

Snapshots

RESEARCH REPORT

Discipline as Teachers See It

In the first scientifically designed national survey on school discipline published in 15 years, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute looks at the topic through the eyes of the nation's teachers, with a focus on the views of African American teachers and those in high-poverty schools.

Key Findings

- Teachers in high-poverty schools report higher levels of verbal disrespect, physical fighting, and assault. For example, they are more than twice as likely to say that “verbal disrespect” is a daily occurrence in their classrooms and more than six times as likely to say that “physical fighting” is a daily or weekly occurrence.
- Behavior problems “contributed to a disorderly or unsafe environment that made it difficult for many students to learn,” 58 percent say, while just 24 percent of teachers in low-poverty schools say the same.
- Most teachers say discipline is inconsistent or inadequate and that the recent decline in suspensions is at least partly explained by a higher tolerance for, or underreporting of, misbehavior.
- Overwhelming majorities of teachers say newer disciplinary approaches

such as positive behavioral interventions and supports, “restorative justice,” and “trauma-informed” practices are at least somewhat effective. But 88 percent of teachers also say that a traditional approach that focuses on “establishing specific consequences for misbehavior” is at least somewhat effective.

- Asked to reflect on the previous school year, more than three-quarters of teachers agree that “most students suffered because of a few persistent troublemakers.”
- Despite the costs for students and their belief that discipline is racially biased, many African American teachers say suspensions, expulsions, and other forms of exclusionary discipline should be used more often. Overall, 74 percent of white teachers and 80 percent of African American teachers say getting suspended at least “slightly increases” students’ odds of involvement. However, about twice as many African American teachers (16 percent) as white teachers (8 percent) say suspensions “greatly increase” those odds.

Recommendations

Fordham Institute researchers David Griffith and Adam Tyner

offer four recommendations based on their findings:

1. When it comes to school discipline, federal and state policymakers should respect the principle of non-maleficence: First, do no harm.
2. Districts should revise codes of conduct to give teachers and principals greater discretion when it comes to suspensions.
3. Instead of fixating on the rates at which disruptive students are removed from schools and classrooms, student advocates should focus on improving the environments to which they are removed.
4. Additional resources should be put toward hiring more teaching assistants and mental health professionals in high-poverty schools, rather than training teachers in experimental alternatives that may do more harm than good.

Deeper Into the Debate

In recent years, the debate over school discipline reform has been divided, according to Griffith and Tyner. Those who support reform find an inherent racial bias that puts students into a “school-to-prison

MYTWOCENTS

Besides other educators, who's in your PLN?



Jessica Carey (@MrsCareyFLPS): [I develop] relationships with local businesses and community members. They support our programming and students across the district.



Chara Willaford (@DrCharaChats): I love to connect and study organizations and businesses. My PLN consists of organizational strategists, psychologists, etc. Human behavior is human behavior.



Brittney Dobson (@BrittneyDobson2): Outside of education, I use the amazing resource of military wives and the unique perspectives that we have on situations.

Fast Fact: 81 percent of teachers report that they find themselves dipping into personal time to apply student data to their lesson plans and teaching practices. —Data Quality Campaign, “Teachers Want to Use Data but Can’t Go It Alone”




EARLY CAREER

The New Principal Connection

pipeline.” Opponents are concerned that softer approaches to school discipline will create disruptive classrooms, serving as a distraction to students as they learn.

In short, teachers feel that school discipline is not working, especially in high-poverty schools, and that state policymakers and advocates need to listen to what teachers are saying about what’s best for students.

High Expectations: Discipline Reform Through the Eyes of Teachers, a Fordham Institute survey conducted in partnership with RAND Corp., is available online at fordhaminstitute.org/national/research/discipline-reform-through-the-eyes-of-teachers. 



Early career principals have a unique set of challenges on top of the ones that veteran principals face. To learn about those challenges—and strategies to overcome them—we went straight to the source: panelists on the NAESP National Panel of New Principals (NPNP). What topped the list?

- Time management (22 percent);
- Implementing change (19 percent); and
- Understanding school politics (14 percent).


New principals also noted that working with parents, assessing classroom instruction, providing staff development, evaluating staff, using data in decision-making, and receiving feedback on leadership skills posed challenges, too. But no one surveyed found challenges in implementing team development, creating a clear school vision, or using technology.

Successful Solutions

Principals on the panel offered strategies to address their challenges. Their suggestions?

- Reach out to colleagues to see how they manage their time.
- Display a status board in the lobby that updates visitors and staff on all activities in the school, attendance rates, positive phone calls home, and suggestions for reading and math.
- Offer job-embedded staff development.
- Have parent office hours.
- Develop collective commitments, a common set of values, a mission statement that is reflective of purpose, and a clear vision for future work.
- Set goals and incorporate action steps.
- Have direct conversations with stakeholders and practice self-care to manage stress.

The good news is that despite being stressful, the job of principal is extremely satisfying. And most respondents seem to have a good idea of what the principalship entails: 62 percent said the job is what they expected; 16 percent said the job is better than expected.

To learn more about the NPNP, view results of other NPNP surveys, or to become a panelist, visit newprincipal.org. 



Kurt Brewer (@KurtBrewer10): My family is key for me. They keep me grounded, pick me up, and are always open and honest with me.



Jillayne Flanders (@jillflanders): Biographies and autobiographies of leaders in all walks of life. Particularly inspiring [was] Madeline Albright, and through @NAESP, I had the opportunity to speak with her at the National Leaders Conference.

Want to connect with your peers? Contribute to the conversation by following @NAESP on Twitter.