


Chapter 8

Rethinking Exclusionary Discipline Consequences for Discretionary Reasons for Economically Disadvantaged Youth

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ABSTRACT

Exclusionary discipline practices are continuously pushing economically disadvantaged students out of their traditional home campuses instead of rehabilitating them with the ability to become productive members of their communities. This chapter explores the development of exclusionary discipline consequences and the known outcomes of these consequences on economically disadvantaged students. The chapter provides background information regarding the initial appeal of exclusionary discipline practices followed by the subsequent harm it created for certain groups of students. The chapter identifies the possibilities for decreasing the use of exclusionary discipline by adopting strategies like PBIS and restorative justice practices. The chapter closes with a discussion of the importance of schools moving away from exclusionary discipline practices. The authors argue transparency from school leaders with school community members is essential for the initial and continued success of restorative practices and the curbing of the damage of exclusionary consequences for students.

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INTRODUCTION

The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (GFSA) pushed school districts to use more punitive discipline measures to maintain safety on school grounds. School districts quickly adapted codes of conduct to reflect the new act. Swift action was required to subdue the concerns of the recent spike in violence and drug-related incidents. However, the GFSA became the gateway for school administrators to assign exclusionary discipline for offenses that are not safety concerns; suddenly, not all students were good enough to receive an education on their home campus. Economically disadvantaged students are the most affected by exclusionary discipline consequences since they often have difficulty connecting to their school community. Yet, they are most often assigned exclusionary discipline for discretionary reasons. For example, Texas school administrators assigned more than 58,000 economically disadvantaged students to a Discipline Alternative Education Program (DAEP) (Texas Education Agency, 2020). While school districts are currently adopting discipline strategies like Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS), restorative justice, and rehabilitative practices, school districts must rethink discipline consequences for discretionary reasons to ensure students needing the most support are kept in their home campus. The proposed chapter explores the need for decreasing exclusionary discipline for discretionary reasons, the lack of restorative discipline options and rehabilitative transition plans for school administrators to use, and the need to focus on connecting students to their schools.

BACKGROUND: THE DEVELOPMENT, INCREASE, AND DAMAGE OF EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE PRACTICES

After an uptick in school shootings during the first half of the 1990s, legislatures passed the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (GFSA) to curtail the increase in school violence. With the passing of GFSA, schools also began to adapt their student codes of conduct to reflect the new act and increase their use of exclusionary discipline practices, those which exclude students from their typical classroom. Schools needed to take swift action to quell concerns of the recent spike in violence and drug-related incidents (Skiba, 2014; Skiba & Losen, 2015; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Shortly after the GFSA was signed, school leaders in many districts adopted zero-tolerance policies. Though created out of concern for the well-being and safety of students, the GFSA became a gateway for school administrators to assign exclusionary discipline for offenses that were not safety concerns. Fear has been a primary driving force behind the adoption of zero-tolerance and exclusionary

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