Classmates not Cellmates

Effective School Discipline Cuts Crime and Improves Student Success in Oregon



FIGHT CRIME: Invest in Kids Oregon

Acknowledgements

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Fight Crime: Invest in Kids *Oregon* is supported by tax-deductible contributions from foundations, individuals, and corporations. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids *Oregon* accepts no funds from federal, state, or local governments.

Major funding for Fight Crime: Invest in Kids *Oregon* is provided by: Alliance for Early Success • The California Education Policy Fund • The California Endowment • The California Wellness Foundation • Annie E. Casey Foundation • Robert Sterling Clark Foundation • Early Childhood Investment Corporation • Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation • The Grable Foundation • Grand Victoria Foundation • The George Gund Foundation • Hagedorn Foundation • Irving Harris Foundation • Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust • Robert Wood Johnson Foundation • W.K. Kellogg Foundation • The Kresge Foundation • McCormick Foundation • The New York Community Trust • The David and Lucile Packard Foundation • William Penn Foundation • The Pew Charitable Trusts • Pritzker Early Childhood Foundation • Rauch Foundation • Dr. Scholl Foundation • W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation.

The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Pew Charitable Trusts.

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Executive Summary

Oregon schools issued over 88 thousand suspensions during the 2011-2012 school year. A large number of those were for relatively minor, non-violent, non-drug-related incidents: nearly half of all out-of-school suspensions in Multnomah County, for example. While the transgressions were often minor, the risks for those suspended were not. A study from Texas found that students in trouble who were suspended or expelled were three times more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system than similar students who did not face suspensions or expulsions.

While law enforcement leaders who are members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids *Oregon* will not accept violence in our schools, they remain concerned about the high number of Oregon students who are suspended and expelled from school for minor infractions. To their credit, Oregon schools have reduced the rates of suspensions in recent years, from 107 thousand in 2008 to 88 thousand in 2012, but the total number of suspensions for minor infractions remains too high in many districts, and the total is far higher than the 66 thousand suspensions taking place as recently as 2005.

School leaders must continue to have the authority to suspend, expel or take other school disciplinary action, including referring students to the juvenile justice system, when dealing with students who commit weapons offenses, violent crimes or are selling drugs. However, in many cases, schools are compelling students to stay out of school for relatively minor offenses rather than using alternative approaches that can reduce bad behavior and even prevent some discipline problems before they happen. The Texas study found that rates of suspension and expulsion varied greatly, even among similar districts, suggesting that schools have the ability to impact suspension and expulsion rates. While Oregon schools may not have such large differences in suspension rates as some other states, the data show there are still big differences.

The best way to help students learn and to prevent later crime is to ensure students can remain in school and off the streets. In many cases, pushing students who are getting into trouble out of school and into an often unsupervised environment can exacerbate rather than help deal with problems. Suspensions and expulsions can have serious and lasting consequences. One study found that among students disciplined more than 10 times, only



Adapted from Ryan McVay/Getty Images, 2012

40 percent graduated from high school. Another study found that high school dropouts are eight times more likely to be incarcerated than graduates.

Teachers clearly need help managing classroom behavior and schools need new approaches for responding to students' misbehavior. Fortunately, there are proven and promising approaches that can help ensure that schools are safe and that troubled students are given more opportunities to learn. Approaches that can help include:

- The Good Behavior Game;
- Incredible Years' Dinosaur School;
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS);
- Restorative justice; and
- Social-emotional skills curricula.

When teachers have the tools they need, they will have more time for effective instruction and students will have more opportunities to learn in a safe environment. It is critical that these approaches are implemented with fidelity and have sufficient funding. Further, data collection on school discipline should be improved. The consequences of not taking the needed steps to prevent and effectively respond to misbehavior in schools are too severe to ignore. Change is needed now.

Classmates not Cellmates

Effective School Discipline Cuts Crime and Improves Student Success in Oregon

We Cannot Accept Dangerous Behaviors in Our Schools

Law enforcement leaders firmly believe that crime and violence have no place in our nation's schools. Every child should feel safe at school and not have their learning disrupted by classroom disorder or discipline problems. However, research shows that this is not the case for many school children today. Nearly six percent of high school students nationwide report that they missed at least one day of school in the last month because they felt unsafe at school or on the way to school.[1]

While most discipline incidents are relatively minor, there are serious issues in some schools. Half of violent incidents at schools nationwide occur in just 8 percent of schools. Serious violent incidents – such as sexual assault, robbery and aggravated assault – are even more concentrated, with the majority of incidents occurring in less than 2 percent of schools nationwide. These schools have persistent, major violence and discipline problems that must be forcefully addressed. Thankfully, such incidents are decreasing. According to data from the U.S. Department of Education, the rate of violent incidents in U.S. schools fell by a quarter between the 2003-04 school year and 2009-10.[2]

Given the high level of suspensions, even if many are not for violent behavior or drug related, it is no surprise that one out of every three teachers nationwide say that student misbehavior interfered with their teaching.[3] Teachers cite help in classroom management as one of their top two professional development needs.[4] Teachers clearly need support and a range of responses for dealing with student misbehavior.

Too Many Suspensions for Minor Reasons

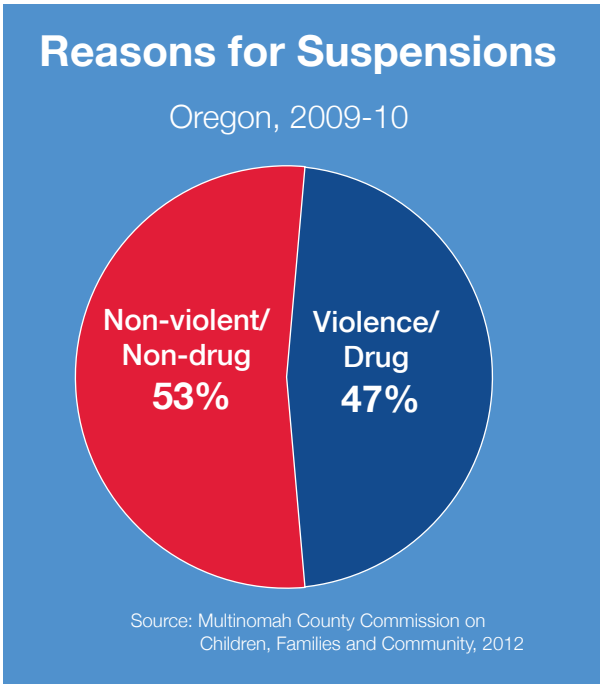
Overall, Oregon schools issued over 88,000 suspensions in 2011-2012.[5] Many students are suspended more than once and some are suspended many times during the year. While federal and state law require suspension or expulsion for certain offenses like bringing a weapon to school, most disciplinary actions are based on district- or school-level choices. In the Multnomah County School District, schools are issuing nearly half of the county's suspensions for non-violent, non-drug-related offenses.[6] This includes willful disobedience, insubordination, and even tardiness or truancy.

Nearly half of Multinomah County suspensions are for non-violent, non-drug offenses.

– Multinomah County Commission on Children, Families & Communities, 2012

While students certainly should not be disrupting class, suspending or expelling them is often not the best solution. When students are suspended or expelled for minor incidents, the primary result is a missed opportunity for learning without addressing any underlying issues contributing to the misbehavior. And putting troubled kids out on the streets without constructive adult supervision can be a recipe for greater misbehavior and crime.

Suspension rates vary widely by race. In Multnomah, for example, African-Americans are 3.3 times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school, and Hispanics are 1.9 times more likely to be suspended or expelled.[7] Why are there such disparities? There is research showing that racial disparities do not appear to be simply due to higher levels of serious misbehavior by some groups of students. However, a thorough analysis of the various reasons behind these disparities is beyond the scope of this report. Whatever the underlying cause of such disparities, schools with clear, positive disciplinary expectations and responses appear to have fewer problems with disproportionate suspensions. (See page 4 for more information on alternative solutions.)



Suspension Rates Vary

Suspension rates vary considerably between districts. For example, while Oregon Department of Education data show that the Beaverton school district suspended its students at a rate of 3.4 suspensions per 100 students, Medford school district suspended their students more than twice as often, 6.7 per 100, and Portland school district was in the middle with a rate of 5.0 suspensions per 100 students.[8]

One of the most critical findings of a Texas study was that schools have the power to mitigate students' misbehavior and reduce the need for suspensions and expulsions in the first place – if they take proactive, preventative measures. For instance, schools with similar characteristics, including school performance and the racial / economic composition of the student body, varied greatly in how frequently they suspended or expelled students. Half of schools had discipline rates that were consistent with what would be expected based on their student and school characteristics. But the other half of schools had actual discipline rates much higher or lower than would be expected.[9]

Oregon is making progress in addressing suspensions and expulsions. The suspension and expulsion rates have fallen over the last four years but not even back to where they were in 2005.[10] Too many suspensions and expulsions are still issued for minor incidents not involving safety threats in many school districts.

Lasting Consequences

Law enforcement leaders know that we must stop these discipline problems before students end up on the streets. The consequences of student misbehavior that is improperly addressed do not stop at the schoolhouse door. Students can go on to commit more serious offenses unless successful interventions are provided.

Simply suspending or expelling students does not solve students' behavior issues. Students expelled and sent to the streets face long odds of success. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study found that out-of-school 12- to 19-year olds were more likely to be involved in a physical fight, carry a weapon and engage in risky behaviors like drug use.[11]

If students drop out of or are removed from school, they are more likely to become involved in crime. Ultimately, high school dropouts are eight times more likely to be incarcerated.[12] While staying in school even one year longer reduces the likelihood that a youngster will turn to crime, graduating from high school has a dramatic impact on life outcomes. Research suggests that a 10 percentage point increase in graduation rates reduces murder and assault rates by about 20 percent. A 10 percentage point increase in graduation rates would prevent approximately 3,400 murders and over 170,100 aggravated assaults in the U.S. each year.[13] Nationwide, almost 70 percent of state prison inmates have not received a high school diploma.[14]

> **Students who are suspended or expelled are almost three times more likely to have contact with the juvenile justice system.**
>
> – Council of State Governments, 2011

The roots of this disheartening outcome may begin as early as elementary and middle school and grow over time. A groundbreaking study of Texas middle and high school students found that students with suspensions or expulsions were more likely to struggle academically and come into contact with the juvenile justice system. The study found that almost 60 percent of students statewide were suspended (in- or out-of-school) or expelled at least once between 7th and 12th grades. Nearly 15 percent of the million students followed were suspended or expelled more than 10 times over this period. As is typical

> Whatever the underlying cause of racial disparities, schools with clear, positive disciplinary expectations and responses appear to have fewer problems with disproportionate suspensions.

nationwide, most disciplinary actions were at the discretion of school officials, typically in response to violations of local schools' conduct codes. Only three percent of the disciplinary actions were mandated by state policy.

This unique study controlled for over 80 factors – like prior disciplinary history, school practices and student characteristics – that might influence whether a student was suspended (in-or-out of school) or expelled. Compared to similar students with no suspensions or expulsions for misbehavior, middle and high school students with one or many discretionary suspensions or expulsions for misbehavior were:

- Twice as likely to be held back in school. Thirty-one percent of students disciplined one or more times repeated their grade at least once.
- Nearly three times more likely to be in contact with the juvenile justice system the following year. One-quarter of students who were involved in the school disciplinary system (including students subject to a mandatory removal from the school) had contact with the juvenile justice system, compared to just two percent of students without disciplinary actions.

Ultimately, nearly 10 percent of those students with at least one disciplinary contact dropped out of school, compared to just 2 percent of students with no disciplinary action. Among students disciplined more than 10 times, only 40 percent graduated from high school during the study period.

These disciplinary actions did not impact students equally. African-American students had a 31 percent higher likelihood of a school discretionary action (non-mandatory responses), compared to otherwise identical White students. Similarly, students with emotional disturbances were a quarter more likely to be suspended or expelled for a discretionary offense than children without disabilities.[15]

Alternative Solutions

Fortunately, evidence-based approaches can effectively improve students' behavior and improve school-wide academic outcomes, while minimizing the use of unnecessary suspensions and expulsions. Schools need an array of disciplinary approaches to address situations appropriately, as they arise. Schools also need far better data on students' behavior and attendance. Comprehensive data systems and early warning systems can help identify students in need of extra support to avoid getting kicked out or dropping out, based on factors like grades, attendance and disciplinary history. Additional intervention approaches include:

Classroom Management Strategies

The Good Behavior Game is a relatively inexpensive, elementary school classroom-wide intervention in which a class is divided into groups and the groups compete for simple privileges, such as lining up first for lunch or recess. The approach, implemented by teachers, uses positive peer pressure to improve aggressive/disruptive classroom behavior and prevent later criminality. By developing students' self-control, later outcomes can be improved.

Children assigned to first grade classrooms without the Good Behavior Game and an enhanced curriculum had a 37 percent higher risk of suspension in sixth grade than children in

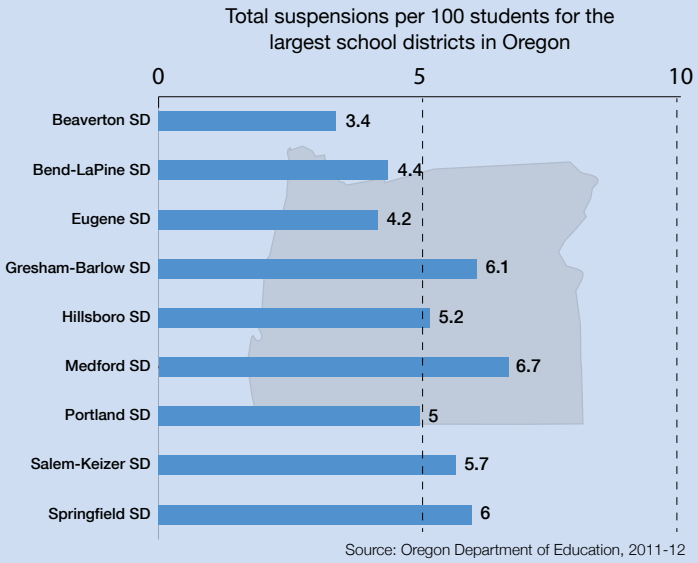
Multnomah County Suspension Rates

Rate of Discipline Incidents in Schools Compared to White Students

White	**1.0**
African American	**3.3**
Latino	**1.9**
Asian/Pacific Islander	**0.6**
Native American	**2.1**

Source: Stavenjord, 2012

Suspension Rates Vary Greatly



Source: Oregon Department of Education, 2011-12

A statewide study in Texas showed that schools with similar characteristics, including school performance and the racial/economic composition of the student body, varied greatly in how frequently they suspended and expelled students. Schools have the power to mitigate students' misbehavior and reduce the need for suspensions and expulsions – if they take proactive, preventative measures.

Source: Council of State Governments

classrooms with those elements. In eleventh grade, the students left out had 2.5 times higher risk of recent suspension than those with the Good Behavior Game and enhanced curriculum, and the program also cut conduct disorders (a behavioral disorder with high correlation to delinquency) and experimentation with illicit and hard drugs by more than half.[16]

The **Incredible Years** is an approach that helps teachers manage the classroom environment. The Incredible Years has long been known as a proven parent training and child training approach for young children with severe early behavior problems. But researchers have now developed a teacher-led classroom management curriculum, Dinosaur School, which can be used as a prevention approach with all students in the early grades, not just those with severe behavior problems. Teachers work with children in small group activities and through vignettes, incorporating puppets, picture cue cards for non-readers, games and homework activities. Topics addressed include learning school rules, anger management, social skills and communication skills. One evaluation found that after 30 classroom lessons per year for preschoolers, kindergartners and first-graders, teacher use of positive classroom management strategies increased and students showed more emotional regulation and fewer conduct problems. The study found that Dinosaur School led to the greatest improvement for the kids who started with the highest levels of conduct problems. Similar improvements were seen for students with very poor initial levels of school readiness.[17]

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– Ialongo et al.

School-Wide Strategies and Curricula Teaching Positive Behavior

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), also known as School Wide Positive Behavioral Support (SWPBS), is a universal, school-wide prevention strategy developed in Oregon for improving behavior and school climate. PBIS is being implemented in schools throughout Oregon. PBIS uses a three-tiered public health model to create primary (school-wide), secondary (targeted) and tertiary (individual) systems of support. At the universal level, schools create three to five clear behavioral expectations and rules that all students and teachers know. Responses to inappropriate behavior are clearly defined, such as a teacher response – like a warning, time out, privilege loss or parent

Bullying

Bullying is a major school discipline problem in many schools. Twenty percent of high school students nationwide reported being bullied at school in the last year. Bullying is often the entry point to more serious crime and a sign of serious discipline issues. Boys who bully at school at least once per week are 5 times more likely to carry a weapon to school than children who do not bully.[25] One study showed that 4 out of 10 boys who bullied others as kids had three or more convictions by the time they turned 24.[26]



Victims of bullying may also be at risk for future crime. A study by the U.S. Secret Service, conducted in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education, examined 37 school shootings in the U.S. since 1974 and found that nearly three-quarters of the school shooters had previously been bullied or injured by fellow students.[27]

What works to stop bullying? The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program enlists the entire school community, from the principal to the bus drivers, in an effort to communicate clearly to all students that bullying is not accepted. The program works individually with both victims and perpetrators along with their parents to stop further bullying. Regular school rules against bullying are established, class meetings on bullying are held, and teachers are encouraged to establish positive consequences for those who help prevent bullying and swift, negative consequences for bullies. Schools ensure adequate adult supervision of outdoor areas, hallways, lunch rooms and other specific areas where bullying is likely to happen. Parents are also included in the school-wide effort through individual interventions with bullies and victims. For example, talks with bullies and their parents reinforce the message that bullying will not be allowed. Meetings with victims and their parents stress that there are adults at the school who will help. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program produced a 50 percent reduction of bullying in Norway and a 20 percent reduction when it was replicated in South Carolina.[28]

contact – versus sending a student to the principal's office or suspension or expulsion. Teachers and school leaders implement a rewards system to encourage students to exhibit positive behavior and be leaders for their peers. Students receive points or token rewards for positive behavior and are recognized periodically for their success. Research shows this is a promising approach.[18]

Social-emotional skill curricula are also promising. These curricula or stand-alone programs help students proactively learn and practice valuable social-emotional skills like empathy, stress-management and problem-solving. A review of over 200 school-based, school-wide social and emotional learning programs found that participants demonstrated better social-emotional skills, fewer conduct problems and had lower levels of emotional distress. Academic performance was also improved, with participants scoring 11 percentiles higher on achievement tests. To be successful, such programs must be well implemented and include the "SAFE" criteria – Sequenced, Active, Focused, Explicit. Researchers believe that programs are more likely to be effective if they include a sequenced step-by-step training method, use active forms of learning, focus on skill development and specify explicit learning goals.[19]

Positive Action.
empower greatness+

The Positive Action program is a K-12 school-based social-emotional education program that teaches children that their positive behaviors can reinforce more positive behaviors in themselves and others. In one study of students from at-risk schools, Positive Action produced academic gains, (for example, a 50 percent relative improvement in the number of kids who score

proficient in the state math test), dramatic cuts in suspensions, reductions in frequent fighting (23 percent vs. 33 percent), and a cut of more than half in the number of young people who reported having carried a gun (4.5 percent vs. 10.7 percent).[20]

Restorative justice in schools is another alternative school discipline policy being used in some schools in Oregon that seeks to "encourage accountability, repair harm, and restore relationships."[21] A primary component of restorative justice is the use of circles, which bring together the offender(s) and those harmed and gives them the opportunity to sit down to discuss the issue and work together to find solutions to repair the damage and come up with an appropriate solution. Examples of solutions include a written apology from one student to another, an agreement between students to avoid the behaviors that led to a conflict or an agreement for students to help teachers with chores.[22]

An International Institute for Restorative Practices 2009 presentation showed before-and-after success stories of school-wide restorative justice in 10 schools in the United States, Canada and England, with meaningful to very impressive reductions in problem behaviors and suspensions.[23]

An earlier, 2007 review by Lawrence Sherman and Heather Strang, top researchers in the field, found that when restorative justice programs were not fully implemented there were no significant differences in results between schools implementing restorative justice and control group schools. But, in the minority of schools where the effort was more fully implemented and for a longer period, the whole-school restorative justice model produced significant results compared to control group schools.[24] Taken together, this indicates that restorative justice is certainly a promising approach that deserves to be more carefully studied and more widely disseminated if those studies confirm these very promising results.

Cost Savings

Smarter school discipline can also be more cost-effective. Given the close link between suspension and grade repetition, limiting the overuse of suspensions through smarter preventative steps could help districts avoid paying for extra years of schooling. Researchers found a return of $31 dollars for every dollar spent on the Good Behavior Game.[29]

Recommendations

Improve data collection

Schools should be required to collect and publicly report accurate data (disaggregated by income, race, etc.) on the use of school suspensions, expulsions and other discipline approaches, as well as on incidents of bullying, drug use and violence; and to analyze that data to help improve their discipline policies and implementation of those policies. The best way to address a problem is to understand it fully, and it is difficult to do that without reliable data.

Implement evidence-based programs with fidelity

To effectively reduce suspensions and expulsions, these interventions must be implemented as designed, with the proper staffing, services and follow-through. If programs stray from the evidence-based model, they may not demonstrate any results. Local, state and federal initiatives must support programs with the strongest evidence and provide sufficient support for proper implementation.

Fund training for school staff on alternatives to suspension

Despite serving all students, not just those with discipline problems, many of these approaches are low-cost because they involve primarily policy changes and some training for teachers and administrators. The expense is particularly low compared to the amount of teaching time and resources currently dedicated to managing disruptive students in school, in juvenile facilities and in the courts. Up-front investments can be far more fiscally responsible and cost taxpayers far less in the end than removing students from school unnecessarily.

Conclusion

The over 160 law enforcement leaders of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids *Oregon* and 5,000 members nationwide believe in punishment that fits the crime. Just like law enforcement authorities need to sanction criminal offenders, school leaders need the authority for serious cases, to suspend, expel or take other school discipline actions including referral to the juvenile justice system. However, in most cases, students and schools are better served by alternative responses – and better yet, prevention approaches that reduce behavior and discipline problems before they happen. Several promising programs can improve school climate and reduce disciplinary problems. Local, state and federal officials should support these approaches and encourage schools to implement effective discipline approaches that can help students, improve the learning environment and prevent more children from entering the criminal justice system.

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age six and later violent behavior." One study of ten- and thirteen-year-olds showed that two thirds of the boys with high teacher-rated aggression scores had criminal records for violent offenses by age 26. For the former, see: Hawkina, J. D., Herrenkohl, T., Farrington, D. P., Brewer, D., Catalano, R. F., & Harachi, T. W. (1999). A review of predictors of youth violence. In R. Loeber, & D. P. Farrington (Eds.) *Serious and violent juvenile offenders: Risk factors and successful interventions* (pp. 106-146). London: Sage Publications. For the latter, see: Stattin, H., & Magnusson, D. (1989). The role of early aggressive behavior in the frequency, seriousness, and types of later crime. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 57, 710-718. Cited in Hawkins, J. D., Herrenkohl, T., Farrington, D. P., Brewer, D., Catalano, R. F., & Harachi, T. W. (1999). *A review of predictors of youth violence.* In R. Loeber, & D. P. Farrington (Eds.) *Serious and violent juvenile offenders: Risk factors and successful interventions* (pp. 106-146). London: Sage Publications

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