

# AASA & CDF School Discipline Survey



## Executive Summary

In April 2014, AASA, The School Superintendents Association, and the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) partnered to survey 500 school superintendents to determine the state of district-wide school discipline policies and practices. It examined how and why districts use out-of-school suspension (OSS), the revision and parameters of districts' discipline policies, the outside partners districts seek in improving school discipline, and the efforts being made to create more positive school climates to reduce discipline disparities.

While discipline policies and practices differ considerably from district to district and state to state, recent national data from the Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education show that too many students are suspended out of school and that disparities persist. AASA and CDF are working together with superintendents to find best practice solutions that keep children in school and improve school climates.

## Snapshot of Survey Findings:

- Half of superintendents surveyed report reducing out-of-school suspensions and expulsions is important/very important to their leadership agenda.
- When asked which infractions account for the greatest number of OSS in their districts, 40 percent of superintendents indicate insubordination, defiance, failure to obey and disrespect of teachers and staff are most common; 30 percent indicate fighting is the most common cause.
- Of the 92 percent of superintendents who believe there are negative consequences to the use of OSS in their districts, 67 percent indicate that lost class time is the most significant while 27 percent identify increased disengagement, absenteeism, truancy and/or dropout as the most significant negative consequence.
- Of the 85 percent of superintendents who believe there are positive consequences to using out-of-school suspension, 33 percent report that suspension maintains or improves school climate by removing the worst offenders and 15 percent say that suspension improves the behaviors of disciplined students.

## About Survey Respondents

500 Respondents

### District Urbanicity

- 13% Urban
- 28% Suburban
- 55% Rural
- 4% County Districts

### School District Enrollment

- Less than 2,500 – 51%
- Between 2,500 & 10k – 32%
- Between 10k & 50k – 13%
- More than 50,000 – 2%

### Percentage of low-income students in the districts:

- 0-25% FRL – 20%
- 26-50% FRL – 33%
- 51-75% FRL – 33%
- 76-100% FRL – 14%

## Findings from the AASA-CDF Survey

### **DISCIPLINE POLICY AND CODES OF CONDUCT**

- Superintendents describe maintaining safety and order in the school building (42%) as the primary purpose of out-of-school suspension (OSS) followed by providing consequences for student misbehavior, which communicate to students, parents, and teachers that the school is taking an issue seriously (20%) and removing students from a setting where they are disruptive to the learning of others (20%). Only 12 percent of respondents say that the primary purpose is to change student behavior and discourage future misconduct.
- The vast majority of districts (95%) limit the ability to suspend students to principals or other building administrative staff such as deans, or to superintendents and central staff (57%). Two percent of superintendents indicate that teachers have the authority to suspend students in their district.
- Seventy-one percent of superintendents indicate that their states have laws or regulations requiring out-of-school suspension or expulsion for certain infractions, limiting the discretion of district and school staff.
- Only 21 percent of districts have policies that restrict the use of suspension to certain grade levels.
- Eighty-two percent of superintendents indicate they ensure that suspended students are able to make up work and receive full credit during their exclusion from school and 50 percent provide suspended students with access to tutoring or other academic assistance. Nineteen percent of districts report that they provide suspended students with one-on-one or small group instruction with a certified teacher during the suspension.
- Eighty-four percent of respondents state that their districts have updated their code of conduct within the last three years. During the revision process, 78 percent received input from teachers, 49 percent received input from parents and 33 percent received input from students. Superintendents (74%) generally believe their district's code of conduct reflects their district's current discipline philosophy.

### **WORKING WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND COMMUNITIES**

- When asked about opposition and support from school stakeholders toward policies that would reduce out-of-school suspension, 72 percent of superintendents expect opposition to come from teachers; 57 percent expect pushback from principals.
- More than half of superintendents expect students and parents to support policy changes that reduce OSS.

- Fifty-three percent of superintendents believe that greater parental involvement would have the greatest impact on reducing OSS in the district. Forty percent of superintendents believe that character education, conflict resolution, skill building and/or social/emotional learning for students would have the greatest effect, 38 percent cite more mental health supports, counselors or social workers and 38 percent believe support and training for teachers and staff on building positive relationships with students would have the greatest effect on reducing OSS.
- Of the 65 percent of districts that partner with outside entities to improve school discipline policy and practice, the most common partners are:
  - Local police/law enforcement – 84%
  - Health/mental health agencies – 75%
  - Social service agencies – 65%
  - Local judges/juvenile courts – 58%
  - Parent/community advocate groups – 48%
  - Students/ student advocacy organizations – 29%
- Of those superintendents who indicate that reducing the use of out-of-school suspension and/or expulsion is very important to their leadership agenda, 80 percent have partnerships with outside entities to improve school discipline compared to 65 percent of all responding superintendents.

## **A DEEPER DIVE INTO DISAGGREGATED DATA**

The data show some interesting differences in how superintendents in varied settings perceive current discipline policy and practice.

### **A. Urban, Suburban and Rural**

- Urban districts are more likely (51%) to believe their codes of conduct are in need of revision and do not reflect the district's disciplinary philosophy than suburban and rural districts (19% and 24%).
- Suburban districts are the most likely to craft a plan for re-entry; 34 percent of all districts surveyed ensure that there is a re-entry plan.
- Urban districts (74%) are more likely to partner with outside organizations to improve discipline policy/practice than suburban (65%) and rural (62%) districts.
- Urban districts are much more likely (43%) to think that OSS encourages disengagement and absenteeism than suburban (21%) and rural (21%) districts. Rural and suburban districts are more likely to identify loss of class time as the most negative consequence (65% and 62%) compared to urban districts (48%).

## B. School Discipline and Poverty

- Reducing the use of out-of-school suspension and/or expulsion is 'very important' to 48 percent of superintendents in high poverty districts compared to 21 percent of superintendents in low poverty districts.
- Superintendents in high poverty districts are more likely to report that their codes are in need of revision to reflect greater tiered supports and reduce OSS and expulsion (39%) than superintendents in low poverty districts (11%).
- Thirty-eight percent of superintendents in high poverty districts believed that the most significant negative consequence to using OSS is that it encourages disengagement, absenteeism, truancy, and/or dropout in suspended students, compared with 15 percent of superintendents in low poverty school districts.