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CHARTER SCHOOL DISCIPLINE TOOLKIT:
A Toolkit for Charter School Leaders





NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOL RESOURCE CENTER AT SAFAL PARTNERS

The National Charter School Resource Center (NCSRC) is dedicated to supporting the development of high-quality charter schools. The NCSRC provides technical assistance to sector stakeholders and has a comprehensive collection of online resources addressing the challenges charter schools face. The website hosts reports, webinars, and newsletters focusing on facilities, funding opportunities, authorizing, English learners, special education, military families, board governance, and other topics. The NCSRC is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and led by education consulting firm Safal Partners.

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INTRODUCTION



The challenges of student discipline have been a perennial topic in public education. Student discipline systems are necessary to create a structured and safe school environment that is conducive to learning. However, over the past two decades, schools in the United States have increasingly relied on exclusionary and punitive discipline practices.¹ These “traditional” approaches to discipline primarily rely on out-of-school suspensions and expulsions to maintain behavior in schools. Research consistently shows that overreliance on these practices has large and detrimental effects on students’ academic, behavioral, and social progress. Often, these effects disproportionately impact traditionally-marginalized groups, such as students of color, students with disabilities, English learners, youth living in poverty, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students. Therefore, it is imperative for all public schools to examine their policies and practices to ensure fair and equitable treatment for their students.

To expand the national dialogue on effective disciplinary practices, the U.S. Departments of Education (ED) and Justice launched the [#RethinkDiscipline](#) campaign. The initiative features best practices and resources to help states, districts, and schools implement alternative practices to create positive school climates. In 2016, ED extends the work of the campaign by sharing and propagating promising practices from and to the charter school sector. The following guiding principles, which were informed by charter school leaders, are important considerations for all charter schools: Academic improvements demonstrated through higher test scores, fewer dropouts, and higher graduation rates;

- Maximize the time students are in school and learning;
- Cultivate systems that acknowledge and remedy the root causes of students’ and educators’ challenges in school;
- Leverage data to inform equitable disciplinary systems; and
- Engage the entire school community in professional development and accountability systems that encourage alignment on the school’s intended processes and cultural goals.

Charter schools have added a new dimension to the discussion of discipline and school climate. A core attribute of charter schools is autonomy. Charter school operators use this flexibility to implement discipline policies aligned to their schools’ missions. In most cases, charter schools can use their autonomy to tailor their discipline policies as self-governing schools while adhering to state and federal laws. However, charter schools are vulnerable to the same challenges traditional public schools face in student discipline. Critics accuse some charter schools of two primary

charges. The first charge is that charter schools rely heavily on (or overprescribe) rigid discipline policies (exclusionary and low or no-tolerance models). Relatedly, the second charge is that this overreliance results in “creaming,” a practice of pushing out “difficult” students to boost achievement data.²

While there have been some high-profile examples of overly rigid or exclusionary schools, most charter schools and networks have shown a strong commitment to serving all students fairly. In school districts across the country, there is evidence that charter schools and charter school networks have made great strides in reducing suspension and expulsion rates. For example, Washington, D.C. public charter schools cut expulsion rates by two-thirds since 2011 through methods that include increasing transparency around discipline practices.³ New Orleans, an all-charter school system, also reduced expulsions to below the Louisiana state average through methods such as centralizing and standardizing expulsion policies.⁴ The sector as a whole has also increasingly focused on the non-cognitive factors influencing student achievement and college persistence, prompting further introspection into the broader role of school climate and discipline.⁵ Charter school leaders are uniquely positioned to leverage charter schools’ autonomy, innovation, and accountability to shift toward discipline practices that are more effective and equitable.

Understanding that there is not one approach that will work for all charter schools, we encourage schools to adapt methods to best meet their students’ unique needs. To support charter schools in this important work, the National Charter School Resource Center (NCSRC) presents this toolkit for charter school leaders and administrators to rethink their school’s student discipline practice and school climate. The following recommendations are informed by individual interviews conducted with charter school leaders across the nation who have successfully established positive and supportive school environments.⁶ These charter schools were nominated by experts⁷ from academia and major charter organizations for their commitment to discipline reform. The school leaders’ experiences in planning and implementing have been grouped into five distinct phases or enabling factors. As the schools’ experiences reveal, creating a safe and supportive school is complex and challenging but essential for the best interests of children and the surrounding community.

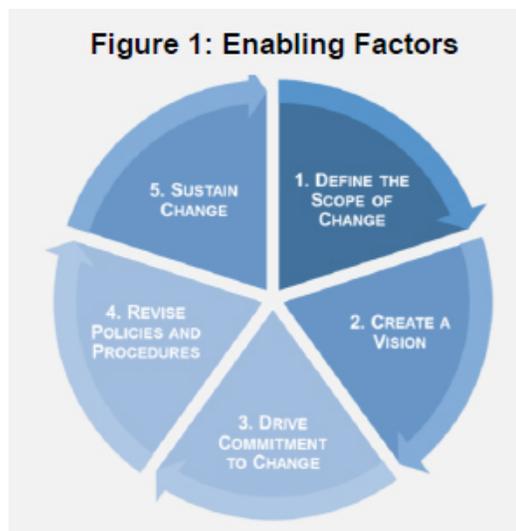
Audience: Recent studies reveal that school leaders’ attitudes and approaches toward discipline are one of the strongest determinants of both suspension rates and discipline disparities, after controlling for other factors such as race and poverty.⁸ To this end, this toolkit will touch on the key responsibilities of school leaders and administrators regarding student discipline, including managing student data, establishing the school’s vision and mission, supporting teachers and staff, engaging the community, and formalizing or revising policies and procedure.

Using the Toolkit: This toolkit presents five enabling factors that emerged from our interviews as key drivers in the planning and implementation of discipline reform (see Figure 1). These five factors can guide leaders in developing a strategy specific to their school:

1. **Define the Scope of Change:** Using data to identify opportunities for improvement.
2. **Create a Vision:** Considering research-based solutions to meet school needs.
3. **Drive Commitment to Change:** Engaging critical stakeholders for successful implementation.
4. **Revise Policies and Procedures:** Rethinking discipline policies and practices.

5. Sustain Change: Using transparency and accountability to sustain the change.

Although this toolkit's language is oriented towards existing schools, new schools can use this toolkit to proactively think about what they want their school climate to be. Laying the foundation for positive climate in the early stages of development enables greater consistency across other academic and structural components of the school. School leaders who have already reformed their practices can also use this toolkit to revisit reform goals or think about solutions to challenges faced in implementation. Because student discipline and school climate are not static, areas for improvement, such as community engagement and data monitoring, may emerge as time progresses.



The Each section includes a *toolbox* with links to recent guidance and resources. The NCSRC developed this toolkit in conjunction with a set of written case studies and videos that feature concrete examples of how other charter schools are rethinking discipline. Please see here for the full case study report and videos.

Student Discipline in Charter Schools: Challenges and Opportunities

Over the past several years, researchers have established a substantial evidence base on the impacts on students of exclusionary discipline policies and practices. Exclusionary discipline is “any type of disciplinary action that removes or excludes a student from his or her usual educational setting.”⁹ Until recently, charter-specific discipline data and research have not been readily available. However, in the 2011-12 school year, the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), housed under ED’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR), required all public schools, including charter schools, to report school-level, end-of-year discipline data. The most recent release of the 2013-14 CRDC data builds off the last release and includes preschool suspensions and expulsions, in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions with separate categories for one or more than one, corporal punishment, expulsions with and without educational services, expulsions under zero-tolerance policies, referrals to law enforcement, school-related arrests, transfers to alternative school, school days missed, offense categories, incidents of harassment or bullying, and restraints or seclusions.¹⁰ Discipline data are also separated by gender, race, limited English proficiency (LEP), and students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) or Section 504.

Based on both prior research and CRDC data, below are three main reasons charter school leaders should take steps to improve disciplinary practices and school climate.

1. The excessive use of exclusionary and punitive discipline is prevalent across both traditional public schools and charter schools.

In the 2013-14 school year, 2.8 million students received one or more out-of-school suspensions.¹¹ However, the majority of suspensions were for discretionary offenses

and were mostly used for non-safety threatening incidents.¹² The 2013-14 CRDC data also indicate that charter schools suspend a greater percentage of students than other public schools.¹³ However, the rate of suspensions in charter schools is trending downward, declining to 6.5 percent in 2013-14 from 7.3 percent in 2011-12, even with a broader definition of suspensions in the most recent collection.¹⁴

2. For all types of schools, the prevalence of exclusionary and punitive discipline is alarming given the large and far-reaching negative impacts on children.

The frequent use of these practices, which lowers student engagement and trust, may create a negative school climate¹⁵. Instead of correcting behavior, exclusionary discipline increases the likelihood of future truancy, dropout, substance abuse, and juvenile delinquency¹⁶. Suspended or expelled students often lose valuable instructional time, which increases the likelihood of dropout.¹⁷ In fact, suspensions and expulsions are associated with lower grades and lower levels of academic achievement, even after controlling for poverty and other demographic factors.¹⁸

3. These negative effects accrue disproportionately to traditionally marginalized groups and specialized populations because discipline is applied more frequently and more severely to these groups.

- Students of color face a greater risk of suspension. Evidence shows that black students are 3.8 times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than white students.¹⁹ Native American, Latino, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and multiracial male students also face disproportionately higher suspension rates.²⁰ The differences in discipline rates are not explained by higher rates of misbehavior, and evidence shows that students of color are punished more severely for the same behaviors.²¹ The 2013-14 CRDC data indicates that students of color* experience greater rates of suspension in charter schools than in traditional public schools.²²
- Students with disabilities are suspended at more than twice the rate of students without disabilities, even after controlling for poverty.²³ In charter schools, students with disabilities are expelled and suspended at higher rates than at traditional public schools.²⁴ However, English learners are not assigned out-of-school suspensions at disproportionately high rates in all schools.²⁵
- LGBTQ students are punished more severely than their peers for similar or less serious behaviors.²⁶

* Students of color include Hispanic/Latino, American Indian/Alaska Native and black/African American students.

In this way, disciplinary practices can perpetuate disparities in achievement, income, incarceration, and other outcome measures that persist for traditionally-marginalized groups and specialized populations. Charter schools that aim to address these gaps cannot do so without addressing student discipline and school climate.

ENABLING FACTOR 1: DEFINE THE SCOPE OF CHANGE



School leaders can analyze school and student-level data to reveal how discipline policies are currently used in the school and the impact of these practices. Many charter schools are already empirically oriented, heavily relying on data to adjust teaching strategies and other operational elements. Similarly, discipline data can serve as a foundation for a comprehensive school climate assessment. By identifying the specific underlying needs, leaders have a greater chance of finding solutions that will have the most impact. The first step for the school leader is to identify key staff members who will be responsible for overseeing the aggregation and analysis of data. If the school has an existing data team, the leader can partner with the team to establish the objectives of the analysis. By creating a robust and systematic approach, the school can continuously evaluate its discipline practices to ensure fair and equal treatment of all current and future students.

Data Collection

Currently, all public schools are required to report discipline data biennially to the OCR under the CRDC. Depending on state legislation, charter schools may also be required to report additional discipline data annually to their authorizer. However, the level of detail of reported data may be too broad to pinpoint particular issues.²⁷ For example, it may be important to identify the behavior that led to a particular disciplinary outcome at the school level. The data reported in connection to the CRDC can be a starting point for schools to dig deeper into the who and why of the disciplinary practices.

There are some key points to remember in recordkeeping and aggregating data for analysis:

- Collect all information related to disciplinary events including the following:
 - Demographic information for all students involved (disaggregated by race, gender, disability, age, socioeconomic status, migrant status, and English-learner status);
 - Description of the alleged misconduct;
 - Grade level of each student referred for discipline;
 - Attempts, if any, to address the behavior prior to the referral to discipline;
 - Witnesses (students and staff) to the incident;
 - Prior history of the student;
 - Referring staff member and prior history of staff member;
 - Discipline imposed; and
 - Law enforcement involvement, if applicable.²⁸

- Aggregate discipline, enrollment, and retention or return data at least annually. Ideally, discipline data should be monitored consistently throughout the year (see Section V. for more details).
- Include the following discipline outcome rates in the analysis:
 - Chronic absenteeism;
 - Expulsions;
 - In-school suspensions (total number and incidences per student);
 - Office referrals (total number and incidences per student);
 - Out-of-school suspensions (total number and incidences per student);
 - Referrals to law enforcement; and
 - School-related arrests.
- Collect data to assess school climate through qualitative methods such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups of students, parents, teachers, and staff. Climate surveys may ask questions to assess the school's safety, family engagement, learning environment, and discipline. Information about the school's climate will present a comprehensive picture of how conducive the environment is to teaching and learning.²⁹

Data Analysis

There are several ways that schools can use their discipline data. Initially, the school leader should work with the data manager or data team to create a plan of analysis. Most schools may start with a higher-level scan of readily available figures (Phase 1 below), such as school-level discipline rates and their distribution across different student demographics. This preliminary analysis will reveal areas that require further analysis, such as any overt outliers of students, student groups, teachers, or practice. The later phases examine underlying trends and root causes. While evaluating the data findings, the school leader should consider how to prioritize different areas of concern. We have included below several considerations that schools can integrate into a plan of analysis:

Phase 1: Understand current discipline practices in the school: This phase captures a broad picture of the school applies discipline policies. While most school leaders may already possess this level of understanding, a scan across several discipline factors may reveal additional concerns to take into consideration. An initial scan will also help to determine what questions to ask in later phases.

- *What are the rates of disciplinary action at the school level? What is the total number of students subjected to disciplinary action?*
- *Both in-school and out-of-school rates should be captured and calculated on an annual basis.*
- *What is the average duration of out-of-school suspensions?*
- *How are disciplinary actions distributed among the students? Do a few number of students make up a majority of the total number of actions?*
- *Schools can also use this data to identify high-risk students, such as students with escalating behavior issues and develop appropriate prevention or intervention strategies.*

Within a tiered support system, schools can target students' specific needs through individualized interventions such as counseling, behavior plans, or scheduled conferences.

- *How are the disciplinary actions distributed among staff? Do a few number of staff members make up a majority of the total number of actions?*
- *This data can be used to indicate if particular staff members or the entire school staff may need additional training and supports.*
- *How are disciplinary actions distributed across grades, classrooms, and student characteristics such as demographics, disability status, LGBTQ identification, and English-learner status?*

Phase 2: Evaluate the discipline practices and trends: The aim of this phase is to gain a deeper level of understanding of why but also to consider what should change.

- *To what extent are disciplinary actions applied disproportionately?*
Data should be analyzed across race, ethnicity, Individualized Education Program (IEP) status, gender, free and reduced lunch (FRL) status, and English-learner status among others. Disproportionality may lie in the frequency or severity of responses. There are three methods to examine the disproportionate application of discipline to groups of students:
 1. **Composition index:** The disciplinary rate of a specific demographic group compared to the composition of the school.³⁰
 2. **Risk ratio:** The probability of disciplinary action for a specific group compared to another.
 3. **Risk gap:** The difference of the probability of disciplinary action between groups.

(See Addressing the Root Causes of Disparities in School Discipline, p.34-35 for details on calculations)

- *What led to the disciplinary actions? Are suspensions and expulsions being used as measures of first or last resort?*
This can be observed if the majority of suspensions and expulsions are assigned for minor or discretionary offenses instead of safety-threatening or violent behaviors.
- *How do the rates compare to other schools with similar characteristics or local district averages?*
- *How have the rates changed over time? Can trend lines be attributed to anything in particular?*
For schools that have discipline data over the past several years, the trends over time can be analyzed to observe the historical effects of changes in policy, practice, or leadership.
- *To what extent were the disciplinary actions punitive versus supportive?³¹*
- *How much instructional time was lost due to suspensions (in and out-of-school) and expulsions?*
The loss of instructional time can also be calculated according to student demographics and may be correlated to student outcomes in Phase 4.

Phase 3: Identify specific areas for improvement

- *Who are the students who are consistently receiving disciplinary action? Are there common characteristics among these students that the school can address?*

Identifying commonalities such as poverty, trauma, and disability status among the students may help to pinpoint the supportive interventions that are necessary.

- *Are there any classrooms or teachers that are outliers in their disciplinary approach? Or are there any practices that the majority of teachers and staff are struggling to implement?*

This question will help to identify **where** and **what** additional training and professional development are needed. School-wide professional development might include workshops or courses on common issues for all teachers. Some methods of providing targeted support include individual mentoring, shadowing, observations, coaching, or small group workshops.

Phase 4: Understand the impact of disciplinary practices: Phase 4: Understand the impact of disciplinary practices: Much of the impact of punitive discipline on students can be inferred by the growing base of research linking exclusionary discipline to negative outcomes. However, if available data allows the school to examine its own students' outcomes, the analysis can be both informing and actionable. It may also present a poignant example to further legitimize reforms and to gain buy-in from teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in the implementation phase.

- *How do student outcomes, such as achievement, attendance, dropout, juvenile detention rates, and attrition compare between students receiving suspensions and expulsions and students that have not? Do specific disciplinary actions correlate with different outcomes?*

School Climate Assessment

To supplement quantitative findings, it is important to capture an assessment of the broader school climate. ED's [#RethinkDiscipline](#) campaign defines "school climate" as "the extent to which a school community creates and maintains a safe school campus; a supportive academic, disciplinary, and physical environment; and respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community."³² Below are examples of questions that are important in an examination of school climate:

- *How are the peer-to-peer and student-teacher relationships in the school?*
- *Do perceptions of school climate differ across different stakeholder groups (e.g., students, teachers, and parents)? If so, how? How do perceptions differ across student subgroups (e.g., race, gender, disability status, English-learner status)?*
- *What are areas of strength in the existing school climate? What are areas of concern?*
- *What are examples of responses to behavioral incidents?*
- *How do current disciplinary policies and practices impact school climate?*

(See the [Safe and Supportive Learning](#) site for several resources on school climate measurement including a compendium of school climate surveys and a School Climate Measurement Tool.)



Resource Toolbox

Resource: [Addressing the Root Causes of Disparities in School Discipline](#)

Author: Safe and Supportive Learning, U.S. Department of Education

Description: A thorough, step-by-step guide to gathering and examining discipline data.

Resource: [Civil Rights Data Collection](#)

Author: U.S. Department of Education

Description: The CRDC is a survey required by ED's OCR and administered every other school year.

Resource: [National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline](#)

Description: Additional resources such as [Measuring Discipline Disparities](#), a glossary of common methods for calculating discipline disparities at the school-level

Resource: [National Center for Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#) (NCSSLE)

Description: This tool outlines the information used to assess a school's discipline practices, including school climate surveys.

Resource: [Evaluating School Climate and Discipline](#)

Author: Urban Institute

Description: A thorough, step-by-step guide to gathering and examining discipline data.

Resource: [How to Look at Your Data to Address Disproportionality](#) (webinar)

Author: Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory

Description: This webinar shares how schools can use data to identify disproportionality and analyze data to examine the root causes. The webinar also includes several data analysis tools.

Resource: Behavioral Support Root Cause Analysis Workbook

Author: [Technical Assistance Center on Disproportionality at NYU](#)

Description: A workbook to assist schools that want to conduct a root cause analysis of their discipline outcomes in relation to behavioral support systems. The core analysis framework examines disproportionate representation.

ENABLING FACTOR 2: CREATE A VISION



Recently, researchers and educators have identified several promising school-wide alternatives to punitive discipline systems in both traditional public and charter schools. Evidence increasingly shows the promise of these alternative models in reducing rates of exclusionary discipline and changing school climate. The NCSRC interviewed several charter school leaders who have embraced these alternative systems and have seen positive impacts on both academic performance and student behavior. However, there is not just one model that works for all schools, especially considering the diversity among charter schools. Below, we present a set of solutions and practices that have been shown to be successful. Among the 15 charter school leaders we interviewed, the majority borrowed elements from multiple models to fit their school's approach and particular needs. For example, a school using restorative practices may use a social-emotional learning curriculum to help students better communicate their emotions. At the same time, fidelity to a chosen model may be important to achieve results. School leaders should be careful not to avoid the more demanding recommendations of the models they choose. In some traditional public schools, leaders who strive to create an intentionally diverse environment have historically done so through limiting which students are admitted. For example, some magnet schools have shaped their enrollment demographics by using admissions requirements—including tests scores—to select higher-performing students. However, charter schools, like most public schools, are generally open to all students and are not allowed to use admission requirements to choose their students.

In conjunction with the data findings, the following questions can guide the school leader in envisioning what the reform process might look like at the school: Understand the likely enrollment that would occur in the absence of targeted recruitment strategies;

- *What are high-priority, immediate concerns? What are longer-term strategies that can impact school climate?*
- *What are good practices to keep? What are practices that need to change?*
- *Do existing practices reflect the belief that the school can serve all students?*
- *How can we align discipline reform to the school's existing mission and vision? If they do not align, reflect on what was the original intent of the mission and vision of the school. Is there a model or approach that will better fit the mission and vision?*
- *How can the school ensure fair and equitable treatment for all students?*
- *How can the school maintain high behavioral expectations in a non-punitive way?*

Evidence-based Solutions

We present alternative discipline systems below that rely on non-punitive methods to change school climate and address student behavior. We group the models by how they address the different components of school climate. The most prevalent approaches include relationship-building, structural interventions, emotional literacy, and culturally-responsive approaches.³³

Relationship-Building

Relationship-building approaches use relationship and community-building to prevent and correct student misbehavior. *Restorative Practices* are the most common set of strategies that aims to build social capital and responds to wrongdoing through participatory learning and decision-making.³⁴ A fundamental principle of restorative practices in schools is welcoming student agency and doing things ‘with’ rather than ‘for’ students. Restorative justice is a subset of restorative practices that focuses on intervention after a student has committed an offense. Restorative practices are more comprehensive and include proactive strategies to prevent conflicts and offenses.

Methods:

- Proactive measures include restoring and building community relationships through positive expression, self-awareness, and respect for others.
- Reactive responses to misbehavior include restorative inquiry, mediation, community conferences, small group conferences, problem-solving circles, and family conferences. These processes give students opportunities to share their feelings, repair relationships, and play an active role in correcting any wrongdoing. These interventions will usually involve the victims, offenders, mediators, and communities of care. Communities of care are members of the community who may be peers, family members, or friends that can support both offenders and victims during the process.

Evidence:

- Restorative practices were linked to reduced suspension and expulsion rates and decreased referrals across multiple districts including Oakland, Denver, and Chicago.³⁵
- District-wide studies from Denver Public Schools also show restorative practices narrowed the discipline gap for black and Hispanic/Latino students.³⁶

Resources:

- The [International Institute for Restorative Practices](#) is a graduate school that provides comprehensive information and resources on restorative practices. The Institute offers certifications and professional development on implementation.
- The San Francisco Unified School District offers a [Restorative Practices Whole-School Implementation Guide](#) for the planning and implementation of restorative practices.



- The National Opportunity to Learn Campaign presents a toolkit for educators, [Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships and Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools](#), to help schools integrate restorative practices.
- [Implementing Restorative Justice: A Guide for Schools](#) is a guide from the Illinois Criminal Justice Authority that provides approaches for using restorative justice in schools.

Structural Interventions

Structural interventions use structural changes, such as multi-tiered systems of supports (MTSS), to shift the school-wide approach to discipline. *Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) or School-wide Positive Behavioral Supports (SWPBS)* is one model that focuses on prevention, early identification, and responsive intervention through a tiered support system. The different PBIS tiers are discussed below. Response-to-Intervention (RTI) is another tiered support system originally based in special education with similar principles to those of MTSS and PBIS, used by schools to target both the learning and behavior needs of students.³⁷

Methods:

- Primary Tier: Applying broad preventative supports to all students and staff by teaching behavioral expectations and creating a positive environment.
- Secondary Tier: Targeting students at risk for behavioral problems and providing systematic support across academics, behavior, family engagement, and monitoring.
- Tertiary Tier: Providing specialized and individualized plans for high-risk and complex cases through a full behavioral assessment.

Evidence

- Reductions in exclusionary discipline rates observed through randomized control trials across schools nationwide.³⁸
- Reductions in exclusionary discipline rates for Hispanic/Latino and Native American students. There is limited evidence of the capability of PBIS to reduce disparities for black students.³⁹
- Lower rates of removal from regular daily classes for students with significant emotional and behavioral problems, including students with disabilities, among schools in Illinois.⁴⁰
- Higher test scores and greater academic achievement observed across several studies.⁴¹
- Significant positive effects on staff reports of their schools' organizational health over a 3-year period.⁴²

Resources

- The [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#) site from ED's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is an online technical assistance center with extensive research and implementation resources for schools, families, and communities on PBIS. The site includes a section on [Equity and PBIS](#) specifically for using PBIS to reduce discipline disproportionalities.

- The [PBIS Indiana Resource Center](#) is a statewide network for Culturally-Responsive PBIS that integrates culturally-responsive practice into the PBIS model to explicitly address disproportionality. (culturally-responsive Approaches addressed below).
- The [Center on Response to Intervention](#) is a website maintained by the American Institutes for Research that supports the implementation and scale-up of RTI.
- The [RTI Action Network](#) is a program of the National Center for Learning Disabilities that provides guidance on the effective implementation of RTI in schools and districts.

Emotional Literacy

Emotional literacy equips schools with the tools to regulate student behavior by reinforcing an awareness of responsibility to self and others. *Social and emotional learning (SEL)* programs emphasize five key competencies as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Methods:

- Curriculum: Embedding SEL throughout the academic curriculum or a separate curriculum focused on developing student SEL competence.
- Tools and language: SEL curricula provide the tools for teachers to teach students the proper language to understand and vocalize emotions and tools to manage emotions.

Evidence

- Significant improvements in social and interpersonal skills, behavior, attitudes about school, and academic performance from a meta-analysis of 213 K-12 SEL programs.⁴³
- Reduction in school suspensions and aggression at school after participation in SEL program.⁴⁴

Resources:

- [CASEL](#) is a Chicago-based organization that seeks to make SEL an integral part of education. The website provides resources, state and federal policy guidance, and research on SEL.
- [Rutgers Social and Emotional Learning Laboratory](#) conducts research on building children's skills for life.
- The [Social and Emotional Learning Research Group](#) at the University of Illinois at Chicago is a research center focusing on school, family, and community approaches for SEL.
- The [Social Development Research Group](#) is a research center housed at the University of Washington for the promotion of positive social development.
- The [Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence](#) conducts research on the power of emotions to create a compassionate society. The Center developed RULER as a curriculum that teaches emotional intelligence and the communication of emotions.



Culturally-Responsive Approaches

Culturally-responsive approaches directly target discipline disparities through considerations for different student cultures that are reflected in communication, behavior, and engagement norms of student cultures. This model is frequently integrated with others, such as PBIS, to ensure that the school is intentionally addressing the different cultures and backgrounds that are represented in the student body or staff.

Methods:

- Grounding teachers' judgments about behavior in awareness of culture and the development of cultural competencies.
- Classrooms are defined by high expectations and empathetic personal relationships.
- Teachers include students' culture in the classroom in a manner that respects students' cultural heritage.

Methods

- Preliminary research results point to positive impact, but the evidence is less established. In a pilot study, student engagement increased and students' perceptions of the school climate for learning improved with culturally-responsive professional development for teachers.⁴⁵

Resources

- [Culturally Responsive Professional Development](#) from the Technical Assistance Center on Disproportionality at NYU provides a series of Culturally Responsive Professional Development Modules.
- The [Culturally Responsive Instruction](#) page by the Inclusive Schools Network provides resources for educators, school leaders, and parents to promote culturally-responsive environments.



Resource Toolbox

Resource: [U.S. Department of Education School Climate and Discipline Web Page](#)

Description: A web page for administrators, educators, students, parents, and community members including tools, data, and resources on school climate and discipline

Resource: [Directory of Federal School Climate and Discipline Resources](#)

Author: U.S. Department of Education

Description: A website indexing the extensive federal technical assistance and other resources on school discipline and climate

Resource: [Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline](#)

Author: U.S. Department of Education

Description: The principles and action steps that can guide efforts to improve school climate and discipline.

Resource: [Dear Colleague Letter on the Nondiscriminatory Administration of School Discipline](#)

Author: U.S. Department of Education

Description: A guidance letter prepared jointly from ED and the U.S. Department of Justice on administering fair student discipline.

Resource: [The School Discipline Consensus Report](#)

Author: Council of State Governments Justice Center, U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice

Description: A set of consensus-based and field-driven recommendations to improve learning for all students and educators.

Resource: [Instead of Suspension: Alternative Strategies for Effective School Discipline Author: Duke Center for Child and Family Policy and Duke Law School](#)

Description: A publication that presents a thorough overview of several alternative strategies grouped according to targeting school culture, professional development, or response.

ENABLING FACTOR 3: DRIVE COMMITMENT TO CHANGE



Interviews with charter school leaders reveal that buy-in from internal and external stakeholders is one of the most challenging, yet essential, steps in discipline reform. Whether the school is overhauling its discipline system or making minor reforms, the success of any effort is contingent on how the changes are interpreted and implemented. For all schools, the key drivers of the change process will include: teachers and staff, parents and families, students, the local school district and other local organizations. For charter schools, other stakeholders will also include the school's board and its authorizer. Proactively engaging these groups in the beginning stages can help to secure early wins and reduce any areas of conflict. However, it is also important to anticipate resistance from parents and staff, as not everyone will appreciate the need for reform. Charter school leaders who encountered these challenges emphasize that the eventual results often speak for themselves. Even through resistance, it is important for the school leader to drive forward efforts to create a positive and supportive school climate for the benefit of all students.

Below, each section is separated by stakeholder group and will discuss the steps that school leaders can take to secure buy-in from the different stakeholders. The engagement strategies can be tailored according to the level of involvement and interest of each group. Broadly, leaders' strategies will fall into four categories:

1. **Consult** for feedback on discipline and student climate.
2. **Share** about discipline data, research, and best practices.
3. **Involve** and **Collaborate** in decision-making and policy formation.
4. **Empower** to change practices and direct school climate.

Teachers

Teachers and other school staff are the primary drivers of school-wide cultural change since they have a direct role at the individual student level. Because the school leader has primary responsibility for the management, hiring, retention, training, and professional development of the staff, he or she has several tools to initiate engagement on the topic of student discipline and school climate.

1. Consult

- Facilitate safe and open dialogue on discipline, race, gender, students with disabilities, English learners, LGBTQ students, implicit bias, and school climate to learn about how discipline is being implemented in the classrooms.
- Address and respond to teacher concerns and worries, ensuring that teachers feel fully supported by school leadership. Teacher perceptions of leadership support become increasingly important as teachers adjust to new policies and are uncertain about the outcomes.
- Regularly check in and receive constructive feedback from teachers and staff during and after implementation.

2. Share

- Present data on the school's current disciplinary rates and student demographics to spark conversation and identify opportunities for improvement, while refraining from attributing blame to a single individual or practice.
- Offer alternative solutions and welcome feedback on how the different models might be applied in the school.

3. Involve and Collaborate

- Lead staff in investigating ways to implement solutions and alternative models by engaging foundational texts and research or by visiting other schools that are successfully applying the models.
- Collaborate on the development of the language and practices that can be adopted consistently across the classrooms.
- Leverage exemplary teachers to model teaching methods and mentor others.

4. Empower

- Provide additional and frequent training and professional development in new policies and procedures and classroom management skills throughout the school year to ensure consistency and to emphasize its prioritization. School leaders should engage teachers and staff to select the topics for professional development. In Washington, D.C., for example, 93% of charter school teachers indicated they would like additional professional development in violence prevention and substance abuse.⁴⁶
- Provide training in cultural relevancy and responsiveness to align with the student community.
- Offer a multi-tiered support system, such as dedicated counseling staff, psychologists, special education specialists, and behavior support teams to assist with a diverse set of student needs. Many charter schools have leveraged local organizations to offer these additional services. Alternatively, a charter school could expand the capacity of existing staff by training or redirecting roles (e.g., refocusing the Dean of Culture's role to climate rather than discipline).
- Provide tools that help with implementation, from tracking student-level behavior data to conducting student behavior assessments.

- Expose parents to problem-solving and positive discipline to create consistency across the school and family environment. Some schools have offered samples of an SEL curriculum or restorative circle to the parents to introduce the concepts.

Parents and Families

As schools of choice, charter schools are designed to serve their communities and families; therefore, engaging parents and community leaders across reform efforts is integral to how changes in discipline policy are received. Research shows that parents of all income levels take discipline and school climate into consideration when choosing a school.⁴⁷ For students, the family environment is one of the most important factors in student behavior. While school leaders cannot change students' family environments, there are opportunities to increase family involvement and communication. Evidence suggests that creating more cooperation between the school and the family can improve student behavior and reduce disciplinary actions.⁴⁸

1. Consult

- Create a space for families to voice their thoughts and concerns on discipline policies and school climate before and after the reform.
- Engage parents systematically for both positive and negative feedback, and ensure that input is taken into account as new decisions or policy changes are made. Increasing informal interactions between staff and parents can create more open and honest relationships.

2. Share

- Articulate discipline policies and procedures clearly, making them available in easily-accessible formats and in the major languages represented in the school.
- Educate parents (regularly and frequently) about the mission and vision of the school as they relate to behavioral expectations and the rationale for making certain changes. Opportunities to educate parents can include school-wide meetings, individual parent-teacher conferences, school newsletters and websites, parent-teacher association meetings, and other informal interactions.
- Keep parents updated on reform efforts. Because positive outcomes may take time, it is important to keep the parents informed on the reasoning behind the efforts.

3. Involve and Collaborate

- Engage parents to determine the root cause of students' behavioral problems.
- Collaborate on conflict resolution and the creation of individualized behavior plans for student accountability.
- Maintain 'positive' communication with parents; do not contact them solely about interventions.

4. Empower

- Expose parents to problem-solving and positive discipline to create consistency across the school and family environment. Some schools have offered samples of an SEL curriculum or restorative circle to the parents to introduce the concepts.

Students

Particularly for higher-level grades, increasing student engagement in discipline reform may increase student accountability and ownership of the discipline process.

- Give opportunities for students to voice opinions about the existing code of conduct, disciplinary practices, and school climate.
 - Communicate expectations to all students clearly and consistently.
 - Allow students to participate in the disciplinary process through student government, peer juries, peer counsel, restorative circles, etc.
-

Districts and Other Charter Schools

District-charter collaborations can be useful in multiple contexts, including discipline reform. A study of the District-Charter Collaboration Grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation showed that discipline strategies and school culture systems were among the most shared practices between participating district and charter schools.⁴⁹ Several districts have made significant progress in this area and can be a source of inspiration for practices and policies. Below are concrete ways for school leaders to engage their local districts and examples of successful district-charter collaborations:

- Share professional development and training resources to expand the skills and knowledge of teachers and staff. Schools can also focus on behavioral education for specific student groups, such as English learners or students with disabilities.

In Boston, a charter, district, and private school jointly invested in English-language instructor training.⁵⁰

- Create an open dialogue with local district schools on the challenges of implementation and to learn about how other schools have addressed them, especially around specific discipline models such as culturally-responsive approaches or restorative practices.

Carson-McMahon Elementary-Middle Campus, a charter school, shared its character development approach with its district counterpart while borrowing the district school's restorative discipline system.⁵¹

- Work with local districts by sharing resources and best practice to guide charter school reform efforts. Schools and districts can also examine ways to standardize discipline data across traditional public and charter schools.

D.C. Public Schools and the D.C. Public Charter School Board worked together to create cross-sector School Equity Reports, increasing transparency and accountability for all schools. The initiative promoted collaboration between district and charter school data managers on discipline data and policy.⁵²

- Schedule school visits to exemplary district schools to observe the implementation and impact of positive practices.

In New York City, charter school and traditional district school leaders have jointly participated in school study tours to exchange ideas around topics such as *Infusing Character Education*.⁵³

Please see the National Charter School Resource Center’s guide to District-Charter Collaboration for strategies on how to collaborate.

Governing Board

A charter school’s governing board holds the charter and is responsible for governing the school. The board’s responsibilities include approving policies, ensuring that policies align with the school’s mission, as well as federal and state laws. The board also oversees how discipline policies are applied to students. School leaders can work with their board in several ways to ensure that the school adopts and applies fair and effective discipline practices. Specifically, he or she can:

- Inform the board on the school’s baseline data and recommend opportunities for improvement.
- Ensure that the data systems support the board’s monitoring responsibilities. Many boards use data dashboards for regular updates. Discipline figures should be included in these dashboards and regularly updated.
- Share a range of evidence-based approaches for improving school climate. Work with the board and staff to determine an approach that complements the school.
- Work with the board when revising school discipline policies and codes of conduct.(Details of adjusting policies are discussed in the next section.)
- Support the board in reporting discipline data and information to the authorizer during review and renewal.
- Work with the board to develop an implementation timetable and plan that allows the board to hold the school leader accountable.
- When writing or renewing charter contracts, partner with the board in incorporating metrics that accurately reflect the discipline policies and measure the goals that the school aims to achieve through its discipline reform.

For more information on charter school boards, please see the dedicated page on Board Governance on the NCSRC website.

Community Organizations and Agencies

Partnering with local organizations can amplify the capacity of the school in both expertise and resources. These external stakeholders can help the school in three ways: 1) supporting the leader in creating a system of care for the students, 2) expanding school capacity by providing additional services, and 3) providing expertise and guidance in specialized areas, such as special education. The following types of organizations are examples of stakeholders that can expand the impact of discipline reform:

- State charter support organizations
- Mental health professionals and organizations
- Child welfare agencies
- Homeless shelters and service providers
- Special education cooperatives
- Community service agencies
- Afterschool programs



Resource Toolbox

Resource: [How Educators Can Eradicate Disparities in School Discipline: A Briefing Paper on School-Based Interventions](#)

Author: Discipline Disparities Research to Practice Collaborative at Indiana University

Description: Research-based principles to support educators in conflict prevention and intervention.

Resource: [You Can't Fix What You Don't Look At: Acknowledging Race in Addressing Racial Discipline Disparities](#)

Author: Discipline Disparities Research to Practice Collaborative at Indiana University

Description: A paper discussing how to directly address racial disparities in the school, including recommendations for a race-conscious approach.

Resource: [MyTeachingPartner](#)

Author: Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning at the University of Virginia

Description: A system of professional development supports that have been evidenced to improve teacher-student interaction.

Resource: [Supporting and Responding to Behavior: Evidence-Based Classroom Strategies for Teachers](#)

Author: U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

Description: A document summarizing the evidence-based, positive, proactive, and responsive classroom behavior intervention and support strategies for teachers.

Resource: [District-Charter Collaboration: A User's Guide](#)

Author: National Charter School Resource Center

Description: A toolkit intended for use by district and charter representatives interested in establishing a new collaboration or in increasing the effectiveness of an existing collaboration

ENABLING FACTOR 4: REVISE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES



Many charter schools borrow discipline policies from the district or other existing charter schools during their initial planning and start up. However, since charter schools have the opportunity to craft their own discipline policies, school leaders may want to revisit discipline policies and determine how well current policies align with the school's overall vision and reform efforts.

The code of conduct sets the expectations for student behavior and the school's response to misbehavior. These policies should maintain a safe and orderly environment and foster a positive school climate. School leaders should ensure that they are establishing policies that support these goals through a participatory process that is informed by teachers, students, and families. As discussed in Section 3, school leaders and staff should also share and discuss policies and any proposed changes with all stakeholders. This section discusses the revisions to policies and procedures that schools should take into consideration.

1. Introduce additional controls for exclusionary policies

- Raise the threshold on what merits a suspension or expulsion for non-violent or non-mandatory offenses, as required by federal and state law (e.g., offenses involving guns and other weapons, etc.). The specific behaviors that will merit a suspension or expulsion should be clearly defined in the code of conduct. Other offense categories should clearly spell out the disciplinary penalties based on objective and specific criteria. Objective consequences will combat any disparate treatment from personal biases.
- Break down the categories of offenses to better track the escalation of infractions. Introduce a scaled system for addressing misconduct with additional tiers before a suspension or expulsion to ensure exclusionary discipline is used as a measure of last resort.
- Establish a high standard of recordkeeping for all disciplinary events, including a thorough description of the misconduct and all attempts at non-disciplinary strategies to ensure that other strategies are tried. In this way, the school can confirm that exclusionary practices are used as measures of last resort.
- Set limits for the length of time spent out of school. Limit the time that all children can be out of school. For students with disabilities, federal law limits the number of days that students can be out of school, beyond which would warrant a change in placement and triggers a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR).

2. **Provide in-school alternatives to suspensions and expulsions whenever possible.**
 - Offer access to academic instruction. Alternative settings should continue to provide academic instruction so that students do not suffer from the additional impact of being out of class and losing instructional time.
 - Leverage opportunities to engage the student in reflective activities or counseling.
3. **Move away from a one-size-fits-all approach.**
 - Ensure interventions are appropriate for students' developmental and individual needs. Adjust consequences to be proportional to the offense.
 - Change from being punitive to supportive. Intervene to address the root cause of behaviors, introducing therapeutic, non-punitive intervention options for behavioral infractions (e.g. substance-abuse, trauma-informed counseling).
 - Account for the specific needs of students with disabilities. Please see below for important discipline policy considerations for students with disabilities.
4. **Create a reintegration plan supporting students' ability to be successful when returning to school.**
 - Offer proper social and emotional support through counseling and professional services.
 - Ensure lost instructional time is regained through close academic supervision.
5. **Maintain due process rights for all students.**
 - Due process regulations should include a fair adjudication and appeals process. Ensure that all students and families are aware of their rights.
 - Focus policies on protecting students' rights rather than the school's environment.



Resource Toolbox

Resource: [How Educators Can Eradicate Disparities in School Discipline: A Briefing Paper on School-Based Interventions](#)

Author: Discipline Disparities Research to Practice Collaborative at Indiana University

Description: Research-based principles to support educators in conflict prevention and intervention.

*Discipline Policy for Students with Disabilities

As public schools, charter schools must commit to providing equitable education for all students. The 2013-14 CRDC data confirm that students with disabilities were more than twice as likely to be suspended than students without disabilities in both traditional public schools and charter schools.⁵⁴ Previous 2011-12 data indicated that charter schools expelled students with disabilities at a slightly higher rate than traditional public schools.⁵⁵ Charter school leaders must ensure that disciplinary practices are not disproportionately targeting students with disabilities and that their schools are providing the appropriate special education support.

To better track and monitor the impact of disciplinary practices on students with disabilities, school leaders can ask the following questions when analyzing data and investigating solutions:

- *What are the main disciplinary actions assigned to students with disabilities in the school? Are the behaviors that received disciplinary action a result of a disability?*
- *How can the school better support teachers and students with disabilities in identifying alternative methods to address the behaviors that are commonly disciplined? Is the school meeting all the needs of individual students? Are teachers trained to identify and respond appropriately to common behavior issues of students with disabilities?*
- *Are there any discipline trends by type of disability? If so, how can the school better support this type of disability?*
- *How is the school working and communicating with the parents of students with disabilities?*
- *Is the school fully leveraging available community organizations or agencies for support and expertise?*
- *Is there a clear system in place for when the MDR is triggered?*
The system will vary depending on whether the charter school is its own Local Education Agency (LEA).

In most cases, what is a best practice for all students will also benefit students with disabilities—especially transitioning to a positive and supportive discipline system that can respond to the nuances in students’ needs. In some cases, schools have adopted an informal approach of “IEPs for all,” since all students benefit from a structured, individualized learning plan. PBIS was initially designed as an alternative to punitive interventions for students with significant disabilities. It easily integrates the federal requirements by emphasizing functional assessments and positive approaches to encourage good behavior. There is growing evidence of the effectiveness of PBIS and other multi-tiered approaches in closing the discipline gap for students with disabilities. In Illinois, schools have seen a reduction in suspensions and gains in instructional time for students with significant emotional and behavioral problems.⁵⁶ Also, trauma-informed approaches can be helpful for students, particularly those diagnosed as emotionally disturbed, by addressing potential root causes of their behaviors.

For any model, disabilities do not excuse students from behavioral education, and it is important that students are exposed to behavior education as much as their disabilities allow. In addition, all teachers and staff should be trained in how disabilities may affect behavior and the appropriate interventions for different disabilities. Federal statutes require that students with disabilities be served in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). In general, LRE requirements mean that schools should work to maximize the time that students with disabilities spend in regular education classrooms. Therefore, all teachers should be trained to provide meaningful educational experiences for all students in a way that responds to individual students’ needs.

It is important to keep in mind that there are significant protections and specific federal provisions for students with disabilities that all schools, including charter schools, must follow. The two main federal policies are [IDEA](#) and [Section 504](#) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The school leader’s responsibilities include the following:

- Understand the federal and state laws and their specific application to the school.
- Ensure the proper policies, training, and systems are in place, consistent with applicable laws and thoughtfully aligned to the school’s mission and culture.

- Communicate frequently the specific policies and practices to the school community.

If in doubt, it is important to consult experts in special education, legal professionals, state officials, or other responsible parties for guidance in interpretation and application to protect student rights before implementation.



Resource Toolbox

Resource: [IDEA.ed.gov](https://www.idea.ed.gov)

Author: U.S. Department of Education

Description: A website for all resources related to IDEA, with a specific section on [Discipline](#)

Resource: [National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools](#) (NCSECS)

Description: The website for NCSECS with resources to address the challenges of providing special education and related services in charter schools.

Resource: [Student Discipline Best Practices for Charter Schools to Employ](#)

Author: NCSECS

Description: A list of practices for charter schools to employ and avoid pertaining to student

Resource: [Charter School Joint Statement](#)

Author: NCSECS Equity Coalition

Description: The Equity Coalition is a collaborative community from the charter school and special education communities convened by the NCSECS to inform efforts for continued improvement of access and equity for students with disabilities in the charter sector.

Resource: [Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Special](#) Education

Author: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Description: A report analyzing the disproportionality of the identification, placement, and discipline of students with disabilities by race and ethnicity across states or school districts.

Resource: [IDEAs that Work: Preparing Children and Youth with Disabilities for Success](#)

Author: Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)

Description: A website providing easy access to information from research to practice initiatives funded by OSEP that address the provisions of IDEA and ESSA.

Resource: [Disciplining Students With Disabilities](#)

Author: National Association of School Psychologists

Description: An article providing practical guidance on behavioral education for students with disabilities.

ENABLING FACTOR 5: SUSTAIN CHANGE



After schools initiate discipline reform, reinforcement mechanisms are essential to maintaining the changes. Monitoring, review, continued professional development, stakeholder communication, and accountability not only support change but also identify areas for continuous improvement. The school leader can support ongoing progress by thinking about systematic ways to reinforce positive practices, such as assigning specific responsibilities to staff and building out operational infrastructure to automate processes. Regularly revisiting the core ideas behind the discipline reform can help the leader identify other areas of improvement or ways that the school can be more consistent and holistic in its approach. However, it is important to maintain a longer-term vision because changes in behavior and understanding are not immediate. In this way, the school can continue to offer students a caring and supportive environment into the future.

To support ongoing improvements in change efforts, school leaders can work with the board and staff to ensure the following:

Monitoring Progress

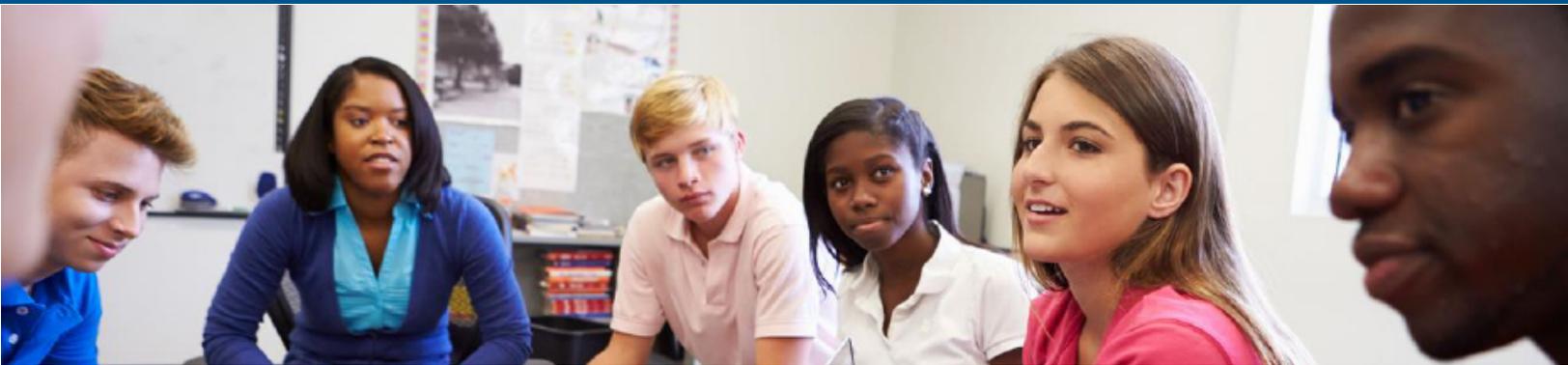
- Establish a team or assign responsibilities to an individual to lead the process of active monitoring. Ensure that the individual(s) has the authority to access data and to respond to findings, such as assigning additional training or evaluating staff.
- Set measurable benchmarks and goals pertaining to exclusionary rates, discipline gaps, and school climate.
- Track discipline data systematically, even if expulsion and suspension rates are low. Data systems and dashboards can provide up-to-date statistics to inform administration and teachers about incidents. Whenever possible, correlate the trends in reduction of disciplinary action with academic performance to tie efforts to impact. The data summaries can also be shared with school staff to maintain continuous feedback.
- Review how new discipline policies are applied and whether they are applied consistently school-wide. Inconsistent application may indicate that the policies need further clarification or that the staff requires additional training.
- Use discipline data to identify specific teachers or staff who require additional support. Build capacity-building mechanisms such as assigning peer mentors, classroom observations, and role playing.
- Monitor the progress of intervention(s) and modify when necessary. If using multiple discipline approaches, assess which reform efforts are the most and least effective and why this is the case.

- Evaluate the level of rigor and the relevance of instruction in alternative education classrooms (if applicable). Celebrate big and small wins, such as reductions in discipline rates or individual student success stories, in order to maintain staff motivation.
-

Accountability

- Publicly report discipline data in an accessible and transparent manner. The school should help families and the community understand how to read and interpret the data.
 - Create and maintain stakeholder feedback loops, especially for families and parents. Ensure that all of their feedback is taken into account as policies and models are implemented.
 - Incorporate discipline targets into the charter contract, performance framework, or other measures.
 - Assist governing board in revising the charter contract upon renewal to address any programmatic or pedagogical changes.
 - Provide the governing board with discipline outcomes in the school's performance review by monitoring exclusionary discipline rates and potential disproportionalities between student groups.
-

CONCLUSION



Increasingly, charter schools across the nation are looking for positive and supportive approaches to school discipline to improve their students' academic and behavioral outcomes. While many reform efforts are in their early stages, the NCSRC has drawn lessons from charter school leaders who have been working on these issues for years to help school leaders who are just beginning this challenging work.

Most of the work to improve discipline takes place in schools. There are several ways that charter school leaders can engage their whole school in a thoughtful and inclusive reform process. Often, the process begins with a deeper understanding of how the school is implementing its current discipline policies and the effects those practices are having on students as reflected in student-level data. There is a growing number of evidence-based alternatives to punitive practices. These alternatives can guide schools as they develop their own vision for reform.

Engaging the entire school community, including teachers, families, students, the board, and other external stakeholders like authorizers, is essential for successful implementation. Creating or revisiting discipline policies and procedures should align with the school's overall vision and goals. Monitoring and accountability mechanisms can help by ensuring that the changes endure and continue to benefit all students.

It is our hope that this toolkit will help charter schools as the sector rethinks discipline practices and school climate. While reforming discipline can be challenging and time-intensive, equitable and fair disciplinary practices are an important priority for all schools to support student success.

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