AMERICAN
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Seeding Change
in School Discipline

THE MOVE FROM ZERO TOLERANCE TO SUPPORT

Moving Past Punishment Toward Support

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

EDUCATORS ASPIRE to help all kids grow to meet their full potential.

Each morning, when we walk into our classrooms, we aim to create safe, nurturing environments where each student can thrive and succeed. Educators' efforts must be supported by school leaders and sound policies. But it is increasingly clear that some policies intended to maintain safety and order not only have failed to do so but have caused considerable harm.

That is why many people have called for reevaluating so-called zero-tolerance policies. These policies were promoted by people, including me, who had hoped they would standardize discipline procedures and free students from the disruptions of misbehaving peers; it was analogous to the broken windows theory of policing. We were wrong. Data have shown both that these policies have failed to make schools safer and that their discriminatory application violates the 1964 Civil Rights Act. And they have emphasized punishment, rather than developing the positive behaviors students need in school and in life.

The facts are stark: over the past two decades, zero-tolerance policies have disproportionately affected students of color—particularly African American and Latino boys—as well as students with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. This trend can be seen as early as preschool. One study found that African American children make up 18 percent of enrollment in public preschool, but they account for 42 percent of out-of-school suspensions and 48 percent of multiple suspensions.

As a former New York City public school teacher and someone in constant contact with students, their families, and educators, I know there are cases when suspension or expulsion for serious student misbehavior is warranted and necessary. And I am just as certain that less serious (and more common) incidents should be dealt with using appropriate, proportionate strategies.

These strategies include:

- Professional development for school leaders, educators, and other school staff, including school resource and police officers, on classroom management, child psychology, cultural competency, and conflict resolution;
- Restorative practices through which students assume responsibility for the consequences of their actions;
- Social and emotional learning that is integrated into the curriculum so that students develop interpersonal skills to handle frustration and conflict;
- High-quality alternative educational settings for students who violate codes of conduct and need to be removed from the classroom while still maintaining access to instruction; and
- Social, health, and psychological services to address students' needs. It's rare for a student to demonstrate serious misbehavior without first exhibiting signs of needing help. Providing such services can prevent problems, as opposed to simply punishing students after those problems occur.

Such strategies should be applied in all public schools—both district and charter. Shocking revelations about some charter schools suspending or expelling students as young as kindergartners, often for minor infractions, are a reminder that publicly funded charter schools have a legal (and, I would add, moral) obligation to educate the students they have, not just the students they want to have.

All this requires training, support, and resources. We cannot, and will not, support a shift in policies that leaves educators without what they need to manage schools and classrooms effectively.

The Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second-largest school district, has led the way in banning suspensions for defiance and in using restorative justice methods as a way to resolve conflicts. But this shift in policies has not been backed up by the necessary training and supports.

For example, so far only 307 of the district's 900 campuses have received any training under the district's five-year restorative justice plan, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. In 2014, the district budgeted funds for five restorative justice counselors. And, even though that number was eventually increased to 45, the *Los Angeles Times* estimates that this still represents less than a third of those needed in the district's 181 secondary schools.

By contrast, when sound student behavior policies are combined with adequate resources—as we have seen in Austin, Texas; Cleveland; and New York City, for example—there has been progress. The work by Turnaround for Children, which combines extensive professional development for school administrators and staff, coordination of social and mental health services, and an awareness of the toxic stress and early trauma that can plague high-poverty neighborhoods, has led to transformative change in 80 schools across New York City; Washington, D.C.; and Newark, N.J. This is work we need to emulate. This is change we need to scale up and sustain.

The discipline policies of the past that emphasize punishment over developing positive behaviors are not working. As well-meaning as they were, they have made our schools more inequitable. We now have the chance to learn from these mistakes. We can, and we must, do better for all our kids.

> **Zero-tolerance policies intended to maintain safety and order not only have failed to do so but have caused considerable harm.**

AMERICAN Educator

Positive School Discipline and the Supports Educators Need

The AFT has long championed the idea that all schools should be safe and welcoming places. Teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn unless they feel physically secure and emotionally connected. But the sad reality is that too many students—particularly students of color; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth; students with disabilities; and students belonging to ethnic and religious minorities—enter school every day feeling neither welcome nor safe.

This special issue of *American Educator* explores new research on the ways that members of the school community can work together to ensure that schools are safe and welcoming for everyone. It comes nearly two decades after the AFT first supported the introduction of zero-tolerance policies, believing them to be a way to make schools safer and punishments less arbitrary and unfair. The jury is now in, and, far from helping, we now know that zero-tolerance policies have served to make schools less safe and punishments more biased and unfair, especially in their application to students who are different or vulnerable.

According to 2014 civil rights data from the U.S. Education Department, for example, African American students represented only 15 percent of all students but represented 35 percent of students who had been suspended at least once, 44 percent of those suspended more than once, and 36 percent of expelled students. Similarly, students who receive special education services (i.e., those who qualify for services mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) represented only 12 percent of all students but represented 20 percent of students receiving one out-of-school suspension, 25 percent of students receiving multiple out-of-school suspensions, 19 percent of expelled students, and 23 percent of students receiving a school-related arrest. In response to such data, the U.S. departments of Education and Justice issued federal guidance in January 2014, bringing the force of law to bear upon calls for the elimination of student discipline disparities.

The following pages are devoted to helping all of us move forward. To that end, they address the specifics of what does—and does not—work when it comes to school climate and student discipline. Articles include the research behind effective discipline strategies and the challenges local unions and school districts face in implementing them, as well as educators' personal stories. Other articles explain the role that philanthropy can play in school discipline reform and how implicit biases can inadvertently perpetuate overly punitive discipline measures for students of color. Just as important, this issue offers resources for implementing positive school discipline strategies as well as related resources for addressing students' social and emotional learning, improving relationships within schools, and ensuring that schools are safe and comfortable places to teach and to learn.

According to the researchers and educators who contributed to this issue, one of the main lessons they've learned is that we need to focus less on punishing misbehavior and more on preventing it and helping students learn from what they did wrong.

The move from zero tolerance to supportive discipline practices will not happen overnight. It will take time and a great deal of work and reflection. It will also take educators receiving the proper training in student engagement, effective behavior management, and restorative practices. It will require the rethinking of school policies, procedures, and routines. It will require all schools—particularly high-poverty schools with the greatest need—to have full access to the community supports, social services, guidance counselors, and health and psychological services that students require. And, as with any educational endeavor, teachers and other school staff, along with parents and students, must be consulted and involved every step of the way for these changes to take hold and succeed.

At the heart of this paradigm shift in school discipline lies a lesson that the best educators continually strive to teach: one can make mistakes, learn from them, and emerge stronger and wiser. It is a lesson that is as true for ourselves and our students as it is for the schools in which we teach.

–EDITORS

From Reaction to Prevention

Turning the Page on School Discipline
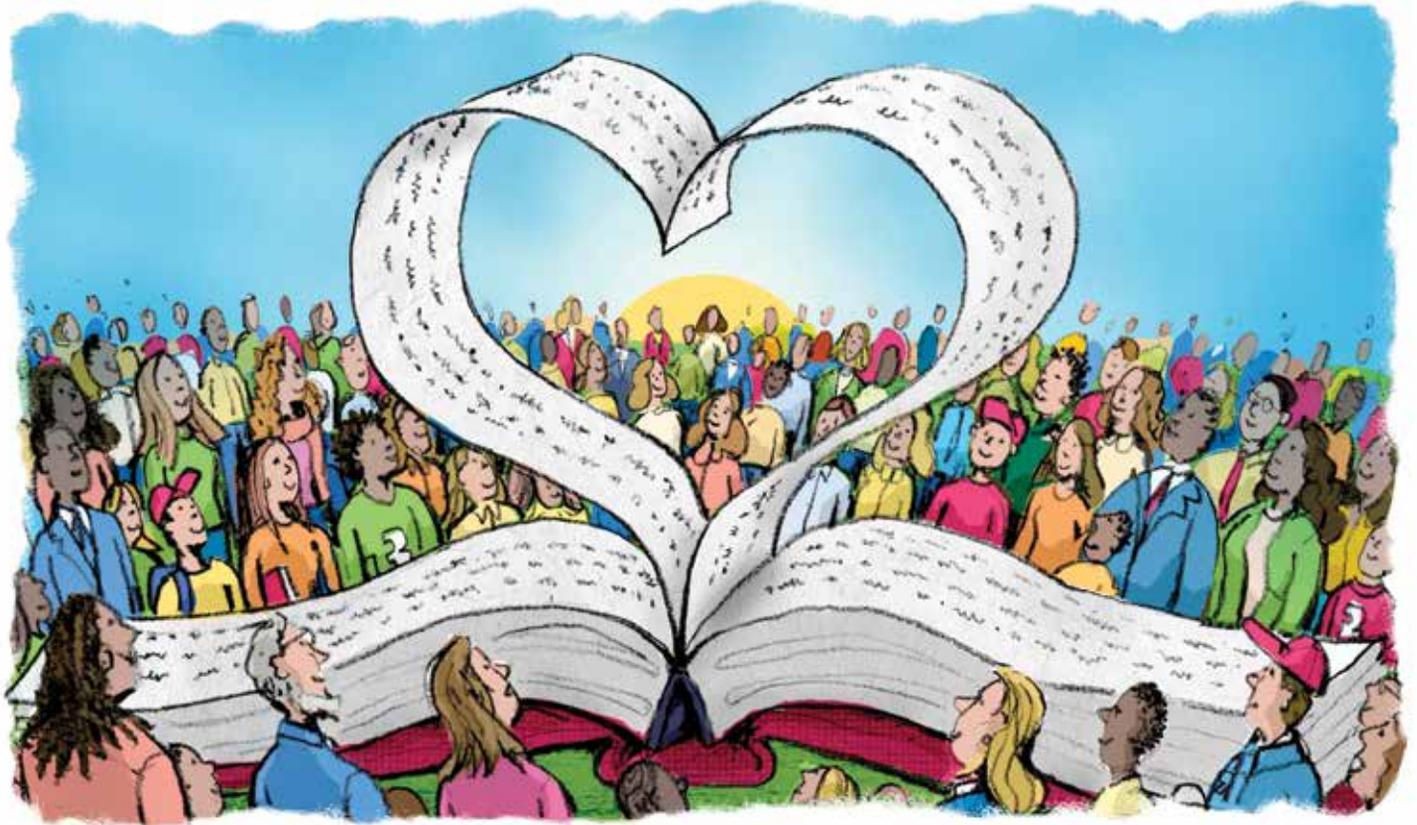
By Russell J. Skiba and Daniel J. Losen

We stand today in the middle of an important debate on the role, function, and practice of school discipline. There can be no question that any approach we implement should strive to create school climates that are safe, orderly, and civil, and that teach our children basic values of respect and cooperation. The key question revolves around the best way to accomplish that goal.

Russell J. Skiba is a professor of counseling and educational psychology and directs the Equity Project at Indiana University. A member of the American Psychological Association's Task Force on Zero Tolerance and the lead author of its report, he has worked with schools across the country, directed numerous federal and state research grants, and written extensively about school violence, school discipline, classroom management, and educational equity. Daniel J. Losen is the director of the Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the University of California, Los Angeles, an initiative at the Civil Rights Project. A former public school teacher, lawyer, and researcher, he has analyzed the trends in school discipline of nearly every school and district in the nation. This article draws upon the latest research on alternatives to punitive discipline and Losen's Closing the School Discipline Gap *(Teachers College Press, 2015).*

For some 20 years, numerous policymakers responded to concerns about school safety and disruption with a "get tough" philosophy relying upon zero-tolerance policies and frequent out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. But research has overwhelmingly shown that such approaches are ineffective and increase the risk for negative social and academic outcomes, especially for children from historically disadvantaged groups. In response to these findings, educational leaders and professional associations have led a shift toward alternative models and practices in school discipline.[1] District, state, and federal policymakers have pressed for more constructive alternatives that foster a productive and healthy instructional climate without depriving large numbers of students the opportunity to learn.

The recent beginnings of strong models in states, districts, and schools throughout the nation can serve as a guide to more effective and research-based school discipline approaches. Yet there is also resistance to changing the status quo. Bolstered by a get-tough political discourse, some schools and districts have not had the chance to consider effective alternatives to zero tolerance. Educators in environments characterized by excessive suspension rates may see themselves with few alternatives to suspension and

expulsion. Therefore, a successful transition toward a positive school climate will require strong support and training for both teachers and administrators.

In this article, we trace the course of school discipline over the past 20 years and examine the status of school discipline reform today. We begin with an examination of zero-tolerance, suspension, and expulsion policies, as well as their assumptions and effects. We discuss alternatives that have been proposed and the guidance that has been offered by the federal government, and examine state changes that may be models for others. Finally, for any new model to be effective, support of teachers and administrators is essential; thus, we consider what educators really need if we are to successfully reform school discipline.

How Did We Get to "Get Tough"?

In the 1970s, suspension rates for students of color, especially those who were black, began to rise, prompting concerns from civil rights groups. In 1975, the Children's Defense Fund published a report, *School Suspensions: Are They Helping Children?*, about high and racially disparate rates of out-of-school suspensions. Unjust suspensions were also the subject of several court challenges in the 1970s and 1980s.

Pressure to expand the use of suspension and expulsion increased further with the advent of zero-tolerance policies. Growing out of federal drug policy in the 1980s, zero tolerance was intended primarily as a method of using severe and invariant consequences to send a message that certain behaviors would not be tolerated.[2] Beginning in the late 1980s, fear of increased violence in schools led school districts throughout the country to promote zero-tolerance policies, calling for expulsion for guns and all weapons, drugs, and gang-related activity, and to mandate increased suspension and expulsion for less serious offenses such as school disruption, smoking, and dress code violations[3] (although later research showed no significant rise in school violence in that period[4]). This movement also resulted in the increased use of security personnel and security technology,[5] especially in urban schools.[6]

In 1994, the federal government stepped in to mandate zero-tolerance policies nationally when President Bill Clinton signed the Gun-Free Schools Act into law, requiring a one-year calendar expulsion for possession of firearms on any school campus. Some states had already passed similar requirements, and many others that adopted the federal law into their state codes of conduct further expanded them to cover much more than the mandated expulsion for bringing a firearm to school.

Ultimately, these policies led to significant increases in disciplinary removal and expansion in inequities in suspension and expulsion rates. Since 1973, the percentage of students suspended from school has at least doubled for all racial and ethnic groups.[7] Nearly 3.5 million public school students were suspended at least once in 2011–2012,[8] more than one student suspended for every public school teacher in America.[9] Given that the average suspension is conservatively put at 3.5 days, and that many students are suspended more than once, these figures mean that U.S. public school children lost nearly 18 million days of instruction in just one school year because of exclusionary discipline.[10] While an estimated 6 percent of all enrolled students are suspended at least once during a given year, national longitudinal research indicates that between one-third and one-half of students experience at least one suspension at some point between kindergarten and 12th grade.[11]

Out-of-school suspension and expulsion, and their associated risks, fall far more heavily on historically disadvantaged groups, especially black students. Data reported on disciplinary removals for the 2011–2012 academic year show that black students face the highest risk of out-of-school suspension, followed by Native American and then Latino students.[12] White, Asian, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students are typically suspended at the lowest rates.

Although the percentage of students who receive at least one suspension in a school year has increased for all groups, that increase has been most dramatic for historically disadvantaged groups, resulting in a widening of the discipline gap. As depicted in Figure 1 below, 7.6 percent of all black elementary school students were suspended from school in 2011–2012, and that rate is

Figure 1. Elementary and Secondary Suspension Rates by Group, 2011–2012

This graphic shows the percentage of U.S. public school students who received at least one out-of-school suspension during the 2011–2012 school year, by grade level and group. As depicted, 23.2 percent of black secondary school students were suspended at least once in 2011–2012, compared with just 6.7 percent of white students.
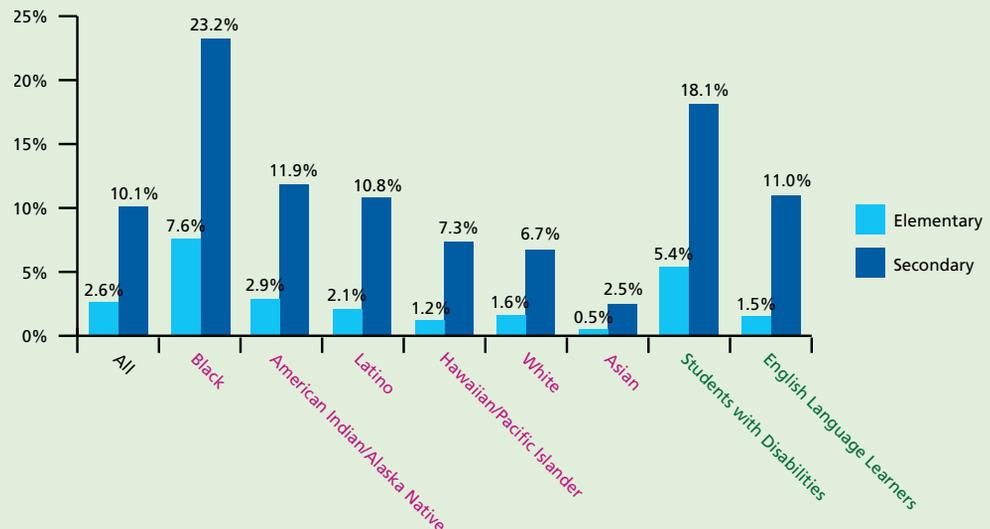
SOURCE: DATA FROM THE CENTER FOR CIVIL RIGHTS REMEDIES, WWW.SCHOOLDISCIPLINE DATA.ORG. THE TERM "SECONDARY" HERE REFERS TO ALL MIDDLE, JUNIOR HIGH, AND HIGH SCHOOLS.

6 percent higher than for white elementary school students (1.6 percent). As the frequency of suspension rises dramatically at the secondary level, this 6 percentage-point difference in suspension rates (the black-white gap) expands almost threefold, becoming a nearly 17 percentage-point black-white gap at the secondary level (middle school and high school). Across the nation, in just one year—2011–2012—nearly one out of every four black students in middle and high school was suspended at least once.

These differences are not simply due to poverty or more severe misbehavior on the part of students of color. Sophisticated statistical models have consistently shown that race remains a significant predictor of school exclusion even when controlling for poverty.[13] Nor is there evidence that racial discipline gaps are due to differences in severity of misbehavior; black students appear to be disciplined more frequently for more subjective or more minor offenses and disciplined more harshly than their white peers, even when engaging in the same conduct.[14]

Other groups are also at increased risk for suspension and expulsion. Discipline disparities for Latino students appear to increase at the secondary level.[15] Students with disabilities are suspended nearly twice as often as students without disabilities,[16] and are removed for longer periods of time, even after controlling for poverty.[17] Although males, in particular black males, are more likely to be suspended,[18] black and Latina females are also at increased risk.[19] Finally, recent research has found that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students are at increased risk for expulsion, for encountering a hostile school climate, and for being stopped by the police and arrested.[20]

Another response in U.S. schools to perceptions of increased threat has been the more prevalent use of school security measures, such as video cameras, metal detectors, and increased security personnel. Yet over a 20-year period in which use of these measures increased, there are very few empirical evaluations of their effectiveness. Regardless of perceptions of their effectiveness, the data on school security measures that do exist do not provide support for using such measures to deter violence. Surveys and statistical analyses in the United States have found that schools that rely heavily on school security policies continue to be less safe than schools serving similar communities that implement fewer components of zero tolerance.[21] Moreover, qualitative research suggests that invasive school security measures such as locker or strip searches can create an emotional backlash in students.[22] More recent studies have found that greater security measures at a school are associated with black students' increased risk for suspension but no benefits to the overall school environment.[23] A study of Cleveland's investments following a school shooting found that money spent on security "hardware" did not result in higher safety ratings.[24] While a belief that security hardware will instill a sense of safety informs these decisions, survey data, including a controlled study of all of Chicago's schools,[25] has found that the quality of student, teacher, and parent relationships was a far stronger predictor of feelings of safety.

What Are the Effects of Suspension and Expulsion?

A large body of research findings has failed to find that the use of suspension and expulsion contributes to either improved student behavior or improved school safety. Schools with higher rates of suspension have lower ratings of school safety from students[26] and have significantly poorer school climate,[27] especially for students of color.[28] In terms of student behavior, rather than reducing the likelihood of being suspended, a student's history of suspension appears to predict higher rates of future antisocial behavior and higher rates of future suspensions in the long term.[29] These and other findings led the American Psychological Association to conclude that zero tolerance was ineffective in either reducing individual misbehavior or improving school safety.[30]

School exclusion also appears to carry with it substantial risk for both short- and long-term negative outcomes. Use of suspension and expulsion is associated with lower academic achievement at both the school[31] and the individual[32] level, and *increased* risk of negative behavior over time.[33] In the long term, suspension is significantly related to students dropping out of school or failing to graduate on time.[34]

Finally, exclusionary discipline appears to be associated with increased risk of contact with the juvenile justice system. The Council of State Governments' report *Breaking Schools' Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Students' Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement* found that suspension and expulsion for a discretionary school violation, such as a dress code violation or disrupting class, nearly tripled a student's likelihood of involvement with the juvenile justice system within the subsequent year.[35] Together, these data show that out-of-school suspension and expulsion are, in and of themselves, risk factors for negative long-term outcomes.[36]

Alternative Strategies

The good news is that a number of universal, schoolwide interventions have been found effective in improving school discipline or school climate and have the potential to reduce discipline disparities based on race.[37] Such strategies address three important components of school climate and school discipline: (1) *relationship building*, through approaches such as restorative practices; (2) *social-emotional learning* approaches that improve students' ability to understand social interactions and regulate their emotions; and (3) *structural interventions*, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or changing disciplinary codes of conduct.

Relationship Building. Interventions that focus on strengthening teacher-student relationships can reduce the use of exclusionary discipline, particularly for black students. For example, MyTeachingPartner, a sustained and rigorous professional development

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program focusing on teachers' interactions with students, reduced teachers' reliance on exclusionary discipline with all of their students, and that effect was the most pronounced for black students. Interestingly, although the training did not focus on racial disparities per se, there was a substantial reduction in discipline disparities in the classrooms of teachers who received the training.[38]

Restorative practices, implemented throughout the school to proactively build relationships and a sense of community and to repair harm after conflict, are beginning to be widely used in schools across the country. A review of teacher and student reports of restorative practices implemented in two high schools found that individual teachers with better implementation of restorative practices had better relationships with their students, were perceived as more respectful by their students from different racial and ethnic groups, and issued fewer exclusionary discipline referrals to black and Latino students.[39]

After implementation of restorative practices in the Denver Public Schools, suspension rates were reduced by nearly 47 percent across the district, and all racial groups saw reductions, with the largest drops in suspension rates for black and Latino students. During the same period, achievement scores in Denver improved for each racial group each year.[40]

Social-Emotional Learning. Social and emotional learning programs vary greatly but generally build students' skills to (a) recognize and manage their emotions, (b) appreciate the perspectives of others, (c) establish positive goals, (d) make responsible decisions, and (e) handle interpersonal situations effectively.[41] Several studies have linked the completion of social and emotional learning programs to an increase in prosocial behaviors and a decrease in misbehaviors.[42]

For instance, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District engaged in comprehensive reform efforts that included the implementation of data-driven improvement efforts, districtwide implementation of research-based social and emotional learning programs, and the creation of student support teams that addressed early warning signals such as discipline referrals and attendance issues. Results included improved student attendance districtwide, a 50 percent decline in negative behavioral incidents, and a districtwide reduction in use of out-of-school suspension.[43]

Structural Interventions. Changing the structure of the disciplinary system can reduce the use of suspension and expulsion, and may reduce disparities in exclusionary discipline. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* can reduce exclusionary discipline, but specific attention to issues of race and diversity

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*PBIS is a framework for assisting school personnel in adopting evidence-based behavioral interventions to support positive academic and social behavior outcomes for all students. To read more about PBIS, see www.pbis.org.

may be necessary if PBIS is to reduce disciplinary disparities. A four-year project implementing PBIS in 35 middle schools showed that schools using proactive support instead of reactive punishment saw reductions in disciplinary exclusion rates for Latino and American Indian/Alaska Native students, but not for black students,[44] suggesting that modifications of PBIS may be necessary to reduce racial disparities in discipline.

Another study, through a survey of 860 schools that were implementing or preparing to implement PBIS, identified the most commonly cited "enablers" and "barriers" to using this model. Among the most common enablers were "staff buy-in, school administrator support, and consistency" of a common approach among school personnel, while the most common barriers were lack of "staff buy-in, resources: time, and resources: money."[45]

Other research has shown that a systematic response to threats of violence can reduce suspensions and racial disparities. Schools across the state of Virginia using the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines, a tiered process of review designed to help schools identify and respond appropriately to the full spectrum of behavior perceived as threatening, were 25 percent less likely to suspend students, and black-white racial disparities in suspension were significantly lower than in schools not using the guidelines.[46]

Finally, changes in policy at the district level are a key first step in developing more positive and effective school climate. An extensive examination of school codes of conduct found that many of the codes reviewed were rated as punitive/reactive, even for minor behavioral infractions such as repeated tardiness, foul language, dress code violations, or horseplay in the hallway.[47] Thus, rewriting district codes of conduct has been a major focus of school discipline reform. A number of major urban school districts, including the Los Angeles Unified School District[48] and Broward County (Florida) Public Schools,[49] have revised their codes of conduct to eliminate out-of-school suspensions for minor offenses and to focus on preventative alternatives to suspension and expulsion. To ensure success, such revisions should go hand in hand with providing school staff with effective training on these preventative alternatives and the support needed to implement them.

A Comprehensive Model for Reducing Exclusion and Disproportionality

Among the recent national initiatives addressing disproportionality in school discipline has been the Discipline Disparities Research-to-Practice Collaborative, a group of 26 nationally recognized researchers, educators (including the AFT), advocates, and policy analysts who came together to address the problem of disciplinary disparities. After three years of meetings
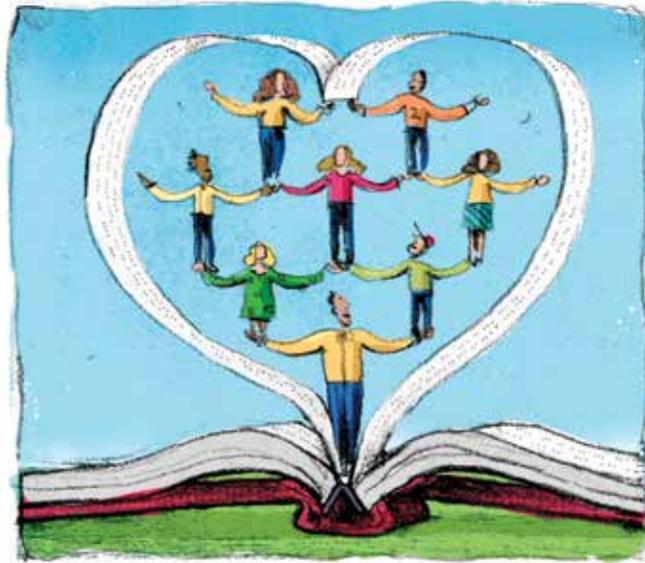
with stakeholders and reviews of the relevant literature, the collaborative released a series of four briefing papers on the status of discipline disparities, with a particular focus on increasing the availability of practical and evidence-based interventions.[50] The collaborative also sponsored a major national conference, "Closing the School Discipline Gap," that resulted in an edited volume of papers.[51]

In the second paper in the series, "How Educators Can Eradicate Disparities in Discipline: A Briefing Paper on School-Based Interventions," Anne Gregory, James Bell, and Mica Pollock present what may be the most comprehensive model to date for addressing disparities in school discipline by focusing on conflict prevention and conflict intervention.[52]

Conflict in the classroom leading to office referral and possible school exclusion is not inevitable. Rather, a number of strategies can defuse potential conflict and keep students in class:

- *Building supportive relationships.* Forging authentic relationships with all students communicates high expectations and sends a message that all students will be fairly and consistently supported in reaching those goals.
- *Ensuring academic rigor.* Offering engaging and relevant instruction, while setting high expectations, has shown remarkable results in dramatically raising the achievement and graduation rate in schools some might regard as too challenging.[53]
- *Engaging in culturally relevant and responsive teaching.* By integrating students' racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual identities into curricula, resources, and school events, effective schools find that students feel safer, report lower rates of victimization and discrimination, and have higher achievement.
- *Creating bias-free classrooms and respectful school environments.* Research on implicit bias has shown that racial stereotypes can influence an individual's judgments, unbeknownst to that individual. For teachers, this means that implicit bias can influence their judgments about a student's behavior.[54] (For more on implicit bias, see the article on page 29.) Gregory and her colleagues suggest that the potential effects of implicit bias—which all individuals, regardless of profession, may hold—can be mitigated by self-reflection, avoiding snap judgments, and examining data on discipline disparities and the key decision points that might contribute to them.[55]

Gregory and her colleagues point out that some conflict and disruption are inevitable in schools. However, they note that schools can reduce the effects of conflict by targeting "hot spots" of disciplinary conflict or differential treatment in order to identify solutions, examining what caused the behavior or conflict and addressing the identified needs, reaching out to include the perspectives and voices of students and families in resolving conflicts, and implementing procedures to reintegrate students into the learning community after a conflict has occurred.[56]

> A number of interventions have been found effective in improving school discipline or school climate and have the potential to reduce discipline disparities based on race.

Changes in Disciplinary Policy

In response to the accumulating research and growing public awareness of high suspension rates, leading educational professional associations and policymakers have begun to embrace national, state, and local initiatives intended to reduce rates of suspension and expulsion and increase the use of alternatives. Professional associations such as the American Psychological Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics have issued reports on the ineffectiveness of and risks associated with disciplinary exclusion, and have recommended the use of such measures only as a last resort.[57] Statements issued by the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, the National School Boards Association, and the American Association of School Administrators have similarly endorsed a policy shift away from frequent reliance on disciplinary exclusion and toward more constructive interventions.

Research in Texas links frequent and disparate school discipline to a three- to fivefold increase in students' risk of dropping out of school and coming in contact with the juvenile justice system. Inspired in part by this research, the U.S. departments of Education and Justice undertook a national initiative, the Supportive School Discipline Initiative, to reduce the use of suspension and expulsion, and the corresponding flow of students into the juvenile justice system.[59]

This initiative included the departments' joint release of a two-part federal guidance document intended to reduce the use of suspension and expulsion, and the disparities associated with those, and offer guidance on moving toward more-effective alternatives. (For more about this federal guidance, see page 12.) One critically important document was the legal guidance, issued as a "Dear Colleague" letter to schools and districts, alerting recipients of the need to review discipline policies, practices, and data for evidence of unjustifiable racial disparities, in order to ensure compliance with federal anti-discrimination law.

The legal guidance highlights the importance of the "disparate impact" analysis. To illustrate disparate impact, it uses a policy of suspending students for truancy as an example because of obvious questions about the underlying justification. If suspending truant students was found to burden one racial group more than others, unless the district could show that the suspensions were educationally necessary, it would likely be found to violate federal anti-discrimination law, even if there was no intent to discriminate. As the letter makes clear, even if the school district had some justification for suspending truant students, the policy might still be found to be unlawful if less-discriminatory alternatives were available that were equally or more effective at deterring truant behavior.

With this guidance has also come stepped-up federal review of district discipline practices for possible violations. In several large districts, including Dade County, Florida; Los Angeles and Oakland, California; and Oklahoma City, reviews for compliance

Box 1. States with Legislative Changes around School Discipline

- **California:** In 2014, the California legislature passed a bill limiting the authority of superintendents and principals to suspend K–3 students or to recommend expulsion for minor violations under the category of disruption or willful defiance. State legislation also limits suspension to cases where other disciplinary actions have failed and encourages the use of nonexclusionary alternatives in response to disruption and defiance.

- **Colorado:** Led by the citizen advocacy organization Padres & Jóvenes Unidos, Colorado passed legislation in 2012 directing schools to minimize referrals to law enforcement for minor infractions and to align the severity of consequences with the seriousness of the offense. In 2011, the legislature passed HB 11-1032, promoting the adoption of, and schoolwide training in, restorative practices in schools throughout the state.

- **Georgia:** Beginning in 2014, Georgia established a statewide school climate management program as part of its school accountability system. The state board is authorized to develop model codes of discipline and annually release ratings of schools' disciplinary practices and use of research-based practices promoting positive interventions.

- **Maryland:** In 2012, the Maryland State Board of Education released a study recommending a significant shift away from exclusionary discipline. In 2014, the state approved and released a progressive discipline framework. The new state code of conduct guidelines emphasize out-of-school suspensions as a last resort and provide steps for districts to move away from zero-tolerance practices. In 2015, the board approved regulations calling for the elimination of racial disparities in out-of-school suspensions.

- **Massachusetts:** Statutory changes that went into effect for the 2014–2015 school year require districts to provide students with educational services when they are suspended or expelled, and discourage the use of long-term suspension unless alternatives such as mediation, conflict resolution, and positive behavioral interventions and supports have been tried and have failed.

- **Oregon:** In 2014, the Oregon legislature revised Oregon's school discipline code, requiring school boards and districts to develop and implement policies and practices that focus on reducing unnecessary suspensions and expulsions. The law requires districts to develop codes of conduct or a student handbook defining acceptable behavior, a respectful learning climate, and procedures for promoting positive behavior.
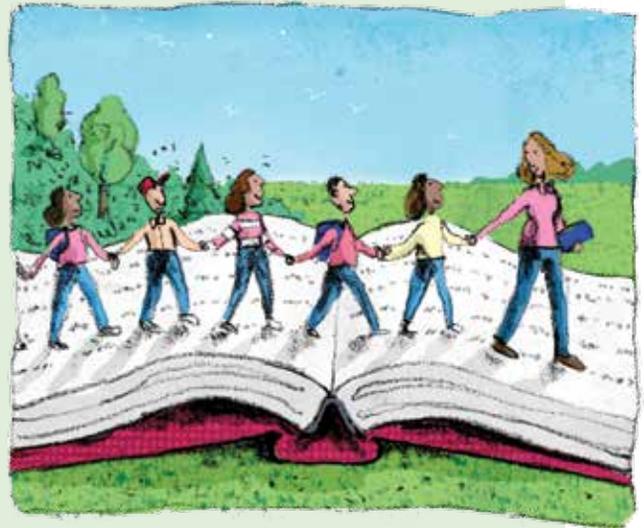
There are already some indications that these changes in state policy are affecting state rates of suspension and exclusion. In Maryland, for example, the state passed a law in 2004 requiring any elementary school that suspends more than 10 percent of its total enrollment to engage in corrective action. Connecticut passed a law in 2009, implemented in 2011, aimed at eliminating out-of-school suspensions except as a measure of last resort. Both states are currently on the lower end of the overall state rankings on suspensions.

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with civil rights law have resulted in major changes.

The Center for Civil Rights Remedies' review of federal investigations between September 2009 and July 2012 indicates the level of federal involvement with school discipline.[60] As that report notes, there were 821 discipline-based complaints and agency-initiated compliance reviews during that time, of which 789 were resolved. As of fall 2014, 55 of those resolutions resulted in an agreement to address discipline policies and/or practices, with 32 districts currently under investigation. Geographically, discipline-based complaints or compliance reviews were found in all states except Alaska, Montana, North Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming.

Ultimately, federal enforcement of disparate impact can help leverage the replacement of harsh and often counterproductive approaches with better policies and practices that help all children. As the research (and contents of resolution agreements) suggests, such changes entail districts providing teachers and administrators the support and training necessary to implement more effective approaches. In its position statement on school discipline, the AFT supports more effective disciplinary alternatives. At the same time, the union emphasizes that to implement these approaches, educators require proper training. This training and professional development must be ongoing, provided to all school staff, and "aligned with school and district reform goals, ... with a focus on evidenced-based positive school discipline, conflict resolution, cultural relevancy and responsiveness, behavior management, social justice and equity."[61] Similarly, the National Education Association has joined efforts to end school discipline disparities, and both organizations have supported replacing harsh discipline with restorative practices.[62]

Concurrent with changes at the federal level, states and school districts across the nation have formulated new policies shifting codes of conduct away from punitive and exclusionary practices, and toward comprehensive and restorative approaches. Often driven by local advocates, at least 19 states have passed legislation moving policy and practice away from zero-tolerance strategies toward an increased emphasis on promoting positive school

Box 2. Major School Districts' Progress in School Discipline Reform

- **Baltimore:** Beginning in 2008, the Baltimore City Public Schools implemented a new discipline code to reduce exclusionary discipline and encourage prevention and intervention, especially for cases of minor offenses and truancy, and began an expansion of the implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports into schools throughout the district. The district reports that, compared with a decade ago, suspensions have dropped by about two-thirds, from more than 26,000 in 2004 to 8,600 in 2013.

- **Chicago:** In 2012, the Chicago Public Schools amended its student code of conduct to reduce the use and length of suspensions and encourage restorative practices. In 2014, the district released its Suspension and Expulsion Reduction Plan to further efforts in improving approaches to discipline.

- **Denver:** Beginning in 2005, the Denver Public Schools, in partnership with Padres & Jóvenes Unidos, implemented restorative justice practices in selected pilot schools, and has since expanded them to much of the district. Between 2006 and 2013, the overall suspension rate dropped from 10.58 percent to 5.63 percent, and the suspension gap between black and white students decreased from a 12- to an 8-point gap.

- **Oakland:** In 2005, the Oakland Unified School District in California initiated a pilot program of restorative justice at Cole Middle School and saw an 87 percent decrease in suspensions in three years. Restorative justice practices have been expanded throughout the district and are now being used in 24 schools, with a goal of full implementation in all of the district's K–12 schools by 2020. The district reports that the suspension rates for schools implementing the program have been cut in half since 2011–2012, while high schools implementing restorative justice report a 56 percent decline in dropout rates.

- **Vallejo:** Beginning in 2011, California's Vallejo City Unified School District has implemented restorative justice practices, schoolwide PBIS, and the Positive Youth Justice Initiative program. The district reports a decrease in school suspensions from nearly 7,200 suspensions in 2010–2011 to 2,604 in 2014–2015.
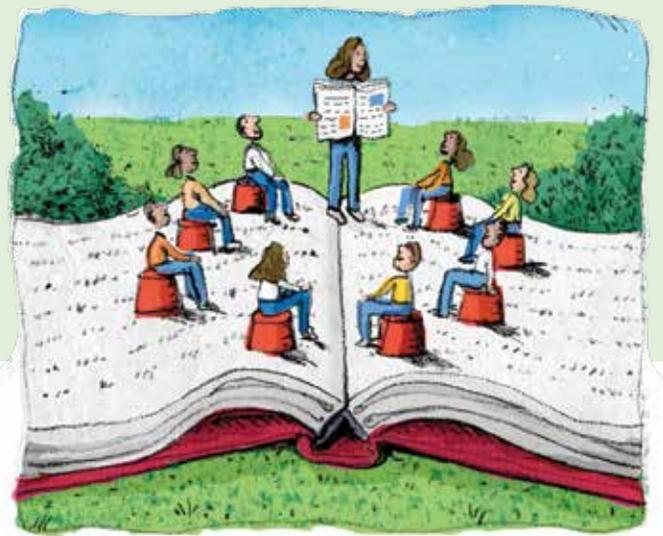
climates.[63] (For more on these state and local policies, see Boxes 1 and 2 on pages 9 and 10.)

The Need to Support Educators

Research has led educators and policymakers across the nation to an understanding that exclusionary approaches to discipline are neither an effective nor equitable method for ensuring safe and productive schools for all students. This has led to the development of alternative and more effective strategies in reducing disruption, maintaining a positive school climate, and keeping students in school. Federal, state, and district policies and guidelines have begun to mirror this shift.

But change is rarely an easy, straightforward process. When it comes to school discipline, effective implementation of new approaches typically depends upon substantial levels of support for educators and schools. In particular, where remedies call for widespread systemic change, in order to successfully replace counterproductive practices with more effective disciplinary alternatives, it is critically important that educators be fully supported with resources and training.

Professional Development and Technical Assistance. As noted, numerous strategies for maintaining safe and productive school climates are emerging as more effective alternatives to suspension and expulsion. In order for teachers to integrate these strategies into their instruction, schools and districts must ensure that sufficient time for professional development and technical assistance are available to train and coach teachers in implementing such approaches as restorative practices, culturally responsive approaches to PBIS, social and emotional learning, implicit bias training, and culturally responsive classroom management.

Some professional development on positive discipline strategies can be integrated into ongoing school and district professional development schedules. In other cases, however, implementation of new programming will require additional training and resources (e.g., teacher release time) to ensure adequate training in new practices, and especially guidance on how those strategies can be best fit within (not in addition to) existing instructional time. Teacher-to-teacher support programs, such as professional learning communities or mentoring, are also important.

Administrative Support. Instructional leaders must stand by teachers throughout this process. The *Blueprint for School-Wide Positive Behavior Support Training and Professional Development* from the National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports includes strong support from a district leadership team among the criteria for implementing PBIS with fidelity. With the backing, support, and commitment of administrators, school districts can avoid the myriad problems often associated with mandated changes.

Ongoing Collection of and Access to Disaggregated Discipline Data. There are three reasons why data collection and reporting are also essential. First, within most districts, disciplin-

ary approaches, the frequency of suspensions, and the ensuing disparities can vary greatly. Thus, data can establish baselines describing current areas of need, as well as schools that are doing well. If schools do not routinely pay attention to their discipline data, it will be difficult to respond and build upon what is working in a timely manner, or to modify a policy that is not working as well as expected. Second, data enable teachers and administrators to track their progress as they implement new alternatives, in order to change or revise interventions that are not working and to celebrate those that are. Finally, the school community needs transparency about both minor violations and those involving safety or resulting in arrests or referrals to law enforcement. To meet that need, the school and community need data that are publicly reported and disaggregated, including complete information about which groups are disciplined more than others, and for what types of offenses.

Collaboration with Community Agencies. No one agency can or should be expected to handle the needs of struggling students alone. Schools and school districts can form collaborative partnerships with mental health, probation, juvenile justice, and social service agencies, as well as business and union leaders, to help support teachers for students whose problems are severe.

Codes of Conduct That Support Alternative Strategies. School districts across the nation, from Denver to Chicago to Baltimore to Indianapolis, have restructured their codes of conduct, replacing simple lists of behaviors that lead to suspension and expulsion with comprehensive plans for creating positive school climates. By shifting the focus from punishment to prevention, and providing guidance for alternate strategies, such codes support and encourage teachers who are already seeking to implement strategies for supporting positive student behavior in the classroom.

Helping Parents Understand and Support Less Punitive Approaches. Parents and community members are often mixed in their support of zero-tolerance and exclusionary measures.[64] In the face of school disruption, some parents and community members may see few options other than school removal, and they may support or even demand suspension or expulsion. On the other hand, the excessive use of punitive and exclusionary tactics often leads to pushback and resistance by community groups advocating for reform.[65]

Parent involvement is always critical, but never more so than in times of change. Effective reform of school discipline demands open lines of communication with parents and the community (including annual public reporting of data disaggregated by race, gender, and disability status) in order to emphasize the school community's commitment to safe and productive schools, and where needed, to provide evidence-based information that can reassure all stakeholders that new, more comprehensive systems are in fact *more effective* in meeting those goals.

> Revised codes of conduct should go hand in hand with providing school staff effective training on preventative alternatives and the support needed to implement them.

Increased Presence of Mental Health and Instructional Support Personnel in Schools. Programs such as PBIS or restorative practices can improve the climate of schools overall, leading to reductions in rates of disruption, office discipline referral, and suspension. Yet, other support, in the form of the increased presence of mental health and instructional support personnel, is an invaluable addition to school climate improvement in any number of ways, including assistance in developing individualized behavior programs for challenging students, acting as a liaison with families, providing counseling services, and coordinating school-based and community-based programming for students and families.

We *Can* Get There from Here

Our nation's students deserve safe, productive, and positive school climates that promote teaching and learning for all children. The idea that a zero-tolerance philosophy based on punishment and exclusion could create effective learning climates has proven to be illusory. As the evidence of what does work has grown, strategies emphasizing relationship building, social-emotional learning, and structural change have emerged as promising paths to a comprehensive approach for developing positive school climates. Significant shifts in federal, state, and district policy are moving our nation toward the adoption of these more effective and evidence-based practices.

Yet it is critical that educators (including teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, and other school staff) be fully supported through professional development, sufficient resources, and opportunities to collaborate, both among school professionals and with outside agencies. Together, these developments represent a fundamental sea change toward more effective and equitable school discipline, one that holds promise for reducing the loss of educational opportunity and increasing the likelihood of safe and healthy learning environments for all students. ☐

Endnotes

1. See especially, American Federation of Teachers, "Reclaiming the Promise: A New Path Forward on School Discipline Practices," accessed September 17, 2015, www.aft.org/position/school-discipline.

2. Russell J. Skiba and Reece L. Peterson, "The Dark Side of Zero Tolerance: Can Punishment Lead to Safe Schools?," *Phi Delta Kappan* 80, no. 5 (1999): 372–376, 381–382.

3. Russell J. Skiba and Kimberly Knesting, "Zero Tolerance, Zero Evidence: An Analysis of School Disciplinary Practice," in *Zero Tolerance: Can Suspension and Expulsion Keep Schools Safe?*, ed. Russell J. Skiba and Gil G. Noam, New Directions for Youth Development, no. 92 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 17–43.

4. See, for example, Irwin A. Hyman and Donna C. Perone, "The Other Side of School Violence: Educator Policies and Practices That May Contribute to Student Misbehavior," *Journal of School Psychology* 36 (1998): 7–27.

5. Ronnie Casella, *At Zero Tolerance: Punishment, Prevention, and School Violence* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001); and Aaron Kupchik, *Homeroom Security: School Discipline in the Age of Fear* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

6. John Devine, *Maximum Security: The Culture of Violence in Inner-City Schools* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

7. Daniel J. Losen and Tia Elena Martinez, *Out of School & Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools* (Los Angeles: Center for Civil Rights Remedies, 2013).

School Discipline and Federal Guidance

The AFT's Response

In January 2014, the U.S. departments of Education and Justice jointly issued legal guidance, in the form of a "Dear Colleague" letter, on the subject of discriminatory practices in the administration of student discipline and violations of Title IV and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. To read the letter, and to learn more about the departments' recent efforts to support discipline practices that keep students in school, visit **http://1.usa.gov/1Nm8AmB**.

The guidance relies upon data collected by the federal Office for Civil Rights, which have shown that under mandatory suspension or expulsion policies, certain groups of students are more likely to be disciplined based on race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. While focused on race, the letter reminds schools that federal law also prohibits discriminatory discipline based on other factors, including disability, religion, gender, and sexual orientation.

The guidance states that the administration of student discipline can result in unlawful racial discrimination in two ways: (1) when a student is subjected to different treatment based on the student's race; and, more commonly, (2) when a policy is neutral on its face—meaning that the policy itself does not mention race—and is administered in an evenhanded manner but has a "disparate impact" (i.e., a disproportionate and unjustified effect) on students of a particular race. Under either scenario, statistical analysis can be used to track potential violations.

As the letter explains, the departments initiate investigations at particular schools based on complaints they receive from students, parents, community members, and others about possible racial discrimination in student discipline or as part of their regular compliance-monitoring activities. The departments use data to answer a three-part inquiry to assess whether a policy has an unlawful disparate impact:

- Has the discipline policy resulted in an adverse impact on students of a particular race?
- Is the discipline policy necessary to meet an important educational goal?
- Are there comparably effective alternative policies or practices that would meet the school's stated educational goal with less of a burden or adverse impact on the disproportionately affected racial group, or is the school's proffered justification a pretext for discrimination?

According to the guidance, policies that impose mandatory suspension or expulsion can raise disparate-impact concerns. In all cases, the departments will investigate all relevant circumstances, such as the facts surrounding a student's actions and the discipline imposed.

The guidance letter advises school systems to:

- Have a system for monitoring all disciplinary referrals;
- Ensure that staff are trained to administer student discipline in a nondiscriminatory manner; and
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of disciplinary practices. If the departments have concerns with the adequacy of a school district's data collections and record keeping, they may require the district to implement various data collection practices.

If the federal departments conclude that a school district is in violation, the departments will attempt to resolve the matter through a voluntary agreement with the district before instituting a judicial or administrative action.

Next Steps

Several years prior to the federal guidance, the AFT had begun a dialogue internally on positive approaches to school discipline—and the critical need for high-quality alternative education settings, effective professional development, administrator support, community collaboration, and better use of data—with a focus on increased student attendance, staff and student safety, parental involvement, and improved school climate and culture. In the summer of 2012, the AFT released a statement on then–newly announced disparate discipline data, reiterating a commitment to combating the effects of zero-tolerance policies and to working with communities to improve education for all children. It also affirmed the need for educators to receive related professional development and training.

In response to the 2014 federal letter, the AFT acknowledged the disturbing suspension data and embraced the guidance, noting that schools must be safe and welcoming places for all students and staff. But the AFT also cautioned that any new policies will succeed only if resources and support are available to help at-risk children thrive.

To that end, the AFT called upon school systems and the federal departments to make the following changes:

1. Provide ongoing professional development and training to all school staff, aligned with school and district reform goals, with a focus on evidence-based positive school discipline, conflict resolution, cultural relevancy and responsiveness, behavior management, social justice, and equity.
2. Earmark funding for states to collect data and to support a comprehensive and aligned system of mental health and intervention services for children and youth.
3. Increase school district and statewide investments in social-emotional learning and student-support teams, focusing on academic engagement, equitable access to rigorous coursework, and appropriate behavioral instruction.
4. Include time to collaboratively analyze and address school discipline data.
5. Review and monitor existing discipline codes to ensure they are appropriate, effective, and equitable.
6. Restore critical school personnel, such as counselors, psychologists, nurses, and school social workers, who have the knowledge and expertise to appropriately address student behavior.
7. Restore and provide training to essential paraprofessional and school-related support personnel, such as instructional aides, bus drivers, security and school resource officers, cafeteria staff, and custodial staff.
8. Include students, families, educators, school support personnel, juvenile justice professionals, law enforcement officers, child welfare workers, and other community members in developing and implementing school improvement/reform plans that will affect school climate.
9. Implement alternatives to suspension and expulsion to manage student behavior. Establish criteria for high-quality alternative education settings and develop transition protocols for students returning to their community's schools.

–AFT GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
DEPARTMENT

It's About Relationships

Creating Positive School Climates

By Dana M. Ashley

Imagine this scenario: A first-year teacher escorts her third-graders from the school cafeteria to the classroom. She then asks them to join a reading circle in the front of the room—something they've practiced a lot. Jeremy, once again, refuses to come over. As a teacher, does she call him out? Offer him a reward for joining? Threaten consequences when he doesn't? Thirty students are ready to move on with their lessons and are waiting for a response from the teacher, but Jeremy is holding up the class. What should she do?

Now take a more seasoned teacher, his ethnicity and social class different from those of the students he teaches. A female student just said "F__ you!" and approaches him in a belligerent manner in the hallway. As a teacher, he does not want to just let

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this go, but he also knows that he needs to be careful not to escalate the situation or allow other students to think this behavior is appropriate. What should he do?

When teachers wonder "What should I do?" in response to challenging student behaviors, the answers are not as simple as they might seem. Although an individual teacher asks the question, the response must be nuanced enough to take into account the specific school and community. As in any field—not just in education—context is key.

Educators ask me all the time: "What do I do about the students in my class who just won't behave?" There's often a sense of urgency in their voice and a sense of desperation. I get it; these situations are uncomfortable, they're filled with emotions, and they detract from instruction. What we do know is that punitive discipline does not solve the problem—it exacerbates it.

Because of all sorts of challenges, many schools, particularly those in high-poverty districts, operate in a crisis management mode. Often our students display anger, frustration, and hurt in ways that feel (and often are) "defiant" or "disrespectful" to educators. There's no magic bullet, I tell them. The effectiveness of responses

hinges not solely on individuals, but also on whether school cultures facilitate relationships between students and educators, open communication, provide opportunities for school-family collaboration, promote cultural awareness, and offer professional development to help teachers manage stress. In other words, we cannot place systemic responsibilities on the shoulders of individual educators.

What teachers can do also depends, at least in part, on external demands (e.g., discipline codes, principal expectations, time pressures on teaching content and testing) that can either facilitate or thwart positive resolutions of conflicts. For example, do school policies have some flexibility to account for the context of a situation and students' experiences? Are the expectations of a first-year teacher with less or no training in de-escalating student behavior the same as the expectations of a more seasoned teacher who has more experience and training with tough situations?

During my years in District 75, I started an initiative called STOPP (Strategies, Techniques, and Options Prior to Placement). As part of the initiative, I taught a four-day course called Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Schools (TCIS), which uses a curriculum developed by Cornell University to reduce the number of students placed in restraints in residential treatment centers. We gained traction with the STOPP initiative by teaching the course to faculty from a few schools and helping their staffs build behavior support/climate teams that could address student behavior.

The TCIS course provides effective crisis intervention strategies that start to stabilize the school community by creating a common language around behavior, which then enables teachers and administrators to better connect with children. Educators practice self-awareness, active listening skills, and other strategies in order

Punitive discipline does not solve the problem—it exacerbates it.

Perhaps, the real question in most cases is what are *we* or what is *this system* prepared to do? Framed differently, we can do a lot within a multitiered schoolwide approach in which behavioral challenges activate an existing system of positive support for both students and teachers. Over time, a disciplined, thoughtful approach to behavioral interventions can become sustainable despite individual strengths and weaknesses.

Empowering Educators

Prior to the birth of New York City's Positive Learning Collaborative, I spent nine years as a social worker and behavior specialist in District 75, the city's special education district. I worked extensively in classrooms with new teachers on how to handle behavior challenges they were facing. With a lot of trial and error, we figured out strategies together.

Often, teachers would come find me in the hallways and ask, "What do I do about this student who is running out of my room?" or "What do I do about that student who is picking on other kids and won't sit while I'm trying to teach?" It seemed clear that they didn't have the preparation or support systems to deal with the many students coming in with complex histories of trauma, abject poverty, homelessness, and psychiatric vulnerabilities. I soon found out that the most effective teachers in working with challenging students had very positive relationships with them.

to prevent crises and teach students new coping skills for sorting out difficult feelings.

TCIS is an approach that empowers educators to feel a sense of greater control in dealing with the multifaceted problems students bring to school (e.g., psychiatric issues, trauma, poverty). We call upon participants to get in touch with their own beliefs and implicit biases about behavior and how our own experiences—as children, students, members of a community of faith, parents, etc.—shape our responses to behavior often in ways that escalate situations and produce negative outcomes for all concerned. (For more about what implicit bias is and how it works, see the article on page 29.)

Through the work of STOPP, I began to realize that this approach provided a framework with the potential to transform school climate and contribute to the success of our students. However, our resources were limited, and while we had strong administrative support from our superintendent in District 75, we had no room for expansion. I began to feel that the only way to embed this work into our school system was to align both partners and policy to a shared vision of positive approaches to school discipline.

Successful Collaboration

Throughout her more than two decades as vice president for special education for the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the AFT's

New York City affiliate, Carmen Alvarez has sought to support members in finding the most effective ways of responding to challenging behaviors. For most of her tenure, the only strategy she felt she had at her disposal was enforcing the student discipline code and using the "disruptive student" clause in our contract, which states that students with chronically disruptive behavior can be removed from the classroom for a single period, a single day, or up to four days. About five years ago, she started to hear about the work we were doing in District 75 and invited me to come to the union and give an overview of the STOPP initiative.

According to Alvarez, "Those who attended told me that this was exactly what they had been looking for and asked for more in-depth training." She worked with UFT President Michael Mulgrew to expand the number of people who could provide TCIS training in New York City. However, we knew from experience that

Corinne Rello-Anselmi, to see what more could be done, especially in terms of on-site support. Alvarez proposed the creation of a UFT-Department of Education consortium to provide New York City schools with a systemic, research-based approach to understanding, assessing, and supporting positive student behavior.

In spring 2012, The Atlantic Philanthropies awarded a three-year, $300,000 grant to the consortium that helped cover start-up costs, technology, and professional development. (For more about The Atlantic Philanthropies' work, see the article on page 34.) With this grant, we have sought to support schools regarding student behavior. But before we agree to work with a particular school, we ask for a three-year commitment from that school. Since the grant does not cover the full cost of this work, each school must pay an annual sum that varies by staff size.

> The most effective teachers in working with challenging students had very positive relationships with them.

the training was far from enough. We understood that we needed a multitiered system of support that addressed both schoolwide climate and individual students in order to be effective.

The concept of a multitiered framework of support is not new. For years, many school districts have provided training or support around positive discipline but with little evidence of improving the culture of punishment that pervades many New York City schools. I found that most educators were not directly trained in the strategies their schools were trying to implement.

For instance, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a tiered framework of positive behavior systems in a school. Success depends on having clear expectations that are taught, rehearsed, and reinforced consistently across settings. Teachers would often tell me "PBIS doesn't work"; however, in many cases, I would find that the school had a reward system that had no buy-in and no system for teaching the expected behaviors or analyzing the behavior data. I realized that relying on just one approach, or training only a few people in a school with little ongoing support and expecting sustainability, is a recipe for failure.

Designing a Sustainable Model

As interest in understanding student behavior and creating positive school climates continued to grow, Alvarez approached the New York City Department of Education's deputy chancellor,

This was the beginning of what would become the Positive Learning Collaborative (PLC), an initiative jointly run by the UFT and the New York City Department of Education to help educators create positive school environments. As director, I work with a staff of four experienced behavior specialists who understand the toll that poverty, trauma, and stress take on our students and staff. The PLC's holistic approach focuses on teaching reflective and restorative practices. To that end, we coach educators to be mindful of their own internal dialogue and to teach students coping skills to deal with feelings such as anger and frustration.

Changing a school's culture can't happen without having the school's leader on board, and so we require that principals and union chapter leaders attend our four-day Cornell TCIS training first, and then we plan for *all* school-based staff—including teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, and others—to attend over the course of a year. We provide ongoing workshops in restorative practices, social-emotional learning, and PBIS, among other programs based on the action plan developed in collaboration with school staff.

These individual action plans are geared toward each school's needs. Because we assess behavior and climate data often, we can help schools make adjustments accordingly. The PLC employs an in-depth, anonymous survey measuring major school climate indicators. We survey all school faculty every six months. My PLC

staff then shares the data with school faculty, who are an integral part of the action planning process. Moreover, school teams receive support in using data to develop periodic benchmarks of success.

To build capacity and sustainability in every school we work with, we help school-based leadership teams develop behavior intervention systems and implement restorative practices and PBIS.

Training, however, is just a foundation. Every school has a PLC behavior specialist who visits the school at least twice a month and supports administrators, teams, and individual educators. We aim to reduce time students spend out of the classroom due to discipline issues. We also aim to build community through the use of restorative practices (e.g., emotional literacy and restorative circles, places for students and adults to reflect and rebuild relationships) in classrooms devoted to helping students regain their composure after a disruption or outburst.

and optimize instructional time.

Paradoxically, it is precisely during the most difficult moments that we are most open to building stronger relationships. We can do some of this work as individuals in our everyday lives, but we can also have a great impact when an entire school staff engages in this effort together.

We encourage schools to establish a leadership team that tracks observable behaviors so educators can identify patterns and changes in order to prevent escalation and support students in need. The same data will also help a school see where the adults should make changes in the school environment. For example, if students are getting rowdy while waiting in a long line for lunch, it may make sense to change the intervals of when classes come into the cafeteria or how they line up for the food. Data can let us know where and when the incidents are most prevalent.

> **We encourage schools to establish a leadership team that tracks observable behaviors so educators can prevent escalation and support students in need.**

In only its third year of existence, the PLC has shown remarkable success. Though the PLC began with six elementary schools in the 2013–2014 school year, it started the 2015–2016 school year with 14 schools, including two K–12 schools and one K–8. Thus far, the PLC has trained approximately 1,000 school staff members in TCIS and conducted more than 300 school visits for consultations, professional development, and direct classroom supports.

In the first year, the six schools that began with the PLC in 2013 saw a 46 percent reduction in suspensions and a 40 percent reduction in total disciplinary incidents. In addition, educators in these schools report improvements in school culture in terms of attitudes about school discipline and improved relationships between teachers and students, between teachers and principals, and among staff members themselves. That's real progress.

Moments of Opportunity

Teaching always centers on relationships. Sometimes, the best thing to do is just let an incident go until you have more information or until you can gather yourself emotionally. We know many of our students are vulnerable and suffering.

We can start to view moments of crisis as moments of great opportunity to understand our emotional triggers and those of our students. Doing so will enable us to reduce power struggles

Let's return to Jeremy, who won't join the group after lunch: What should you do? If you have a relationship with Jeremy, you might walk over to him and ask, "Are you OK?" or "Will you walk over with me?" Or maybe it's as simple as walking up to him in the hallway on the way back from lunch and talking with him about his day. By doing this, you might find out that Jeremy is being teased by a classmate at lunch and is walking into the room feeling humiliated and alone. Or maybe something else is going on. You should try to find out, because understanding why this behavior is happening will guide your strategy for helping him.

For example, planned morning check-ins with students identified as experiencing family turmoil can make the difference between building positive relationships and the proverbial "putting out fires" throughout the day. In the PLC, we coach educators to try their best to determine the feelings and needs of each student. They can't do that if they don't have relationships with students first or the flexibility to employ differentiated ways of responding.

Ultimately, our goal with any school is not just to eliminate suspensions or violent incidents, but rather to create supportive and positive relationships that enable educators to teach and students to learn.   □

Learning to Switch Gears

In New Haven, a Restorative Approach to School Discipline
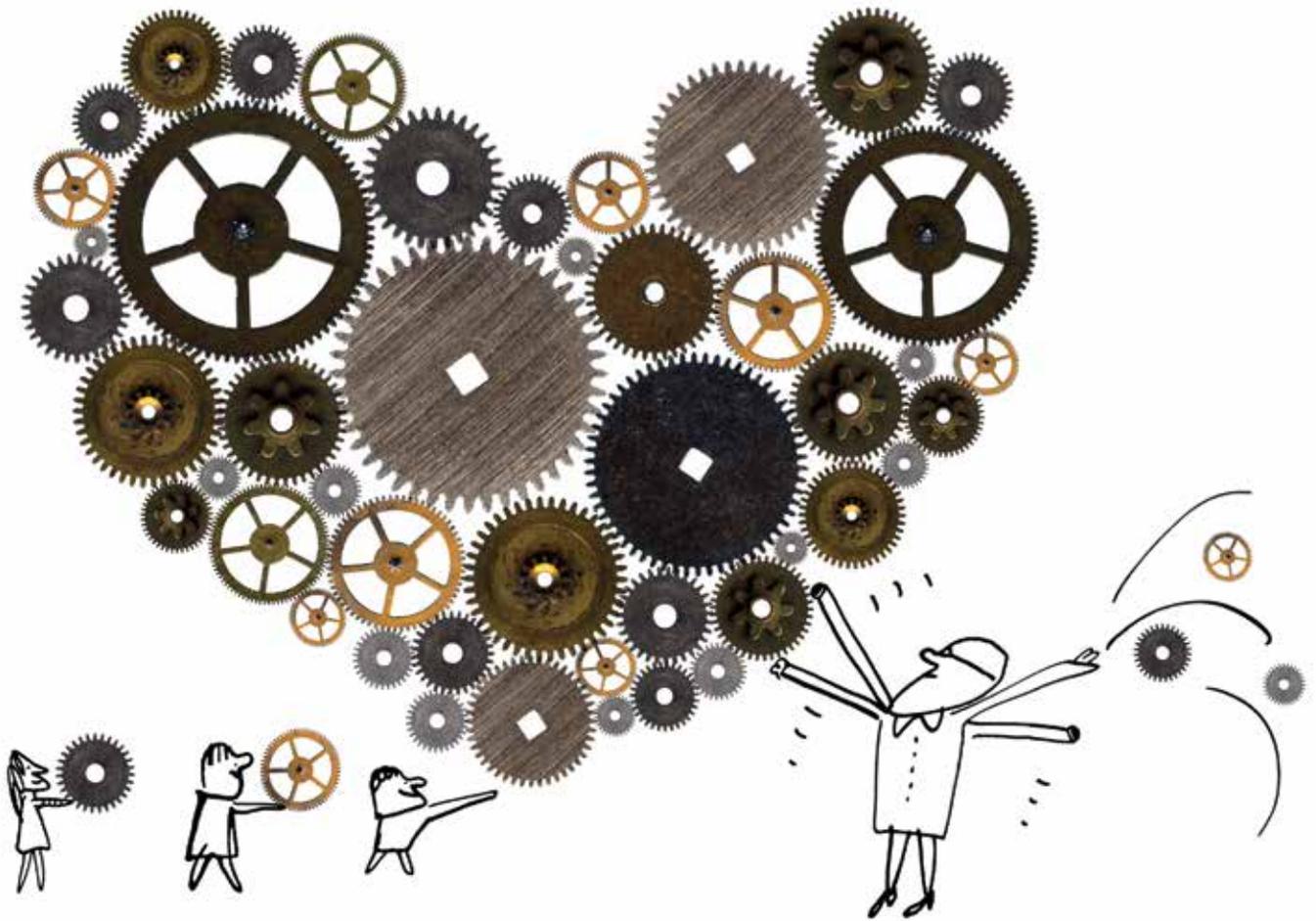
By Jennifer Dubin

Just a couple of weeks into this school year, an eighth-grader new to Brennan-Rogers School of Communications and Media was trying to fit in. To impress a group of boys who had known each other for many years and whom he wanted to befriend, the student tried to win them over with humor. In math class, he drew a sexually explicit picture of himself and their teacher, then passed it to them. The image garnered a couple of laughs but also a rebuke from one offended student who threw the drawing back at him.

Hearing the commotion, the teacher walked over and picked up the picture. She was horrified but held onto it and resumed teaching; she did not ask anyone to leave class. After the bell rang, she pulled aside the boy who had drawn the picture to tell him she was hurt and to send him to the principal's office.

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Gail DeBlasio, the principal of the preK–8 school in New Haven, Connecticut, asked the student to wait in her office while she called his mother and asked her to come to the school. When she arrived 10 minutes later, DeBlasio says, "I showed his mom what he had drawn. It did not go well." The student protested that it was only a joke, but his mother was furious. Since it was already late in the day, DeBlasio sent the student home. She told him to write a reflection about his action and to hand it to her when he returned to school the next day.

"Because he was a new student, he thought it was all done," DeBlasio says. He didn't know that his essay was just the beginning of how Brennan-Rogers helps students learn from what they did wrong. Upon the student's return to school, DeBlasio asked him to sit in a circle with his teacher and the other students he had shared the picture with. "They each had to talk about what harm was done by the note, but also what harm they did by laughing at what they saw," DeBlasio says. "And then the one child who threw the note back talked about how hurt he was and how embarrassed he was for his teacher."

The students who laughed took responsibility for their behavior. Then the student who drew the picture burst into tears. "He

never really considered how [his teacher] would feel," DeBlasio says. The conversation enabled him to empathize with her and to feel the remorse and guilt that would prompt him to learn from his mistake.

Had the student attended another public school, DeBlasio says he would almost certainly have received a suspension. In fact, this student had been expelled for behavior issues from his previous school in New Haven, operated by a high-profile charter school chain.

The student came to Brennan-Rogers at a serendipitous time. In recent years, administrators and teachers have shifted from traditional school punishments, such as suspension, to strategies that help students acquire the skills to engage in positive behaviors. To that end, educators in the building have embraced restorative practices, in which students participate in conversations with their teachers and peers to discuss problems at school and

at home. These conversations, also known as restorative circles, take place to prevent conflicts between students and to repair relationships after a student has harmed an individual and/or the school community.

Teachers at the school also rely on peer mediation, where students learn to help others resolve arguments. Nearly 25 students from grades 5 through 8 have volunteered to be trained as peer mediators this year. Since Brennan-Rogers' efforts around restorative practices are still so new, suspension rates at the school have not yet changed significantly. But DeBlasio hopes those rates will decrease this year, given the training in restorative practices that she and her staff have received.

The school's approach to discipline is not happening in isolation. A burgeoning effort is underway in the New Haven Public Schools to recognize the importance of social and emotional learning. In fact, research shows that suspensions do not help students understand and correct their behavior. (For more on how zero-tolerance policies do more harm than good, see the article on page 4.) Research also shows that social and emotional learning improves student behavior and reduces the use of suspensions, which keeps students in school and learning.

Last year, the New Haven Federation of Teachers (NHFT) received a two-year grant for $300,000 from the American Federation of Teachers Innovation Fund toward this school discipline endeavor. The grant money is used to train teachers in restorative

practices and to pay for a project director responsible for helping teachers apply these practices in their classrooms.

David Cicarella, the president of the NHFT, marvels that many of the questions related to student discipline remain the same. "It's been a little bit of a mission of mine, in a personal sense, because I was a classroom teacher," says Cicarella, who has worked in education for 36 years. One of those perennial questions is particularly complex and the focus of the AFT grant: What do we do about students, like the new eighth-grader at Brennan-Rogers, who constantly disrupt class?

A Citywide Effort

In 2009, at a time when the NHFT negotiated a groundbreaking contract that received tons of media coverage for its approach to teacher evaluation, the issue of school discipline weighed on Cicarella's mind. "It would come up in our executive board meetings," he says. Individual teachers would call him to say they faced incredible challenges because of a handful of disruptive students and that no effective supports were in place to help them teach or their students behave.

Cicarella continued to raise the issue with district officials, but it wasn't until a few years later that a citywide effort around school discipline started to take shape. In 2013, Garth Harries became superintendent of the New Haven Public Schools, and Toni Harp was elected the city's mayor. That year, "we had a number of homicides involving school-age kids," Harries recalls. The deaths shocked both him and Harp and prompted them, he says, "to run toward the problem in the context of engaging students in learning that would prevent the kinds of behaviors that were taking lives."

To prevent losing children to poverty and crime, the mayor created Youth Stat in the spring of 2014. The program connects officials from the school district and the juvenile justice department, among other agencies, so they can identify and help at-risk youth. Youth Stat consists of weekly to monthly meetings, depending on a student's grade level, where officials can share information about student attendance and truancy, student achievement, school transfers, and how many times students have made contact with the juvenile justice system. Both Harries and Cicarella have on occasion attended the meetings, which focus on connecting students and their families to appropriate social services and education supports.

Soon after the creation of Youth Stat, the union won the AFT Innovation Fund grant to help teachers implement restorative practices. Cicarella says that the mayor, who also sits on the school board and was elected its president, "was just ecstatic about it."

Cicarella then hired William Johnson, a former principal of an alternative school for disengaged youth in New Haven, as the grant's restorative justice project director. Johnson's focus on social-emotional learning at the school, as well as his later work as a consultant specializing in restorative practices, made him an ideal candidate for the job.

Johnson laid the groundwork for the grant's first year in 2014. He contracted with the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), an organization based in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, to train 37 New Haven teachers in the use of these practices. These teachers, many of whom volunteered to be trained or were asked to go through the training based on their strong rapport with students, would then return to their schools to train their

For more on the International Institute for Restorative Practices, visit www.iirp.edu.

colleagues. These teachers attended two days of training in May 2015, while the district provided substitutes for their classrooms. For their three-day training over the summer, they received a stipend of $28.69 per hour.

While the grant to the union covered the cost of this "train-the-trainer" model, the district paid for principals and assistant principals to attend the IIRP training as well. Their two-day training occurred in August, with more trainings planned for later this year.

Over the summer, when Johnson took a permanent position with the school district as director of instruction, Cicarella needed to find a new project director for the grant's second and final year. He hired Cameo Thorne, a former English teacher who in 2009 was named New Haven's Teacher of the Year. Thorne had spent 15 years at High School in the Community, a New Haven public school.

At High School in the Community, in addition to teaching,

Educators have embraced restorative practices, in which students participate in conversations with their teachers and peers to discuss problems at school and at home.

Thorne handled student discipline. "We had a developmental guidance approach," she says. It was "meant to help the students tie their choices to their results." When students did something wrong, she would tell them, "I'm really not interested in taking sides and shaming you. I'm interested in helping you make the choices that you want to make to support your long-term goals."

To that end, Thorne wants to help teachers learn how to ask neutral questions about misbehavior, an approach at the heart of restorative practices. For instance, asking "What happened?" instead of "Why did you do that horrible thing?" is far more effective, Thorne says, in getting students to share why they misbehaved instead of acting overly defensive.

Of course, not all classroom disruptions rise to the level where teachers need to use restorative practices. Say a student is using his cell phone in class. Thorne learned a long time ago not to look at the student; instead, she has found that looking over the heads of all the students in her class and announcing that now is the time to put all cell phones away actually works best.

When, as a less experienced teacher, Thorne did address the student directly, she found that often the student, embarrassed for having been singled out in front of his or her peers, would simply deny having used the cell phone. At some point, Thorne realized she was inadvertently inviting an argument with the student that detracted from instruction. "I don't want an argument," she says. "I've got to get through the educational piece."

Thorne now spends much of her time meeting with teachers and administrators to help them apply restorative practices and other classroom management strategies in their schools. She also meets with officials in the mayor's office who run the Youth Stat program, as well as members of the city's Board of Alders, who are interested in how they can support this work.

Thorne keeps in close contact with administrators in the superintendent's office who focus on the district's restorative practices effort. That effort is reflected in revisions currently being made to the district's code of conduct, which now states that "the New Haven Board of Education has adopted a Restorative Practices approach within New Haven schools to address conduct issues. Restorative practices will be applied within schools to address misconduct in most instances." The code goes on to state, however, that "repeated or severe misconduct may result in suspension, and/or expulsion, and/or referral to police and/or other appropriate agencies." In other words, for major offenses, stiffer penalties are still in place.

The code categorizes misconduct in four levels and outlines specific examples of offenses and their consequences. For instance, Level 1 is "minor misconduct," such as "making noise in class" and a "dress-code violation." These offenses warrant the use of restorative practices such as students sitting in circles to discuss behavior (often referred to as the circle process) and peer mediation.

Even for Level 4's "major offenses," such as assault/battery and bringing a weapon to school, which are crimes under state law, the use of restorative practices, along with harsher consequences, is mentioned: "Suspension from school or transportation services is required pending implementation of a restorative practices process or initiation of expulsion proceedings." The inclusion of restorative practices as an additional consequence for major offenses signals the district's confidence in them to help even the most challenging students learn from what they did wrong.

These changes to the code, which were made in September and were still in draft at press time (and will likely not take effect until spring 2016), come less than a year after New Haven was cited as one of many school districts across the country that suspended black and Latino students in 2011–2012 "at extraordinarily high rates." According to the "District Profiles" addendum to *Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap?*, a report published by the Center for Civil Rights Remedies, in that year "nearly 4 out of 10 Black female secondary students with disabilities (39%) were suspended, as were 35% of all secondary Latino males."

But the report also noted some positive findings, stating that the district had "made significant progress since 2009–10." At the secondary level, overall suspension rates decreased. "Roughly 690 students were suspended at least once in 2011–12, a rate of 10.9%. This is a decrease from 18.7% in 2009–10, a decline of nearly 8 percentage points." Also, during this time, suspension rates decreased significantly for black students, from 24.7 percent to 16.2 percent, and for Latino students, from 19.9 percent to 9.4 percent.

Harries says that so far this year, suspensions of all students are down compared with figures for last year. According to the district's data department, the number of students with disciplinary incidents (suspensions, expulsions, office referrals, and detentions) has decreased by nearly 26 percent, from 466 in 2014 to 347 in 2015. Harries attributes the drop to the district's overarching push to implement restorative practices systemically "so that this kind of practice isn't happening at the margins, but it's happening at the core of what we do."

Improving Communication Skills

Long before Youth Stat and the AFT Innovation Fund grant, educators at Brennan-Rogers were gradually making restorative practices part of their school's core mission. Several of them were hired in 2010 as part of the district's plan to improve the school, which was one of its lowest-performing. Standardized test scores have improved since then, recently climbing as high as the district's average.

As part of the turnaround effort, Brennan-Rogers became a magnet school for technology and communications. At first, the school focused more on acquiring iPads, interactive whiteboards, and other technology it lacked than it did on the communications piece. But the staff knew communication skills were also critical

> If educators try to teach content over disruptive behaviors that manifest themselves in negative ways, learning will not and cannot occur.

for their students. "We wanted to give our students the skills of being able to speak to one another about something they don't agree on without name calling and getting into fights," says DeBlasio, who was the school's magnet resource coach at the time.

At Brennan-Rogers, students had always started their day with a morning "crew" meeting. The name "crew" was chosen to reflect the idea that students must all work together (like the crew of a boat, not passengers) to build a positive school community. In the middle school grades, each crew consists of a group of 10 to 12 students that meets for 30 minutes with a single teacher to work on character development. For all other grades, crews consist of a full class, which can be up to 24 students. DeBlasio says that a few years ago, teachers began introducing deeper topics into crew meetings so that students could wrestle with moral and ethical dilemmas, discuss ways to regulate their emotions before the academic day, and resolve conflicts with one another.

Building on these changes to crew, DeBlasio sought out additional help in teaching students communication skills. In 2013, when she became principal, she turned to Joe Brummer, a consultant and trained mediator who specializes in nonviolent communication and restorative justice. Brummer conducted trainings for teachers on how to manage conflicts between students and classroom behavior. The next year, DeBlasio and her staff asked him to help start a peer mediation program for students in grades 5 through 8.

One morning in September, Brummer stands in front of peer mediators gathered in the school's library for their first day of training. The students, dressed in uniforms of blue polo shirts and khaki pants, are seated in a circle. With a marker in hand, Brummer asks them to define "respect" so he can write their answers on a large sheet of paper taped to a whiteboard. He tells the students the paper is their "respect agreement" between themselves and their teachers. Taking turns, students politely offer the following definitions: "Treat others the way you want to be treated." "Not talking back." "Listening to others."

A few minutes later, Brummer then explains the term "mediation." It's "where we bring one group or party of people into a process to help them share their own problems." In other words, he tells them, their job will be to help classmates "have a conversation they haven't been able to have."

At Brennan-Rogers, when students have disagreements with each other, they can request to meet with peer mediators to help them resolve conflicts. DeBlasio says the practice has helped de-escalate many situations at school. "We presume that people are able to resolve differences amicably, and that's a wrong presumption," she says. "Many times kids grow up in homes where they hear the yelling and the screaming." What they don't hear are the calm words needed to work things out.

Victoria is an eighth-grader who has volunteered to become a peer mediator. (To protect her privacy, I have changed her name.) Wearing a sweatshirt emblazoned with "LOVE" over her blue polo shirt, she pays close attention during the training. Later she tells me she signed up for the program because she wants to help other students. "In my school, there are kids who go through a lot at home."

Like Victoria, the majority of students at Brennan-Rogers come from low-income homes; nearly all qualify for free or reduced-price meals, and most are black or Latino. Many students live in public housing only a short drive from the school.

For the last two years, Victoria's mother has frequently been hospitalized for blood clots that she worries will eventually take her mother's life. This anxiety often prompted her to act out in school; fighting with peers and disrespecting her teachers were routine parts of her day. But as she began participating more in crew and confiding in teachers about her fears of losing her mother, her behavior slowly improved.

On particularly difficult days, "my teacher and my crew talk to me and tell me to calm down, everything's going to be fine," and that "relaxes me," Victoria says. DeBlasio explains that many students don't connect their anxieties with their disruptive behavior at school. But Victoria is "beginning to catch herself and understand that she's actually acting out not because she doesn't like her teacher or her classmates but because she's upset about what's going on at home."

A Different Response

While Brummer trains Victoria and her peers, the rest of Brennan-Rogers' students meet in their crews. Kelly Kochan, who teaches science to seventh- and eighth-graders, asks her students to take out their journals and write five words to describe themselves. She then asks them to share what they have written. One boy says "helpful" and "humble." One girl says "baby lover" because she loves babies. Another girl says "mean" but declines to elaborate.

Kochan then steers the conversation to the topic of peer pressure. "Is it hard to be who you are at school versus who you really are?" she asks. "Sometimes I think some of you act differently

because of your surroundings or because of what's going on. Why do we feel at school that we act differently?"

A boy says students may feel they need to be two different people "because they want to show off in front of their friends."

"Do you think it's more important to show off to your friends or stay true to yourself?" Kochan asks.

"It's more important to stay true to yourself," he says. "If you show off, you might get in trouble."

"Staying true to yourself," adds another boy. "If you do something bad as a child or teenager, it can really mess up your future."

For Kochan, crew enables her to really get to know a handful of students. It's also a way to start the day on a positive note, she says, "rather than coming in and just jumping straight into academics, where a lot of kids struggle, and so they act out because of that."

She acknowledges that because it's still early in the year,
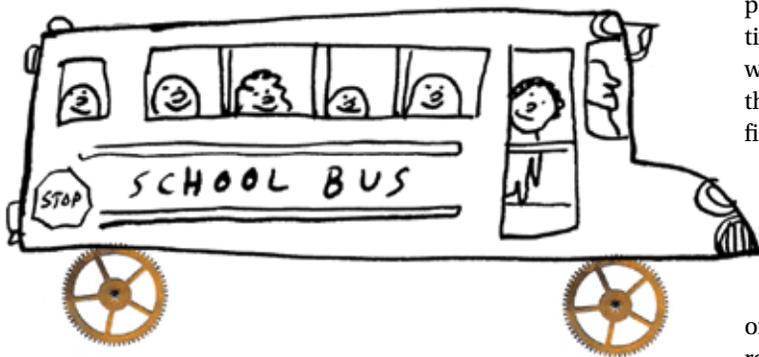
encouraging students to share is difficult. For instance, she'll have to continue to draw out the girl who described herself as mean.

Kochan has taught at Brennan-Rogers for three years. She spent her first year of teaching at another New Haven public school that did not incorporate restorative practices and did not help students learn from their mistakes. Instead, "it was, here's the consequence, and we're just going to hope that they didn't like the consequence enough" to stop misbehaving, she says.

Trying to understand why her students sometimes behave in negative ways and trying not to take that behavior personally can be challenging. "I have to fight the impulse to raise my voice real quickly if something's not going the way I want it to," she says. In her time at Brennan-Rogers, Kochan has learned that raised voices rarely lead to improved behavior.

At the same time, she will ask a student to leave class and go to the office if he or she is physically acting out. "If it looks like they are getting up in a student's face," or if she feels the safety of other students or her own safety is threatened, "that's when usually somebody is going out," Kochan says. She adds that the school's focus on positive discipline means that she dismisses students from class for such behavior only a couple of times each year.

In cases of physical violence, DeBlasio says the school still suspends students. But in the last couple of years, she and her staff have been requiring suspended students to engage in a restorative circle as part of their reentry into the school. The circle takes place in her office with the parents of the children who were harmed and the parents of the children who did the harm. Parents, too,

are affected by suspensions, DeBlasio says.

But circles aren't limited to her office. Often, the student who committed the offense will also participate in a circle as part of rejoining his or her classroom. "When there's a fight between two students, it doesn't just impact those two students," DeBlasio says. "It also impacts the other students around them." She adds that the focus is not on singling out the person who was suspended, but on welcoming him or her back to class.

At Brennan-Rogers, restorative circles also occur in the earlier grades, including kindergarten, although kindergartners are not suspended. "I call them fixing circles," says kindergarten teacher Daron Cyr. With such young students, Cyr works on the foundational part of restorative practices: helping students identify feelings and then sharing those feelings with students who may have pushed them or hurt them in some way, so that students who did harm learn to make things right.

While such practices take time, Cyr says they are a necessary part of instruction. If educators try to teach content over disruptive behaviors or emotions that manifest themselves in negative ways, learning will not and cannot occur. "The kids can't access the content without knowing that their emotional needs are met first," she says.

Not that calmly responding to disruptive behavior always comes naturally for educators. "It does take a conscious decision to respond differently," Cyr says. "Your knee-jerk response is not always to—in a calm, peaceful voice—ask what they're feeling." Engaging in restorative practices is ultimately a retraining of a teacher's response when something is frustrating in the classroom, she says.

While the AFT Innovation Fund grant ends this year, teachers and administrators in New Haven believe the district's positive approach to school discipline and its support of educators in this work will continue. "I see this deepening and extending," says Garth Harries, the superintendent.

Part of what Harries has valued most about the grant is the degree to which it is "solution-driven unionism," he says, quoting a phrase coined by AFT President Randi Weingarten. He lauds the grant for putting money, energy, and focus toward solving a complicated educational problem.

For now, DeBlasio and her staff will keep refining their approach to restorative practices. And they will work with Thorne, the grant's project director, to see where she can best support their efforts, which have been going on longer than most in the district.

As for the new eighth-grader who drew the inappropriate picture, DeBlasio says his behavior will not change overnight. Roughly a week and a half after that incident, his gym teacher sent him to the principal's office for using profanity in class.

"He sat across the table from me, and he was waiting for me to tell him that he was suspended," DeBlasio recalls. "I looked at him and said, 'I'm not going to suspend you for this.' Before he could say a word, he just started crying." Then he said, "I know what I did was wrong."

DeBlasio again called his mother. But this time, she told her there was no need to come in. "I just want you to know what happened," she said. Then, to his mother's great relief, DeBlasio added, "I'm not suspending him, because he's trying." □

It's been five years since American Educator *ran its first Professional Educator column. In that time, union leaders and classroom teachers have offered their perspectives on the meaningful work they do, the challenges they face, and the ways that policy and professional development can better support the profession.*

We try to feature one professional educator each quarter. This time we have two. The complex and sensitive nature of school discipline, its disparate impact on students of color, and the obvious need to support teachers with the tools and training to implement effective discipline strategies warrants hearing from two longtime educators on this issue.

The first article, by Lynne Anderson-Loy, gets to the heart of why teaching is not an exact science. A middle school science teacher in Peoria, Illinois, Anderson-Loy explains how she's come to understand the importance of building relationships with students and how there's no exact formula for doing so. She highlights the role that supportive administrators and colleagues have played in her own career, and she proudly recounts how her local union has worked with the school district to provide teachers with the professional development they need to implement effective approaches to classroom management and positive behavior supports.

The second article, by Kimberly Colbert, examines the intersection of discipline and racial equity. A high school English teacher in Saint Paul, Minnesota, Colbert shares her story of a student who swore at her in the hall. She tells of the anger and hurt she experienced as well as what she learned from the encounter. While she acknowledges the importance of educators not taking negative student behavior personally, she also admits how difficult it is to do so. And she sees the local union as one possible avenue for resources and support. Both articles reflect these educators' sincere efforts to ensure all students—not just the ones in their classrooms—have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and grow.

–EDITORS

Why Teaching Is Not an Exact Science

By Lynne Anderson-Loy

In 2002, the principal who offered me my first teaching position told me she did so because I was "older." I took that as a compliment. I was proud that she recognized my ability to juggle single parenthood, a full-time job, and college. What I didn't know then was that, for her, "older" meant having the wisdom to manage a classroom of 28 fourth-graders in a high-poverty school where I was the only white person in my classroom.

I had just graduated from Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois, after a 30-year career as a certified dental assistant. I remember that when I thanked one of my undergraduate professors for his unwavering guidance, he gave me the following advice: "Remember, teaching is not an exact science."

As a science education major, the phrase struck me as odd. "Wait," I thought, after I left his office, "all my science classes have focused on the importance of examining evidence and being precise. Have I really been sent off to teach in a profession where I must accept unresolved outcomes?" I just wanted to teach students about the world around them in a fun and meaningful way. How hard could that be?

Over the next 13 years, at four different schools, I would learn that teaching is so much more challenging and rewarding than I had ever expected.

After my first year, I was still far from wise, and I felt the full significance of my professor's words. It quickly became apparent during that year that I was well prepared to organize a classroom, maintain a schedule, write and deliver lessons, and meet deadlines set by my administrators. But the life experiences that come with being "older," and that my principal was counting on, did not prepare me to manage student behavior. I struggled to keep my students—with all their various personalities—on a common path of learning, while teaching them to be respectful to me and others. I realized I needed help.

Like many new teachers, I asked my colleagues what they did. Not surprisingly, the number of practices to motivate and discipline students corresponded to the number of teachers; everyone did something different.

Searching for Support

Many approaches, such as sending students out of class, having them stand in a corner of the room, sending them to another teacher, or giving them candy when they did the right thing, seemed ineffective and born out of frustration. Taken together, they simply reflected a lack of support and training around discipline. Moreover, my university teacher preparation program, like many other such programs, did not prepare me to address the

Lynne Anderson-Loy teaches science to sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders in the Contemporary School and the Regional Safe School at Woodruff Career and Technical Center in the Peoria (Illinois) Public Schools District 150. Previously, she taught elementary school in the district for eight years.

social and emotional needs of students, the very needs that fuel so many behavioral problems.

I grew increasingly frustrated that I was not supported enough professionally to be able to support my students and began to look for another teaching position.

Fortunately, at my next school I had a much better experience.

Sometime during my first week, I realized that student discipline here was less of an issue. During one lesson, when I turned my back to my class of 24 first-graders so I could write on the board, the room fell silent. I kept writing and wondered, "Are they still in the room? Did they leave?" At this point in my career, I had never experienced turning my back to write on the board without needing to refocus the class. I finished writing and slowly turned around. Everyone was looking at me attentively, waiting. For a minute, I stood there dumbfounded.

Like my former school, this one was also in the inner city, but the students came from a mix of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.* We had parents who were young professionals and parents who lived in poverty. During my seven years there, I received the support I needed to improve my instruction and handle behavior problems when they did occur. My colleagues and I had a say in professional development, and we also received significant help from Bradley University's education students, who tutored our students. Conveniently, the university was right next door to our school.

All those supports proved crucial to the success of our students. One of my years there, the school was awarded National Blue Ribbon status from the U.S. Department of Education, and it consistently received recognition from the state for high achievement. Our principal continuously helped us reflect on and improve our instruction and understand data and the importance of building relationships. Discipline policies and practices that had been in place before I arrived emphasized ensuring an even and nurturing playing field. Parental involvement was also high.

But the main difference between my first-year teaching experience and my time at this school was the philosophy of the principal. She treated her teachers as professionals and made sure that we knew our opinions mattered. Were there students

who misbehaved? Of course, but teachers knew that the goal was to do their best to keep students in the classroom. De-escalating conflicts, redirecting students, and creating engaging lessons were all emphasized. For example, when students interrupted the lesson, I would direct them to a table in the back of the room and have them work on a different assignment. I made sure no student had idle time. A few minutes later, when the rest of the class was engaged in an assignment at their own desks, I would quietly talk to the student at the back of the room to find out what exactly was going on. My goal was always to build relationships with students and redirect them when necessary.

But if poor behavior significantly interrupted teaching and learning, there was support from the office. If necessary, the principal would remove the student from the classroom and contact the parent immediately. Rarely was the student sent home. Most often, after a brief time out of class, the student returned. Parents also knew that when the school called about a discipline issue, it needed to be handled at home as well.

I am painting a pretty perfect picture here, but no school is without challenges. Even at this school, teachers and administrators struggled with overly punitive consequences for behavior. For instance, when students made fun of others, left their seats during instruction, spoke disrespectfully to teachers, or stole items from their classmates, teachers sometimes unnecessarily raised their voices at students, assigned them to detention during lunch, or made them write sentences in their notebook promising not to engage in a particular behavior again—practices that were hardly ever effective.

But I was pleased that at least my colleagues and I were asking ourselves tough questions: "Is what the student did a big enough classroom distraction to acknowledge the behavior and stop teaching? Can I handle it myself? Do I need to call the parents? Do I need to send this student to the office?"

Discipline Based on a Desire to Understand

While it is frustrating to contain the energy of nearly 30 elementary school children in a single classroom, punitive approaches do not foster calm.

Some of my students had experienced violence, and I was starting to realize that their lack of self-control resulted from overwhelming frustration. With each passing year, my philosophy regarding classroom management, student discipline, and motivation became clearer to me. But my biggest personal growth in these areas occurred because I began teaching middle school.

I followed my elementary school's supportive principal to a school that the state deemed "failing" and that needed to be restructured, meaning all school personnel had to be interviewed and rehired by a completely new administration.

This school included grades 7 through 12, and my assignment was teaching science to seventh- and eighth-graders, which was quite an eye opener. Several students were already masters at disrupting the classroom. The middle school years can be hard for both students and teachers. I had never in my life witnessed a physical fight until I taught middle school.

My new school was in the heart of Peoria's South Side, known for its poverty and crime. Obtaining an education did not always top the students' lists of priorities; making it through the week safely and with enough food in their stomachs did.

It often seemed that many of my students did not focus enough on learning when they came to school. Instead, they seemed to concentrate more on socializing with friends, having some laughs, and seeing who could most disrupt class. Even with professional development focused on writing engaging lessons, collaboration with fellow teachers, peer mentoring, and the support of administrators, often the only recourse to disruptive behavior in the classroom was office referrals. These were written mostly for disrespect, foul language, class disruptions, and fighting. I could have written several referrals each class period if I had the time. Moving through my lessons was difficult, and I tried each day to hold my students' attention in new ways.

After two years, I transferred to another school to join a colleague who was moving from the classroom to administration. As colleagues, we were like-minded. A simple practice of hers helped me understand a way to reach students who disrupted class and also encourage them to respect themselves and others. My colleague would schedule a 15-minute conference after school with any student who disrupted the class and stopped teaching and learning. During this conference, she calmly reminded the student of his or her actions and asked what he or she needed to be more successful in the classroom. To me, the most important aspect of this interaction was that it gave the student an opportunity to be heard. Has this strategy been used in classrooms before? Yes, but it was a lost art that needed to return.

My new school was located in a building (the Woodruff Career and Technical Center) that housed three schools on one high school campus: a career and technical school, an Alternative School, and a Regional Safe School for expelled students.

The Alternative School provides smaller class sizes for students who have had attendance problems, have been retained and are now much older than their classmates, have children of their own, have had some behavior problems, or just do not fit in at their home school. The Safe School is for expelled students to keep up their studies during their expulsion. The Alternative School and the Safe School share staff, and I would be teaching science in both—to the most challenging students in the district.

Students in the Alternative School often have found their previous education boring and far from useful and, as a result, have a history of acting out in class. They are the students about whom some teachers in the past might have said, "If only he weren't here, my class would be great."

Many of these students know the system of school referrals and suspensions very well. They are familiar with the legal system, as some have been in juvenile detention. They have friends and family members who are, or have been, incarcerated. They have lost loved ones to violent deaths. And to avoid doing a task they don't understand for fear of looking stupid in front of their peers, they know how to push teachers' buttons to get sent out of class.

Meanwhile, students in the Safe School have been expelled for a designated time depending on their past misconduct in school. These students are generally academically high-performing. Their day is structured, and they are monitored at all times. Pressure from law enforcement and the district's rising school suspension rate precipitated both schools to open quickly in 2010 but without much direction.

> Some staff members still believe only punitive measures work. But students are more likely to flourish if we handle discipline in constructive ways.

An Opportunity to Improve

In the spring of 2013, the AFT's national office contacted my local union about a grant focused on tackling discipline issues. The funder, The Atlantic Philanthropies, was examining the effectiveness of zero-tolerance policies, and was looking for four schools throughout the nation to support innovative efforts around student behavior. (To read more about The Atlantic Philanthropies' work, see the article on page 34.) I could not believe it; this was the exact opportunity I was looking for.

A few weeks after submitting an application, our school won the grant. The AFT let us know that professional development ideas would come directly from teachers. Educators found it refreshing to have a say since professional development is usually designed from the top down.

Our administrators came on board immediately. Teachers in our building already had a memorandum of understanding with the school district's board of education that stipulates 30 hours of additional professional development with pay and a yearly stipend to attract well-qualified teachers given the challenges of teaching Alternative and Safe School students. But beyond that, no funds covered training educators to work with students suffer-

ing from poverty, trauma, and low motivation, even though the "regular" discipline system had not worked for these students and was, indeed, the very reason they were here now.

The principal of our building at the time had a counseling background. During his tenure, he emphasized the importance of building relationships with students and also reminded us teachers to take care of ourselves and acknowledge that we work in an atmosphere of secondhand trauma. His perspective shaped our first grant proposals, which sought professional development on effective classroom management and positive behavior programs, as well as programs that would help us understand the trauma our students were experiencing.

That spring, administrators and teachers attended a conference in Washington, D.C., organized by the Advancement Project, a national civil rights organization. There we heard for the first time about the "school-to-prison pipeline" and many educators' unintentional contribution to it. I realized that our district had such a pipeline and that we needed to start doing something about it.

A couple months later, when our principal became the superintendent of another school district, we were fortunate that his replacement was another well-respected principal in our district who continued the enthusiastic collaboration between teachers and administrators. He immediately saw the need to create a specific mission for the Alternative School, one that stated the importance of social supports, intentional instruction, and a healthy rapport between teachers and students. This new mission ultimately prompted us to rename it the Contemporary School. That small adjustment reflected the changed attitudes of many staff and students alike. Often when students go to an "alternative school," they feel discarded by their "home" school. The new name was our way to make them feel special and foster pride in the school.

Throughout the first year of the three-year grant, we had a chance to more clearly understand our students' lives. We had professional development on secondhand trauma, and we also had a yearlong consultant who visited classrooms and suggested lessons that helped students see how education was relevant to improving their lives. In addition, we began a tradition of attending the community's annual Martin Luther King Jr. luncheon, which enabled students to interact with community members in a formal setting. Students took two field trips to Chicago (175 miles away) to explore the world beyond their neighborhoods. They visited the DuSable Museum of African American History and the Museum of Science and Industry. They also walked past President Obama's Chicago home, visited one of the city's many beaches, and ate in several restaurants. Such opportunities, while common for middle-class students, are rare for low-income students like mine.

During the grant's second year, two other consultants worked with teachers on helping students learn self-control and how to better retain subject-matter information. We also began implementing restorative justice practices to give our students a voice and help them strengthen their relationships with each other and with teachers (for more on these practices, see page 39).

In August 2014, training in restorative practices took place for the entire staff; a team of seven teachers was also more intensively trained. We developed a schedule in which every student in the Contemporary School and the Safe School participated in peace circles (a restorative practice) at least once a week. The circles focus on having students tell the truth and listen to others and are

facilitated by adults on the school's restorative justice team. We also kicked off the culture change in both schools with a special assembly that included showing a video of students and staff expressing their desire for peace.

Soon after this assembly, a tragic death made us realize we were taking the right approach. One of our seventh-graders in the Safe School was shot in the head as he walked to a friend's house after school. We were in shock.

We turned to restorative practices to give our students a voice so they could heal. They expressed themselves in weekly peace circles, and the conversations were honest. Students shared their fears of neighborhood violence and their hurt over losing friends and family. Just the opportunity to articulate these feelings and hear that their peers felt the same way was empowering.

Peace circles were so effective that administrators eventually suggested they be used when students returned from a suspension or to resolve conflicts among students or between students and teachers. Sure, we had students reluctant to participate, but most appreciated the opportunity and often asked us when the next circle would be held.

Moving forward, our schools will work on building greater consensus among the staff. Changing the culture and climate around student discipline has not come easily for all educators at our school, a fact that is not surprising given the issue's fraught nature. Some staff members still believe that despite being largely ineffective, only punitive measures work. But with time, I hope they see that students are more likely to flourish if we handle discipline in constructive ways. With more training, we will continue to refine our restorative practices and ultimately take our relationship building within our school to another level.

Now more than ever, I realize the truth of my professor's words: teaching is not an exact science. When he sent me out into the teaching world that day, he should have added that it doesn't have to be. That's because teaching is based on relationships, however imperfect (and unscientific) they may be. Those relationships make a tremendous difference, and as a teacher I have learned, and will continue to learn, how to build them. ☐

Where Discipline and Racial Equity Intersect

By Kimberly Colbert

It was the second hour of the school day. Students filled with early morning energy darted through the halls in the mass rush to class. Dylan stood in front of me, eyes cast down, with Mr. D., an administrative intern in a training program to be a principal, at his side. "Dylan wanted to come and apologize for his behavior," Mr. D. explained.

After a prior confrontation, I had enlisted Mr. D.'s help in finding Dylan. Though I was not one of his classroom teachers, I knew he was a ninth-grader with a reputation. They approached me in the hall as I made my way to a meeting with colleagues.

"I'm sorry for the other day," Dylan said, extending his hand. As I studied his face, he appeared to be a different child than he was during our recent encounter.

It is said that the opposite of love is not hate but indifference. Hate requires you to see another, whereas indifference renders the other nonexistent. I believe Dylan's attitude changed when he realized that he was not invisible. I had identified him, and I had asked Mr. D. to help Dylan process his conflict with me. This desire to be seen, to exist, is at the heart of restorative practices. We begin to act and live restoratively when we prove to our students that they are worth the effort to make negative situations right.

Five days earlier, Dylan had been one of several students congregating in the hall near the stairwell. The bell had rung, and I was making my way to my classroom. The teenage energy was palpable, as it always is between classes. There were clusters of animated conversations and varying levels of swagger and silliness on display. I said to no one in particular, "The bell has rung. Please go to class." Most of the students moved along without incident, including Chris and John, two amiable hall "regulars" at whom I shot a playful "you heard me" look.

I then turned to Dylan, who seemed glued to the wall. "Somebody better get this [expletive] teacher out of my face," he said, surveying the corridor and purposely not making eye contact. His words hit me hard. I looked directly at him and said calmly, "I said please." As he turned and moved down the hallway as slowly as humanly possible, he repeated what he had just said.

I don't consider myself unusual when it comes to behavioral expectations. At 55 years of age, I can tell you that teachers, whether longtime veterans like me or novices of any age, take great offense when students swear at them. I was raised in a bicultural family—my mother is Japanese American, my late

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father was African American—and my parents communicated clear, consistent, and strict standards about how one interacts with adults. Their different cultural contexts had taught them the same two things: First, that elders and authority figures are to be respected. Second, that racism forces us, as people of color, to prove our equal worth to white society through our "good" behavior—what author Michelle Alexander, in her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,* calls the "politics of respectability."

In that moment, Dylan's behavior had contradicted my learned set of values. His response pushed my buttons, and I was angry.

Where We Get Stuck

The 2014–2015 school year felt like the toughest, in terms of student discipline, my school, Central High School, had ever experienced. In the Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) district in Minnesota, as in many districts across the nation, discipline issues are synonymous with equity issues. We have the same racially predictable outcomes as other districts, with African American students (particularly African American males like Dylan) experiencing the highest rate of disciplinary actions. At Central, as in many SPPS schools, we continually grapple with what causes the discrepancy.

SPPS has sought to improve its approach to school discipline in a couple specific ways. About four years ago, the district hired Glenn Singleton's Pacific Educational Group to provide "Courageous Conversations" workshops to teachers charged with training colleagues in how to talk about racism with students and with each other and how to do something about it. Such professional development around equity issues often includes personal reflection and discussion with colleagues about the role of institutional racism in public education, in the hopes of changing the system.

In 2013, to bolster this work, the Saint Paul school board approved a racial equity policy, available at www.bit.ly/1VJON6a, which "acknowledges that complex societal and historical factors contribute to the inequity within our school district." It further states that "rather than perpetuating the resulting disparities, SPPS must address and overcome this inequity and institutional racism, providing all students with the support and opportunity to succeed."

At school board meetings, in the mainstream media, and on social media, this policy has become the topic of contentious discussion among educators, parents, and community members. Most agree that racial equity is imperative to have successful, vibrant public schools that effectively serve students. But a divide exists between those who view the policy and subsequent racial equity training as ineffective in resolving school discipline issues and those who believe that discipline disparities can be resolved only by acknowledging the intersectionality of racial equity and school discipline.

As an Afro-Asian teacher with 23 years of experience in education, I applaud the racial equity policy and support the training. I do not disagree, however, that over the last few years, our district has had some very serious challenges with successfully communicating and instituting a clear, consistent, and culturally relevant discipline policy. Thus, the intersection between student discipline and achieving racial equity is where we in SPPS—and, I would wager, in many other school districts as well—seem to get stuck.

Discipline issues are synonymous with equity issues, and their intersection is where we seem to get stuck.

Difficult Transitions

Teaching academic content while simultaneously ensuring that students possess the social and emotional skills needed to focus on learning and to engage with teachers and peers involves deeply personal interactions between educators and students. At Central, even with a supportive administration, the time and support that we and our students require to create these kinds of relationships are not there.

Many of our incoming ninth-graders hail from a middle school that was notorious for its discipline issues, chaotic environment, and history of challenged leadership. Parents, who had expressed repeated concerns about the behavior in that particular middle school, turned to my union, the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers (SPFT), after school district officials did not act. With the union's help, parents successfully advocated for more staff members skilled at engaging students and helping manage behavior.

Like many districts, ours has tended to underestimate the value of paraprofessionals, as evidenced by annual job cuts. These educators often develop meaningful relationships with students—relationships that large class sizes and heavy workloads sometimes prevent teachers from forming.

Unfortunately, Dylan and his classmates had already graduated from this middle school and did not benefit from the increase of adults in the building who would help build relationships. And so they experienced a difficult transition into high school.

Meanwhile, Central faced its own set of challenges. We had moved from a six- to seven-period day, which left us grossly

In addition to teaching subject matter, educators must navigate the complexities of human relationships.

understaffed. The result was much shorter class periods and more unstructured time. Also, the district's iPad initiative, which provided students iPads to use in class, put in play a whole new set of classroom management challenges. (Understandably, students became easily distracted by the technology.) To top it all off, the software used for our grading system experienced a major upgrade midyear, and it was the initial year of a new teacher evaluation system.

All these new efforts required separate trainings and were overwhelming. As a school with many programs, including AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), French immersion, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate Middle Years and Diploma programs, time seemed to move at warp speed. I was overwhelmed, and many of my colleagues (and even an administrator) shared that they felt the same way. It all made me feel ineffective and like I was not the teacher I wanted to be or that my students needed. I became so frustrated that at one point I told district administrators I was almost ready to leave the profession.

The climate continued to be challenging until the very end of the school year. Teachers in my English department collaborated on a plan to head off disruptive behavior by ensuring that the hallways remained clear after students changed classes. The plan would be positive: make Central the best it could be. Our encounters with students would be intentional and relational. My colleagues presented the plan at a staff meeting. Other departments agreed to participate.

Toward the last few weeks of school, other teachers engaged upperclassmen in discussions about school culture and what they wanted to see improve the following year. Our union was also involved in larger discussions around this issue. Contract language that SPFT had negotiated two years earlier resulted in training for School Climate Improvement Teams at each school. The teams consist of teachers and administrators and allow for parents and community members to join. Currently, my team is on the list to be trained.

In addition, to further disrupt racially predictable discipline trends, SPFT released a position paper this fall, available at www.spft.org/restorative-practices, which outlines the history of SPPS discipline practices and lists changes that need to happen to establish a restorative culture throughout the district. The local has also proposed some new contract language around instituting restorative practices districtwide, in advance of its upcoming contract negotiations.

On a personal level, I believe the challenge to treat all students equitably, particularly when it comes to discipline for nonviolent issues, is to refrain from making these behaviors about me. It is not easy, especially in the high-energy, high-stress environment of a school. I have often failed. And when I do, I have to remind myself that as the adult, I have the emotional and intellectual maturity to steer a nonviolent situation in a direction that is restorative rather than punitive. Students can't always make that happen. But to do this, I need support; educators need support. Unfortunately, we must often seek it out on our own. Becoming active in one's local union, taking a leadership role, and encouraging local leaders to organize around the issue of school discipline are all good places to start.

I would also recommend reading Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, which I mentioned earlier. It is factual and thoroughly unpacks the history of institutional racism. *Between the World and Me*, by Ta-Nehisi Coates, is also worth reading. This eloquently written narrative can help educators understand that institutional racism is real and can inform their efforts to disrupt it.

When I reflect on the day of Dylan's confrontation with me, I especially remember his face: his expression was hard, his eyes angry. On the day he apologized to me, however, I noticed that his jaw was relaxed, his eyes soft. He was having a good day, said Mr. D.

"Sometimes I get mad. And when I do, I get mad at everybody," Dylan explained.

In addition to teaching subject matter, educators must navigate the complexities of human relationships. My encounter with Dylan exemplified such complexity. His explanation took me straight to the place where discipline and racial equity intersect. And so I took a deep breath.

"It's all right to be angry," I said to Dylan. "We all get angry. The problem happens when we take our anger out on others." I asked Dylan how he thought one should react to people on difficult days, and I suggested that when he was feeling particularly frustrated, he could seek out the help and counsel of adults in the building, even me. To my delight, he told me he understood the importance of having someone to talk to on bad days and would try to do so. In the end, we shook hands. As we parted, I made a commitment to myself that I would show him that he's not invisible. From that day on, whenever I saw him, I would greet him by name and ask how he was doing. □

Understanding Implicit Bias

What Educators Should Know

By Cheryl Staats

As a profession, teaching is full of well-intentioned individuals deeply committed to seeing all children succeed. Touching innumerable lives in direct and indirect ways, educators uniquely recognize that our future rests on the shoulders of young people and that investing in their education, health, and overall well-being benefits society as a whole, both now and into the future.

This unwavering desire to ensure the best for children is precisely why educators should become aware of the concept of implicit bias: the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Operating outside of our conscious awareness, implicit biases are pervasive, and they can challenge even the most well-intentioned and egalitarian-minded individuals, resulting in actions and outcomes that do not necessarily align with explicit intentions.

Cheryl Staats is a senior researcher at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, housed at Ohio State University.

In this article, I seek to shed light on the dynamics of implicit bias with an eye toward educators. After introducing the concept and the science undergirding it, I focus on its implications for educators and suggest ways they can mitigate its effects.

The Unconscious Mind

Psychologists estimate that our brains are capable of processing approximately 11 million bits of information every second.[1] Given the tremendous amount of information that inundates this startlingly complex organ in any given moment, many researchers have sought to understand the nuances of our remarkable cognitive functioning. In his 2011 tome on cognition, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman articulates a widely accepted framework for understanding human cognitive functioning by delineating our mental processing into two parts: System 1 and System 2.[2]

System 1 handles cognition that occurs outside of conscious awareness. This system operates automatically and extremely fast. For example, let's say you stop your car at a red light. When the light turns green, you know to proceed through the intersection. Thanks to the speed and efficiency of System 1, experienced

drivers automatically understand that green means go, and so this mental association requires no conscious or effortful thought.

In contrast, System 2 is conscious processing. It's what we use for mental tasks that require concentration, such as completing a tax form. Rather than being automatic and fast, this undertaking requires effortful, deliberate concentration.

Together, these two systems help us make sense of the world. What is fascinating, though, is how much our cognition relies on System 1. Of the millions of possible pieces of information we can process each second, most neuroscientists agree that the vast majority of our cognitive processing occurs outside of our conscious awareness.[3] Besides its vastness, System 1 cognitive processing is also notable because it helps us understand that many

judges.[6] Indeed, educators are also susceptible to the influence of these unconscious biases.

Implicit Bias in Education

Research on implicit bias has identified several conditions in which individuals are most likely to rely on their unconscious System 1 associations. These include situations that involve ambiguous or incomplete information; the presence of time constraints; and circumstances in which our cognitive control may be compromised, such as through fatigue or having a lot on our minds.[7] Given that teachers encounter many, if not all, of these conditions through the course of a school day, it is unsurprising that implicit biases may be contributing to teachers' actions and decisions.

This unwavering desire to ensure the best for children is precisely why educators should become aware of the concept of implicit bias.
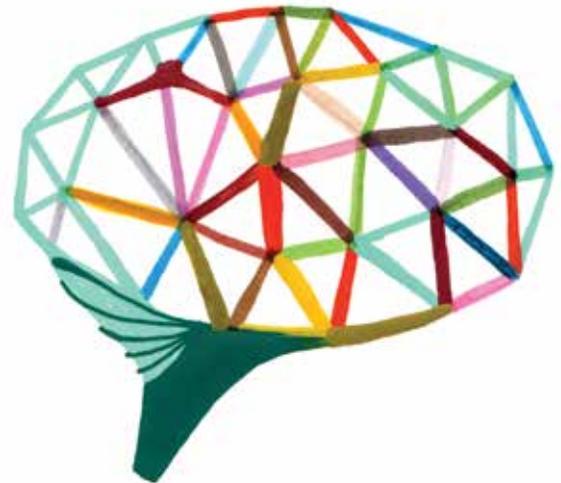
of the mental associations that affect how we perceive and act are operating implicitly (i.e., unconsciously). As such, System 1 is responsible for the associations known as implicit biases.

Because the implicit associations we hold arise outside of conscious awareness, implicit biases do not necessarily align with our explicit beliefs and stated intentions. This means that even individuals who profess egalitarian intentions and try to treat all individuals fairly can still unknowingly act in ways that reflect their implicit—rather than their explicit—biases. Thus, even well-intentioned individuals can act in ways that produce inequitable outcomes for different groups.

Moreover, because implicit biases are unconscious and involuntarily activated as part of System 1, we are not even aware that they exist, yet they can have a tremendous impact on decision making. A large body of social science evidence has shown that implicit biases can be activated by any number of various identities we perceive in others, such as race, ethnicity, gender, or age. Since these robust associations are a critical component of our System 1 processing, everyone has implicit biases, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or age. No one is immune. Consequently, the range of implicit bias implications for individuals in a wide range of professions—not just education—is vast. For example, researchers have documented implicit biases in healthcare professionals,[4] law enforcement officers,[5] and even individuals whose careers require avowed commitments to impartiality, such as

Let's consider a few examples in the context of school discipline.

First, classifying behavior as good or bad and then assigning a consequence is not a simple matter. All too often, behavior is in the eye of the beholder. Many of the infractions for which students are disciplined have a subjective component, meaning that the situation is a bit ambiguous. Thus, how an educator interprets a situation can affect whether the behavior merits discipline, and if so, to what extent.

Infractions such as "disruptive behavior," "disrespect," and "excessive noise," for example, are ambiguous and dependent on context, yet they are frequently provided as reasons for student discipline.[8] That is not to say that some form of discipline is unwarranted in these situations, or that all disciplinary circumstances are subjective, as certainly many have objective components. However, these subjective infractions constitute a very large portion of disciplinary incidents.

There are no standardized ways of assessing many infractions, such as disobedient or disruptive behavior, though schools do attempt to delineate some parameters through codes of conduct and by outlining associated consequences. Yet subjectivity can still come into play. Teachers' experiences and automatic unconscious associations can shape their interpretation of situations that merit discipline, and can even contribute to discipline disparities based on a student's race.

One study of discipline disparities[9] found that students of color were more likely to be sent to the office and face other disciplinary measures for offenses such as disrespect or excessive noise, which are subjective, while white students were more likely to be sent to the office for objective infractions, such as smoking or vandalism. (For more about discipline disparities, see the article on page 4.) Thus, in disciplinary situations that are a bit ambiguous (What qualifies as disrespect? How loud is too loud?), educators should be aware that their implicit associations may be contributing to their decisions without their conscious awareness or consent.

Second, implicit attitudes toward specific racial groups can unconsciously affect disciplinary decisions. For example, extensive research has documented pervasive implicit associations that link African Americans, particularly males, to stereotypes such as aggression, criminality, or danger, even when explicit beliefs contradict these views.[10]

In education, these implicit associations can taint perceptions of the discipline severity required to ensure that the misbehaving student understands what he or she did wrong. In short, these unconscious associations can mean the difference between one student receiving a warning for a confrontation and another student being sent to school security personnel. In the words of researcher Carla R. Monroe, "Many teachers may not explicitly connect their disciplinary reactions to negative perceptions of Black males, yet systematic trends in disproportionality suggest that teachers may be implicitly guided by stereotypical perceptions that African American boys require greater control than their peers and are unlikely to respond to nonpunitive measures."[11]

A recent study from Stanford University sheds further light on this dynamic by highlighting how racial disparities in discipline can occur even when black and white students behave similarly.[12] In the experiment, researchers showed a racially diverse group of female K–12 teachers the school records of a fictitious middle school student who had misbehaved twice; both infractions were minor and unrelated. Requesting that the teachers imagine working at this school, researchers asked a range of questions related to how teachers perceived and would respond to the student's infractions. While the student discipline scenarios were identical, researchers manipulated the fictitious student's name; some teachers reviewed the record of a student given a stereotypically black name (e.g., Deshawn or Darnell) while others reviewed the record of a student with a stereotypically white name (e.g., Jake or Greg).

Results indicated that from the first infraction to the second, teachers were more likely to escalate the disciplinary response to the second infraction when the student was perceived to be black as opposed to white. Moreover, a second part of the study, with a larger, more diverse sample that included both male and female teachers, found that infractions by a black student were more likely to be viewed as connected, meaning that the black student's misbehavior was seen as more indicative of a pattern, than when the same two infractions were committed by a white student.[13]

Another way in which implicit bias can operate in education is through confirmation bias: the unconscious tendency to seek information that confirms our preexisting beliefs, even when evidence exists to the contrary. The following example is from the context of employee performance evaluations, which explored this dynamic. Relevant parallels also exist for K–12 teachers evaluating their students' work.

A 2014 study explored how confirmation bias can unconsciously taint the evaluation of work that employees produce. Researchers created a fictitious legal memo that contained 22 different, deliberately planted errors. These errors included minor spelling and grammatical errors, as well as factual, analytical, and technical writing errors. The exact same memo was distributed to law firm partners under the guise of a "writing analysis study,"[14] and they were asked to edit and evaluate the memo.

Half of the memos listed the author as African American while the remaining portion listed the author as Caucasian. Findings

Many of the infractions for which students are disciplined have a subjective component.

indicated that memo evaluations hinged on the perceived race of the author. When the author was listed as African American, the evaluators found more of the embedded errors and rated the memo as lower quality than those who believed the author was Caucasian. Researchers concluded that these findings suggest unconscious confirmation bias; despite the intention to be unbiased, "we see more errors when we expect to see errors, and we see fewer errors when we do not expect to see errors."[15]

While this study focused on the evaluation of a legal memo, it is not a stretch of the imagination to consider the activation of this implicit dynamic in grading student essays or evaluating other forms of subjective student performance. Confirmation bias represents yet another way in which implicit biases can challenge the best of explicit intentions.

Finally, implicit biases can also shape teacher expectations of student achievement. For example, a 2010 study examined teachers' implicit and explicit ethnic biases, finding that their implicit—not explicit—biases were responsible for different expectations of achievement for students from different ethnic backgrounds.[16]

While these examples are a select few among many, together they provide a glimpse into how implicit biases can have detrimental effects for students, regardless of teachers' explicit goals. This raises the question: How can we better align our implicit biases with the explicit values we uphold?

Mitigating the Influence of Implicit Bias

Recognizing that implicit biases can yield inequitable outcomes even among well-intentioned individuals, a significant portion of implicit bias research has explored how individuals can change their implicit associations—in effect "reprogramming" their mental associations so that unconscious biases better align with explicit convictions. Thanks to the malleable nature of our brains, researchers have identified a few approaches that, often with time and repetition, can help inhibit preexisting implicit biases in favor of more egalitarian alternatives.

With implicit biases operating outside of our conscious awareness and inaccessible through introspection, at first glance it might seem difficult to identify any that we may hold. Fortunately, researchers have identified several approaches for assessing these unconscious associations, one of which is the Implicit Association

associations.[18] There are IATs that assess both attitudes (i.e., positive or negative emotions toward various groups) and stereotypes (i.e., how quickly someone can connect a group to relevant stereotypes about that group at an implicit level).

Educators can begin to address their implicit biases by taking the Implicit Association Test. Doing so will enable them to become consciously aware of some of the unconscious associations they may harbor. Research suggests that this conscious awareness of one's own implicit biases is a critical first step for counteracting their influence.[19] This awareness is especially crucial for educators to help ensure that their explicit intentions to help students learn and reach their full potential are not unintentionally thwarted by implicit biases.

By identifying any discrepancies that may exist between conscious ideals and automatic implicit associations, individuals can

> Educators can begin to address their implicit biases by taking the Implicit Association Test to become aware of unconscious associations they may harbor.

Test (IAT). Debuting in 1998, this free online test measures the relative strength of associations between pairs of concepts. Designed to tap into unconscious System 1 associations, the IAT is a response latency (i.e., reaction time) measure that assesses implicit associations through this key idea: when two concepts are highly associated, test takers will be faster at pairing those concepts (and make fewer mistakes doing so) than they will when two concepts are not as highly associated.*

To illustrate, consider this example. Most people find the task of pairing flower types (e.g., orchid, daffodil, tulip) with positive words (e.g., pleasure, happy, cheer) easier than they do pairing flower types with negative words (e.g., rotten, ugly, filth). Because flowers typically have a positive connotation, people can quickly link flowers to positive terms and make few mistakes in doing so. In contrast, words such as types of insects (e.g., ants, cockroaches, mosquitoes) are likely to be easier for most people to pair with those negative terms than with positive ones.[17]

While this example is admittedly simplistic, these ideas laid the foundation for versions of the IAT that assess more complex social issues, such as race, gender, age, and sexual orientation, among others. Millions of people have taken the IAT, and extensive research has largely upheld the IAT as a valid and reliable measure of implicit

take steps to bring those two into better alignment. One approach for changing implicit associations identified by researchers is intergroup contact: meaningfully engaging with individuals whose identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion) differ from your own. Certain conditions exist for optimal effects, such as equal status within the situation, a cooperative setting, and working toward common goals.[20] By getting to know people who differ from you on a real, personal level, you can begin to build new associations about the groups those individuals represent and break down existing implicit associations.[21]

Another approach that research has determined may help change implicit associations is exposure to counter-stereotypical exemplars: individuals who contradict widely held stereotypes. Some studies have shown that exposure to these exemplars may help individuals begin to automatically override their preexisting biases.[22] Examples of counter-stereotypical exemplars may include male nurses, female scientists, African American judges, and others who defy stereotypes.

This approach for challenging biases is valuable not just for educators but also for the students they teach, as some scholars suggest that photographs and décor that expose individuals to counter-stereotypical exemplars can activate new mental associations.[23] While implicit associations may not change immediately, using counter-stereotypical images for classroom posters and other visuals may serve this purpose.

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*Implicit Association Tests are publicly available through Project Implicit at http://implicit.harvard.edu.

Beyond changing cognitive associations, another strategy for mitigating implicit biases that relates directly to school discipline is data collection. Because implicit biases function outside of conscious awareness, identifying their influence can be challenging. Gathering meaningful data can bring to light trends and patterns in disparate treatment of individuals and throughout an institution that may otherwise go unnoticed.

In the context of school discipline, relevant data may include the student's grade, the perceived infraction, the time of day it occurred, the name(s) of referring staff, and other relevant details and objective information related to the resulting disciplinary consequence. Information like this can facilitate a large-scale review of discipline measures and patterns and whether any connections to implicit biases may emerge.[24] Moreover, tracking discipline data over time and keeping implicit bias in mind can

hold, we recognize that our life experiences may unconsciously shape our perceptions of others in ways that we may or may not consciously desire, and if the latter, we can take action to mitigate the influence of those associations.

In light of the compelling body of implicit bias scholarship, teachers, administrators, and even policymakers are increasingly considering the role of unconscious bias in disciplinary situations. For example, the federal school discipline guidance jointly released by the U.S. departments of Education and Justice in January 2014 not only mentions implicit bias as a factor that may affect the administration of school discipline, it also encourages school personnel to receive implicit bias training. (For more information on that guidance, see page 12.) Speaking not only to the importance of identifying implicit bias but also to mitigating its effects, the federal guidance asserts that this training can "enhance staff

In education, the real-life implications of implicit biases can create invisible barriers to opportunity and achievement for some students.

help create a school- or districtwide culture of accountability.

Finally, in the classroom, educators taking enough time to carefully process a situation before making a decision can minimize implicit bias. Doing so, of course, is easier said than done, given that educators are constantly pressed for time, face myriad challenges, and need crucial support from administrators to effectively manage student behavior.

As noted earlier, System 1 unconscious associations operate extremely quickly. As a result, in circumstances where individuals face time constraints or have a lot on their minds, their brains tend to rely on those fast and automatic implicit associations. Research suggests that reducing cognitive load and allowing more time to process information can lead to less biased decision making.[25] In terms of school discipline, this can mean allowing educators time to reflect on the disciplinary situation at hand rather than make a hasty decision.[26]

While implicit biases can affect any moment of decision making, these unconscious associations should not be regarded as character flaws or other indicators of whether someone is a "good person" or not. Having the ability to use our System 1 cognition to make effortless, lightning-fast associations, such as knowing that a green traffic light means go, is crucial to our cognition.

Rather, when we identify and reflect on the implicit biases we

awareness of their implicit or unconscious biases and the harms associated with using or failing to counter racial and ethnic stereotypes."[27] Of course, teachers who voluntarily choose to pursue this training and explore this issue on their own can also generate interest among their colleagues, leading to more conversations and awareness.

Accumulated research evidence indicates that implicit bias powerfully explains the persistence of many societal inequities, not just in education but also in other domains, such as criminal justice, healthcare, and employment.[28] While the notion of being biased is one that few individuals are eager to embrace, extensive social science and neuroscience research has connected individuals' System 1 unconscious associations to disparate outcomes, even among individuals who staunchly profess egalitarian intentions.

In education, the real-life implications of implicit biases can create invisible barriers to opportunity and achievement for some students—a stark contrast to the values and intentions of educators and administrators who dedicate their professional lives to their students' success. Thus, it is critical for educators to identify any discrepancies that may exist between their conscious ideals and unconscious associations so that they can mitigate the effects of those implicit biases, thereby improving student outcomes and allowing students to reach their full potential. □

(Endnotes on page 43)

A Powerful Partner

Philanthropy's Role in Promoting Positive Approaches to School Discipline

BY KAVITHA MEDIRATTA

L ast year, at the beginning of ninth grade, my son's friend Emmanuel was suspended from school for bringing a brick to class. Emmanuel had found the brick in the schoolyard, and with the satirical wit of a 14-year-old, named it "Softie" and placed it in a prominent position on his desk. Of course, bricks are not soft, and Emmanuel's display of irony got a laugh from his classmates as they settled into the lesson of the day. But a routine classroom visit by the school dean led to a trip to the principal's office, and thus began the trajectory to suspension when a warning would have sufficed.

The award-winning actress and playwright Anna Deavere Smith often poses the question: Whatever happened to mischief?* Indeed. Over the past 30 years, growing numbers of children and youth have been excluded from school for disciplinary reasons.

Today, nearly 3.5 million schoolchildren nationally are suspended from school every year. Put in perspective, 1 in 14 public school students is sent home for increasingly minor offenses, often without supervision at home or the supports necessary to reenter school successfully.

The widespread use of suspension and expulsion in schools reflects a national belief in "zero tolerance" to set a tone of academic focus and seriousness and to maintain order and safety. Yet the larger irony of Emmanuel's story is that this disciplinary approach undermines educational goals. The disrupted learning caused by suspensions does not improve student behavior or school climate. Instead, students like Emmanuel face substantially higher risk of alienation from school, failure to graduate, delinquency, and incarceration.[1] These risks are not only to those who are suspended. Zero-tolerance discipline in schools also is associated with higher levels of anxiety and disconnection among peers of suspended students.[2]

Even more alarming, this harsh disciplinary approach most often targets children of color, like Emmanuel, who is from Ecuador. National data indicate that, in 2012, 20 percent of black males

*For Anna Deavere Smith on discipline, see "A Conversation on Rethinking School Discipline," at www.youtube.com/watch?v=OW68f151E3A.

in the United States were suspended, more than three times the rate of their white counterparts; Native American and Latino students and black girls also were more likely than white students to receive harsher punishment for minor misbehavior.[3] Gay, lesbian, and gender-nonconforming adolescents also were disproportionately punished, often at three times the rate of their heterosexual, gender-conforming peers.[4]

A growing number of studies show that these disparities in discipline are not the result of worse behavior. Rather, as researcher Robert Balfanz observes, "Students from these subgroups are often disproportionately suspended for what are minor and non-violent offences, ones which do not require out-of-school suspensions by any state mandates but rather are applied in a discretionary manner by school or district administrators, meaning that alternatives to out-of-school suspension could be employed."[5]

I work at The Atlantic Philanthropies, an international foundation dedicated to advancing lasting change for those who are unfairly disadvantaged or vulnerable to life's circumstances. At the heart of our work is the belief that all people have the right to opportunity, equity, and dignity. The urgency of school disciplinary exclusion—and its racially biased undertones and high economic and social costs to society—led us to launch a $47 million initiative not just to change policy and practice but also to demonstrate that there is a better, more effective way to create safe, successful, and inclusive schools.[6] To that end, Atlantic, working alongside young people, parents, civil rights advocates, judges, educators, academics, and government leaders, helped to bring school discipline to the forefront of education policy and discussion in the United States. In this article, I trace the efforts of this growing movement, its impacts to date, and the lessons learned about philanthropy's role in education reform.

The Evolution of a Movement

The disproportionate use of suspensions for black children was first identified in a 1975 report by the Children's Defense Fund.[7] But it was not until the late 1990s that demands for reform began to build. High school students and parents of color began to document the increasing use of a get-tough approach to discipline in schools and coined the phrase "school-to-prison pipeline" to describe the cycle of harsh discipline and justice system involvement that they saw.[8] These activists were soon joined by a small group of academics and civil rights advocates, who produced and disseminated research on the racially discriminatory impact of zero-tolerance school disciplinary policies on children.[9]

Despite growing concern, school discipline remained under the national radar screen, subsumed by other reform efforts. Grassroots groups and civil rights organizations suffered from insufficient financial support, while the rates of out-of-school suspension—and their disparate impact on students of color—continued to grow.

In 2009, however, the topic of school discipline reform emerged as a funding opportunity when Atlantic's leaders sought to identify an issue on which the foundation could reasonably expect to make an impact. In December of that year, the director of Atlantic's Children and Youth program, Donna Lawrence, persuaded the foundation's leaders to prioritize an all-out effort to end the school-to-prison pipeline. A longtime children's advocate and poverty expert, Lawrence argued that overly punitive school discipline resulted in deep negative consequences not only for chil-

dren and youth of color, but also for whole communities facing generational cycles of poverty and incarceration. A concerted focus over a five-year period could, she believed, raise the visibility of the issue and build the infrastructure of a long-term effort to reverse these trends. Equally important, it could expose and challenge the damaging racialized narrative of youth criminality that lay at the heart of these inequities.

From the beginning, it was clear that, in a nation of 16,000 school districts, each with the authority to determine its own discipline code, no measure of philanthropic resources would be sufficient to reach each and every school district directly. Instead, we hoped to use our resources and influence to advance, connect, accelerate, and amplify the collective efforts of others.[10] Although no funder had previously taken on this issue at the scale Atlantic contemplated, investments by several had laid the groundwork

> Working alongside others, The Atlantic Philanthropies helped to bring school discipline to the forefront of education policy and discussion.

for a national effort. The Edward W. Hazen Foundation and the Schott Foundation for Public Education, for example, were supporting youth, parent, and community organizing groups working on this issue. And the Open Society Foundations and one of their field offices, the Open Society Institute-Baltimore, were supporting a few national groups in addition to an intensive effort in Baltimore. As a result, districts such as Baltimore, Denver, and Los Angeles were already demonstrating the positive impact of alternatives to zero-tolerance discipline on student achievement, dropout rates, and juvenile justice involvement. The central question was how to leverage these districts' successes to persuade others to move away from zero tolerance.

Much of the activism had focused on stimulating change from the bottom up—for instance, asserting pressure on local school boards and school system leaders to revise discipline codes and practices. All agreed, however, that federal action could dramatically accelerate reform by local districts. We hoped President Obama's administration and members of Congress could be persuaded to put a national spotlight on the issue and provide resources and accountability pressure for positive approaches to discipline in schools.

National advocacy coalitions had formed in the latter part of the 2000s, including the Dignity in Schools Campaign[†] and the

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[†]The Dignity in Schools Campaign is a national coalition of young people, parents, educators, grass-roots groups, and policy and legal advocacy groups dedicated to ending disciplinary practices that push students out of school and to supporting better alternatives.

Alliance for Educational Justice,* which gave parents, students, and civil rights activists new vehicles to connect and build more powerful campaigns for change.[11] Could we help advocates expand their reach to more places and players? How might top-down pressure on districts and states be built through federal action? What would it take to change public perceptions of the costs and benefits of zero-tolerance policies, making visible the little-known impacts on educational attainment and the underlying injustice for children of color? What could be done to help policymakers and educators become more knowledgeable about these issues and, perhaps, more receptive to the prospect of change? We explored these questions with advocates in the field; their answers shaped the four-part strategy that has guided our work these past five years.
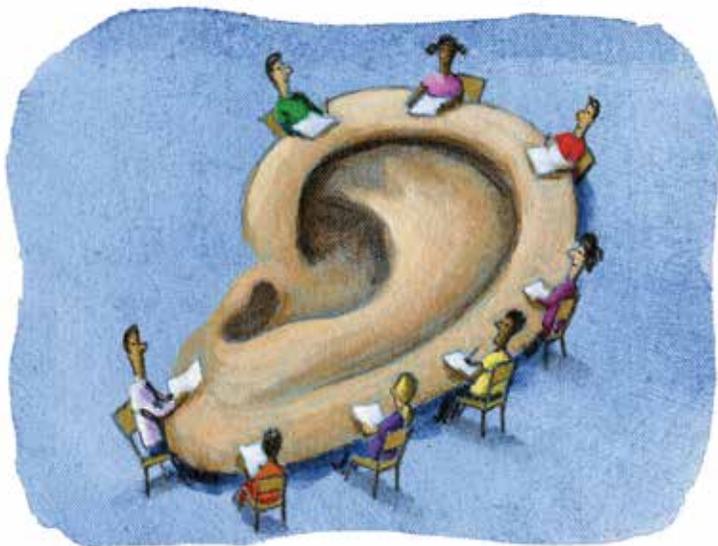
Strategy 1: Build public demand for local and state reform. Providing resources for grass-roots organizing by young people and parents was our first priority, given the crucial role these groups were playing not only in building awareness of the harms of zero-tolerance discipline but also in creating better educational environments for children's success. It was important also to elevate the voices and leadership of young people to contest assumptions about who they are and what they can do and deserve. We initially supported grass-roots organizing in 16 states and subsequently funded efforts in a total of 22 states.[12]

Enhancing advocacy by civil rights groups and public interest law firms also was a priority, as these organizations provide essential analyses of data and policy as well as draft regulations and legislation, and pursue litigation when necessary. This work was funded through a new initiative called the Legal Strategies Collaborative, a national network of advocates convened by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

Strategy 2: Strengthen federal mandates and incentives for reform. National organizations that received Atlantic funding, such as the Advancement Project, the Dignity in Schools Cam-

*The Alliance for Educational Justice is a national coalition of youth organizing groups that work with policymakers to ensure that public education systems prepare all students for college, meaningful employment, and full participation in democracy.

paign, and the Alliance for Educational Justice, anchored the federal-level work by training local advocates to become national spokespeople and bringing them to Washington, D.C., to educate federal lawmakers and urge them to act. These organizations collectively convened Atlantic's other grant recipients on a quarterly basis to learn about each other's work and to identify strategic opportunities for joint action. This work was complemented by groundbreaking analyses of discipline data by the Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the Civil Rights Project and the Council of State Governments Justice Center that demonstrated the extent to which disciplinary suspensions were occurring in schools and highlighted the extreme disparities in these actions, particularly for black boys and girls. Concurrently, behind the scenes, Atlantic and other funders worked to inform agency staffers about the issues and to build strategic connections with grantees.

> We hope that discipline won't be a punitive process but rather an opportunity to teach skills of self-regulation and awareness.

Strategy 3: Engage educators and judicial leaders in promoting positive discipline. Prominent national players, such as teachers' unions and professional associations, became key partners in building understanding and receptivity to reform. The American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, the American Association of School Administrators, and the National Association of State Boards of Education undertook crucial actions to inform and assist their constituents to develop positive, restorative alternatives to suspension.[13] For example, the AFT hosted a national summit on restorative practices in 2014 and, with the National Education Association, the Advancement Project, and the National Opportunity to Learn Campaign, produced a guide for educators. (For more on this guide, see page 39.) Judicial leaders, such as Chief Judge Judith Kaye, who served on New York state's high court for 25 years, organized a national symposium on the need to "keep kids in school and out of court." That effort gave rise to a project by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges to train judges to convene diverse stakeholders in their communities to review data and develop new protocols and supports to reduce suspensions, expulsions, and arrests in schools.

Strategy 4: Spread knowledge about school discipline reform and disparity reduction. Highlighting examples of effective alternatives to zero tolerance, filling gaps in data and research about causes and interventions to reduce disparities, and spreading this information to key audiences was crucial. The Discipline Disparities Research-to-Practice Collaborative, a group of 26 expert researchers, educators, and advocates convened by Russell J. Skiba at Indiana University, worked to identify and disseminate research on disparity reduction interventions, such as restorative practices

and other community-building techniques. (For more on discipline disparities, see the article by Skiba and Losen on page 4.) Comprehensive recommendations were developed by the Council of State Governments Justice Center to provide a road map for districts, law enforcement officials, and policymakers. The American Institutes for Research developed the web-based National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline to share information more widely. Other grants supported the development of a reporting beat on school discipline at *Education Week* and a new play on the school-to-prison pipeline by Anna Deavere Smith, as well as the expansion of media interest in school discipline reform and the creation of an education institute for journalists. These efforts helped to ensure a steady flow of coverage in the public eye.

Shifting Narratives, Policy, and Practice

In 2010, proponents of zero tolerance were framing it as a way to keep well-behaving children safe in school. The public, as did many educators, believed punitive school discipline was a necessary response to remove troublemakers from the classroom. Opponents of zero-tolerance discipline, meanwhile, positioned it as a racially biased, unjust practice that fed the school-to-prison pipeline.[14] Five years later, a debate that once focused on outrageous cases of individual punishment has shifted to a discussion of how suspensions are counterproductive—for individual students' long-term outcomes and for the nation's overall high school graduation rate. The discussion now is part of the mainstream, linked to concerns about school climate and educational effectiveness, as well as to overincarceration in the justice arena.[15]

From President Obama's emphasis on school discipline in the My Brother's Keeper initiative to the 60 urban school districts that pledged to reduce discipline disparities for young males of color as part of an initiative by the Council of the Great City Schools, awareness of the need for change is spreading throughout cities, states, and the federal government.[16] As part of a federal, joint-agency initiative on school discipline,[17] the U.S. Department of Education released civil rights guidance on school discipline in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice, warning school districts against overuse of suspension and expulsion as a disciplinary tool and providing guidance on alternative strategies. (To learn more about this guidance, see page 12.) Federal agencies have provided School Climate Transformation grants to more than 1,000 schools, are assisting judicial efforts by state and local courts to keep children in school, and are funding research on promising practices.

Over the past five years, 14 states have passed legislation to curtail the overuse of suspensions, expulsions, and other exclusionary discipline in schools. Of these, six—Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, and Maryland—require school discipline data to be analyzed and reported to state education departments and boards. At least three states have passed comprehensive reforms (California, Colorado, and Maryland), and the federal guidelines are expected to accelerate similar changes in several more states (Massachusetts, New York, Oregon, Texas, and Virginia).[18]

Scores of school districts—including the four largest in the nation: Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, and, most recently, New York City—have revised their discipline codes and are taking steps to discourage suspensions and help school administrators and staff use restorative practices and other positive strategies in schools.

(For more on the Positive Learning Collaborative, an Atlantic-funded effort underway in New York City, see the article on page 13.) As a result, the number of suspensions is dropping—in some cases by more than 53 percent.[19]

Philanthropy's Role in Public Education Reform

The role of philanthropy in education reform has been the subject of much debate, in part because of the outsized contributions of funders like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the increasing presence of newer, nontraditional hedge fund donors.[20] Both have operated with singular attention on achieving their goals, and Atlantic is no different. We also set a course for impact and proceeded with laser-like focus.

The principles guiding our actions may be helpful to others considering similar work. The first is the emphasis on collabora-

tion and partnership. A diverse group of people across multiple sectors built the foundation for change—developing new partnerships, creating examples of how schools could work differently, shaping new policy, and collaborating with schools to implement and sustain reform. Atlantic has sought to be a thought partner rather than a top-down funder, listening and learning from others, as codeveloper and persistent nudge, to help move these efforts forward, rather than assuming we know the answers and solutions to knotty questions and problems.

A second principle is the attention to roles, and to understanding our place in the larger movement for change. Like some other foundations, we have brought an activist agenda. But with that comes a deep appreciation of the primacy of our grant recipients' work in the field. Our role has been to activate Atlantic's convening power and access to high-level players to open the doors for our grantees and amplify their impact, rather than speaking in their stead.

A third guiding principle is the tactical approach of aligning strategy to goals, in this case by employing a multileveled strategy to create pressure and support for change. One way to think about levels is along a spectrum of activity, from changing a policy to implementing, monitoring, and enforcing it to make sure the changes translate into new practices. Another perspective is to view the strategy through the different lenses of local, state, and federal activity.[21] Aligning work at all of these levels can advance solutions

more quickly than a sequential focus on one level at a time. And the work of advocates to apply pressure on the system can be more effective when those on the inside of the system understand what the problems are and what alternatives exist to address them.

And finally, we're guided by a commitment to building the infrastructure to fight for and sustain reforms over the long term, not just on the discrete issue of school discipline but toward the larger goals of high-quality schools for all children and dismantling structural racism and inequality in all its forms. The improvements to policies, practices, and outcomes achieved by our grantees on school discipline are important in their own right. But they also are significant because aligning sectors and constituencies to address any one issue creates an infrastructure of relationships, roles, and processes that can be mobilized to address other issues.[22] Trust is a key building block to future joint action, and it

must develop in ways that are organic and authentic to those engaged in the movement, not on a funder's timeline or at a funder's discretion.

Looking forward, despite the tremendous progress to date, it would be a mistake to think the work is finished. The nation is only at the beginning stages of awareness and policy change, and shifting practice and culture in schools will take more time, resources, and commitment to achieve. And as the issue evolves from reforming school discipline to advocating for a healthy school climate for all students, those engaged in this work will have to make sure that the goal of confronting racial bias and disparities remains at the forefront.

A key step will be to better incorporate knowledge and training on school discipline into higher education programs for teachers and principals and to expand opportunities for in-service professional development. Two decades of high-stakes test-based accountability have reduced the time and supports for professional collaboration and relationship building between adults and students in schools and classrooms. Now, as interest grows in alternative approaches to school discipline, examples are needed of what it looks like to manage behavior differently and how educators can address implicit bias and foster candid classroom discussion about the impact of racism and other forms of prejudice. Tools like restorative practices and the work by the Center for Advanced Teaching and Learning at the University of Virginia

to develop discipline modules for its MyTeachingPartner program are examples of efforts to integrate school discipline and culturally inclusive pedagogy into the instructional core of schools, but much more needs to be done.

Last year, Emmanuel was suspended from school for behaving in ways that all adolescents do. This year, we hope that he and his peers will encounter a new approach to discipline in which curiosity, humor, and mistakes are met with patience and understanding. When students slip up, we hope that an adult will take the time to probe their reasons and to help them identify other, less disruptive ways of self-expression. Even for behavior that requires more serious intervention, we hope that discipline won't be a punitive process of sending a child out of school, but rather will be an opportunity to teach skills of self-regulation and awareness. In short, we hope that discipline in all schools will be viewed as it should be, as part of a journey of learning and reflection on the path to adulthood and maturity. ☐

Endnotes

1. Russell J. Skiba, Mariella I. Arredondo, and M. Karega Rausch, *New and Developing Research on Disparities in Discipline*, Discipline Disparities Briefing Paper Series (Bloomington, IN: Equity Project at Indiana University, 2014).

2. Brea L. Perry and Edward W. Morris, "Suspending Progress: Collateral Consequences of Exclusionary Punishment in Public Schools," *American Sociological Review* 79 (2014): 1067–1087.

3. U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, "Data Snapshot: School Discipline," Civil Rights Data Collection, issue brief no. 1 (Washington, DC: Department of Education, 2014).

4. Kathryn E. W. Himmelstein and Hannah Brückner, "Criminal-Justice and School Sanctions against Nonheterosexual Youth: A National Longitudinal Study," *Pediatrics* 127 (2011): 49–57.

5. Robert Balfanz, Vaughan Byrnes, and Joanna Fox, "Sent Home and Put Off-Track: The Antecedents, Disproportionalities, and Consequences of Being Suspended in the Ninth Grade" (paper, Closing the School Discipline Gap Conference, Washington, DC, January 2013).

6. For a cost estimate of the negative economic and social impacts of suspensions, see Miner P. Marchbanks III, Jamilia J. Blake, Eric A. Booth, et al., "The Economic Effects of Exclusionary Discipline on Grade Retention and High School Dropout" (paper, Closing the School Discipline Gap Conference, Washington, DC, January 2013); and Aaron Kupchik and Thomas J. Catlaw, "Discipline and Participation: The Long-Term Effects of Suspension and School Security on the Political and Civic Engagement of Youth" (paper, Closing the School Discipline Gap Conference, Washington, DC, January 2013).

7. Children's Defense Fund, *School Suspensions: Are They Helping Children?* (Washington, DC: Washington Research Project, 1975).

8. Kavitha Mediratta, "Grassroots Organizing and the School-to-Prison Pipeline: The Emerging National Movement to Roll Back Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies in the U.S. Public Schools," in *Disrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, ed. Sofía Bahena, North Cooc, Rachel Currie-Rubin, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review, 2012), 211–213.

9. Leading players included the Civil Rights Project, the Advancement Project, the American Civil Liberties Union, the NAACP's Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and the Southern Poverty Law Center, as well as prominent researchers such as Russell J. Skiba, Daniel J. Losen, Tia Elena Martinez, Anne Gregory, and Pedro Noguera.

10. For a longer discussion of The Atlantic Philanthropies' grantmaking strategy and its development, see Leila Fiester, *Tilling the Field: Lessons About Philanthropy's Role in School Discipline Reform* (New York: The Atlantic Philanthropies, 2015).

11. Mediratta, "Grassroots Organizing," 222.

12. Atlantic launched the Just and Fair Schools Fund at what was then known as Public Interest Projects to resource grass-roots organizing groups. In 2015, the fund moved to the New Venture Fund under a new name, the Communities for Just Schools Fund.

13. The American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, National Association of State Boards of Education, and University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research have all declared that suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests for minor infractions are undesirable and have urged their constituencies to work together to reform disciplinary policies and practices.

14. For a discussion of how zero-tolerance policies were perceived, see Mediratta, "Grassroots Organizing."

15. Fiester, *Tilling the Field*, 35.

16. Fiester, *Tilling the Field*, 35.

17. For a summary of the federal joint-agency Supportive School Discipline Initiative, see "Supportive School Discipline Initiative," U.S. Department of Education, accessed September 10, 2015, www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/appendix-3-overview.pdf.

18. Fiester, *Tilling the Field*, 37.

19. See, for example, Howard Blume, "Big Drop in Number of California Students Who Are Suspended or Expelled," *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 2015.

20. Joanne Barkan, "Got Dough? How Billionaires Rule Our Schools," *Dissent*, Winter 2011.

21. Fiester, *Tilling the Field*, 43.

22. Fiester, *Tilling the Field*, 46.

Resources on Positive School Discipline

From the AFT and Our Partners

The AFT has developed a number of resources to help educators implement positive discipline strategies (see the collection housed at **www.aft.org/discipline**), including:

- "Support Restorative Justice Programs in Schools That Receive Public Funds" is a resolution adopted at the 2014 AFT convention in support of personnel, training, and resources for implementing restorative justice programs.
- "Creating a Positive School Climate," "Books, Not Bars," and "Reclaiming the Promise of Racial Equity" are among the pamphlets and brochures that advocate union-driven solutions for positive student behavior and investments in schooling over juvenile detention centers.
- "Thrive: Student Health Matters" and "Helping Children Thrive" are among the booklets promoting strategies that support children's physical, mental, and social well-being.

Another powerful resource, "**Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships and Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools,**" was developed collaboratively by the AFT, the National Education Association, the Advancement Project, and the National Opportunity to Learn Campaign, with support from The Atlantic Philanthropies. This guide for educators explains what restorative practices are and how they can be integrated into the classroom, curriculum, and school culture to help build safe learning environments.

As shown in Figure 1, restorative practices are processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrongdoing. These practices focus on repairing harm, addressing community needs, and building and sustaining healthy relationships. Types of restorative practices addressed in this guide include restorative justice, community conferencing, community service, peer juries, circle processes, preventative and postconflict resolutions, peer mediations, and social-emotional learning. These practices are intended to comple-

ment a school's ongoing initiatives (e.g., Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, social and emotional learning programs) by offering alternatives to suspensions and expulsions and building a foundation for addressing issues quickly and thoughtfully.

This guide highlights some key cultural differences between schools that embrace restorative practices and those that employ zero-tolerance systems. Figure 2 illustrates how the two frameworks differ and the impact each has on staff and student interactions, facility design, and general responses to code of conduct infractions. The guide also discusses "spheres of influence" and provides a framework for activating these spheres around restorative practices in the classroom, school campus, and community. The guide can be downloaded for free at **www.bit.ly/1fKne1A**.

Figure 1. What Are Restorative Practices?

Build healthy relationships between educators and students

Address and discuss the needs of the school community

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Resolve conflict, hold individuals and groups accountable

Reduce, prevent, and improve harmful behavior

Repair harm and restore positive relationships

Figure 2. A Tale of Two Schools

Carlos had a heated argument with his parents before leaving for school, so he's running late. Let's see the difference that restorative policies and practices can make.

Zero-tolerance education system — **Restorative practices–based education system**

Carlos arrives at school.
- He is greeted by metal detectors and a police search.
- Teachers and administrators welcome him and his fellow students as they enter.

Carlos is late to first period class.
- His teacher scolds him in front of the class. Carlos talks back and is given a detention.
- His teacher waits until after class to speak with Carlos to learn more and sets up a meeting with his school counselor.

Carlos gets into a minor altercation in the cafeteria.
- A school police officer detains and arrests both students.
- Student peer mediators and support staff intervene, have the students sit down together, and de-escalate the situation.

Later that afternoon...
- Carlos is held in a juvenile detention facility all afternoon, missing school. He now has an arrest record and is facing suspension.
- Carlos and the other student agree to help clean the cafeteria during a free period. Carlos meets with his counselor and parents after school to help resolve the conflict at home.

Report on Racial Equity

In the fall of 2015, the AFT's Racial Equity Task Force published "**Reclaiming the Promise of Racial Equity in Education, Economics and Our Criminal Justice System**," a groundbreaking report that includes a discussion of overly punitive school discipline (see **http://go.aft.org/ RETF**). Resulting from blunt, uncomfortable, and courageous conversations about how to address the effects of racism and inequity in our nation—especially related to black males—the AFT became the first public sector union in modern history to issue a substantive, action-oriented report on achieving racial equity in America. It provides a framework for the development of policy in national and state legislation, at the school board level, and inside the AFT itself.

JAMES YANG

The report highlights a number of recommendations that the AFT hopes to implement in partnership with its state and local affiliates, including the need to:

- Fund programs that provide alternatives to out-of-school suspensions that offer meaning-ful educational opportunities for black male students.

- Ensure that all schools are safe and welcoming spaces for students and educators, which means replacing zero-tolerance policies with restorative justice practices and fairer enforcement.

- Develop and implement programs to intentionally help identify, recruit, support, and retain black male educators and staff.

- Provide professional development and cultural competency training that help teachers and other school staff understand their own personal biases.

- Create review processes in schools to ensure that black male students are treated fairly.

- Develop funding strategies, mentoring, and counseling to create greater opportunity for black males to attend college.

- Establish partnerships with trade unions to develop apprenticeship programs that provide job training and placement in trade careers that can open the door to economic opportunity and independence for black men.

- Continue and expand the AFT's work with the Conferences of Chief Justices to help establish engagement strategies to bridge the gap between minority and low-income communities and court leadership through collaborative efforts that will increase public trust and confidence in the states' courts.
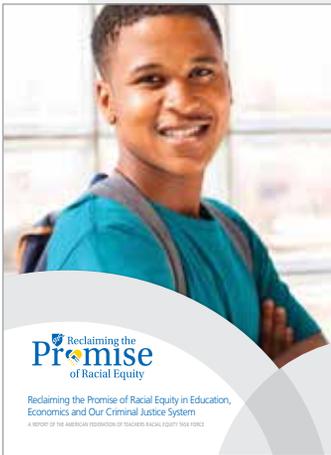
Resources for Understanding the Problem

In addition to resources from the AFT, our partners offer educators a number of excellent resources for engaging in this work:

**Discipline Disparities:
A Research-to-Practice Collaborative**
The Discipline Disparities Research-to-Practice Collaborative is a culmination of research on zero-tolerance policies and more effective approaches to school discipline. (**www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/ briefing-papers**)

Teaching Tolerance
A project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, Teaching Tolerance offers profes-sional development to help teachers ensure that schools are diverse, welcoming

communities. (**www.tolerance.org/ professional-development**)

**"Advancing School Discipline Reform"
(National Association of State Boards of Education report)**
American Institutes for Research analysts Greta Colombi and David Osher report the latest findings on punitive school discipline policies, the effect they have on students, and alternative methods of discipline. (**www.bit.ly/1P8Cnxs**)

**"The Hidden Cost of Suspension: How Can Kids Learn If They're Not in School?"
(National Center for Education Statistics data maps)**
These interactive data maps show the

percentage of students who have received one or more out-of-school suspensions by district, disability status, race, and gender, using data from the federal Office for Civil Rights. (**http://1.usa.gov/1I5aST3**)

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments
The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students, provides training and support to state administra-tors, school district administrators, institu-tions of higher education, teachers, school support staff, communities, families, and students to improve learning environments. (**http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov**)

Partners and Allies

Though far from an exhaustive list, the following organizations include some of the AFT's key allies in school discipline reform. For more than a decade, these groups have worked to highlight discipline disparities, and there have been positive changes in school discipline as a result of collaboration with them. In addition, The Atlantic Philanthropies, whose work in this area ends in 2016, has been instrumental in seeding change (see page 34 for more on that effort).

The **Advancement Project (www.advancementproject.org)** is a multiracial civil rights organization. Its "Ending the Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track" program has played a pivotal role in changing policies and practices across legal and education communities.

The **Alliance for Educational Justice (www.alliance4ed justice.org/about)** is a national collective of approximately 30 intergenerational and youth organizing groups that work with policymakers to prepare all students for college, meaningful employment, and full participation in democracy. The alliance organizes for public schools where all young people are treated with dignity and respect, and are free from harmful student discipline policies that fuel the criminalization and incarceration of youth of color.

The **Dignity in Schools Campaign (www.dignityinschools. org)** challenges the systemic problem of "push-outs" in our nation's schools and advocates for the human right of every child to a high-quality education. It unites parents, youth, educators, and advocates in a campaign to promote local and national alternatives to zero-tolerance policies, punitive punishments, and removal from school.

The **NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (www. naacpldf.org)** fights racial discrimination in public education, eliminates barriers to full political participation by all Americans in our nation's democratic processes, champions economic equality, and confronts persistent racial inequalities in the criminal justice system.

The **National Alliance of Black School Educators (www. nabse.org)**, a nonprofit organization comprised of more than 10,000 educators, administrators, and superintendents, is dedicated to improving the educational experiences and accomplishments of African American youth.

The **National Opportunity to Learn Campaign (www. otlcampaign.org)** unites a growing coalition of advocates and organizers from across the country working to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality public education.

In Baltimore, the **Open Society Institute (www.osf. to/1QBcjLL)** finds ways to keep children engaged and connected to school by supporting citywide reforms to lower suspension rates, increase attendance, and explore new programs for Baltimore's high schools. The institute also focuses on ensuring that treatment for drug addiction is accessible, and it works to reduce the number of youth involved in the criminal and juvenile justice systems.

The **Schott Foundation (www.schottfoundation.org)** advocates for fully resourced, high-quality public education for all children. It collaborates with grass-roots organizations and philanthropic partners committed to equity and justice for all children in the United States.

Resources for Moving Forward

Many terrific programs can be used to maintain order in the classroom while helping educators focus less on punishment and more on teaching students how to handle situations differently. In addition to the guide on restorative practices (see page 39), the following can help:

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
To learn more about PBIS and training opportunities, the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (**www.pbis.org**) and the Culturally Responsive Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports initiative (**www. crpbis.org**) are two good places to start.

Social and Emotional Learning
For more about social and emotional learning and how it relates to school discipline, the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (**www.bit.ly/1PDQMon**) features resources for educators and caregivers about enhancing social skills for young

children with challenging behavior. Also, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (**www.bit.ly/1n01JCn**), which operates in eight urban districts, including Chicago and Cleveland, offers resources about social and emotional learning, bullying prevention, and educator training. For early childhood educators, the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (**http:// csefel.vanderbilt.edu**) is another valuable resource.

Positive School Climates
The National School Climate Center (**www. schoolclimate.org**) offers a number of resources, including a list of specific dimensions that characterize a healthy school climate. (**www.bit.ly/1RqZ5S6***)*

School Safety
The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence provides assistance to groups committed to understanding and preventing violence; its Safe Communities Safe Schools Initiative (**www.bit.ly/1MGXmEF**)

offers research on school safety and prevention through publications, trainings, and technical assistance.

Mental Health
For supports to improve the lives of children and young adults with mental health challenges, the National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health (**http://gucchdtacenter.george town.edu**) provides trainings, webinars, and other resources.

Educational Equity
The Region IX Equity Assistance Center at WestEd (**www.bit.ly/1LDePRf**) provides professional development and technical assistance on civil rights and educational equity to schools and education agencies in Arizona, California, and Nevada.

TEACHER DIVERSITY

A crisis is brewing: the demographic gap between American students and their teachers is widening, particularly in urban school systems where the number of black teachers is shrinking, largely due to retention issues in high-poverty schools. That message comes through loud and clear in a new report from the Albert Shanker Institute, *The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education*, released at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., this fall. The report reviews national data and examines the trends in nine urban districts. In general, the teacher diversity picture is bleak, with only pockets of progress. The report, executive summary, and video of the press conference announcing the report's release are available at **http://go.aft.org/AE415news1**.

TESTING'S SEA CHANGE

In October, the Obama administration released a new Testing Action Plan, which acknowledges that the obsession with high-stakes testing has gone too far and admits administration policies have helped drive the problem. The plan includes a statement that no standardized test should ever be given solely for educator evaluation, as well as a commitment to working with states and districts to eliminate such tests. It was unveiled the same day the Council of the Great City Schools released a report showing that students face about 112 examinations throughout their preK–12 years, or approximately eight tests per year. Congress, through reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, will ultimately have the major federal say on testing in schools. In the meantime, however, a change in White House policies—from Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind waivers to impending teacher preparation policy—could play a significant role in reducing the testing fixation. The Testing Action Plan is available at **http://1.usa.gov/1LQHUWE**.

BEYOND COMPLIANCE

Teacher development and evaluation systems work well when they are co-designed by teachers, based on agreed-upon teaching standards, assessed in multiple ways, and supported with ongoing teacher and evaluator training. Those are some of the major findings in *Moving Beyond Compliance: Lessons Learned from Teacher Development and Evaluation*, which details a five-year effort by labor-management teams in 10 school districts, all located in New York state and Rhode Island. These teams, along with representatives from districts in other states and the U.S. Virgin Islands, gathered in September in Washington, D.C., for the release of the report and a conference to learn more about the 10 districts studied. With support from the AFT Innovation Fund, unions and district partners created transformational evaluation systems, and the report captures lessons learned in that effort, which was also supported by federal Investing in Innovation grants. The report is available at **http://go.aft.org/AE415news2**.

BUILDING BRIDGES

Education union leaders from the 10 U.S. and Mexico border states met in Houston in October for the "We Build Bridges, Not Walls" conference. It was the first in a series of bilateral conferences to devise ways to help children and their families on both sides of the border access educational opportunities. The conference follows the groundbreaking Declaration in Defense of Public Schools that the AFT and the Mexican teachers union Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación signed in May. The declaration forged a partnership to focus on the rights of children; robust multicultural curriculum; educator professional development; support for educators who cross the border daily to teach; and the need to provide parents and educators necessary information to ensure a high-quality public education for immigrant and deported children, undocumented students, and unaccompanied and refugee children. Read more about the event and listen to coverage at **www.bit.ly/1MNGxxB**.

HILLARY CLINTON DETAILS EDUCATION STAND

In November, Hillary Clinton met with AFT members in Nashua, New Hampshire, for a discussion that covered a range of topics related to education. Teachers, paraprofessionals, and higher education faculty participated in the conversation with Clinton—the AFT's endorsed candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination—which was moderated by AFT President Randi Weingarten. Participating union members came from eight states, and the event offered one of the biggest opportunities to date for a 2016 presidential candidate from either party to address in depth a full range of education issues. Among the topics covered were testing, the Common Core State Standards, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, special education, poverty, and equity. For coverage of the event, go to **www.wapo.st/1WWuRgY**.

AMICUS BRIEF FILED IN *FRIEDRICHS* CASE

The AFT, along with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), filed an amicus curiae brief on November 13 in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, a widely watched case currently before the U.S. Supreme Court. The case threatens to make it harder for working people to join together and collectively speak out, and the repercussions of a union-weakening high court decision would be felt broadly. "When educators come together in a union, they are able to advocate not just for better pay and benefits but for a higher-quality public education for their students," says AFT President Randi Weingarten, who cowrote the brief. Oral arguments in the case will be heard in early 2016, with a decision expected by spring or early summer. For a copy of the AFT-AAUP legal brief, go to **http://go.aft.org/AE415news3**.

Webinars on Supportive School Discipline

WHEN DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS ARISE, where can educators turn? The AFT's own Share My Lesson (**www.sharemylesson.com**). In addition to providing free lesson plans, classroom activities, and articles on current events, Share My Lesson offers free, on-demand webinars that educators can watch from the comfort of home. Many of these webinars focus on common issues related to school climate and classroom management, like the ones below.

Social-Emotional Learning and Positive Classroom Culture

Creating a positive classroom culture in elementary school can go a long way in preventing student discipline issues later. Many prekindergarten and kindergarten students have never been in a formal classroom setting, and it is important that they learn the value of kindness. In Creating a Kind Classroom Culture (**www.bit.ly/ 1QgUjIB**), an hourlong webinar created by the Share My Lesson team and the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation, teachers can learn how to foster acts of kindness among students. Other webinars to help cultivate a positive classroom culture include:

- Animated Characters Can Teach SEL Skills to Students Ages 4–8 (**www.bit.ly/ 1P65STQ**)
- A Tool to Model Appropriate Behavior for Back to School Readiness (**www.bit. ly/1P65XXx**)

Supporting Students' Positive Behaviors

Middle and high school students need positive reinforcements for behavior too. A great way educators can keep discipline problems at bay is by getting to know students. The webinar Connect with Your Students Right from the Start (**www.bit.ly/ 1WtOxmF**), by author Julia G. Thompson, helps educators make connections that encourage students to respect teachers and their peers. Other webinars that focus on supporting positive behavior include:

- PBIS in the Classroom: The Essentials to Support Responsible Student Behavior (**www.bit.ly/1Wru9YA**)
- Prevent Discipline Problems with a Positive Classroom Environment (**www. bit.ly/1iy67sj**)
- Supporting Youth-Adult Partnerships: Lessons in Encouraging Upstander Behavior (**www.bit.ly/1EAWXC9**)

Learning effective techniques to foster a positive school climate and a positive classroom culture can take time and effort. But Share My Lesson's webinars provide easy-to-follow tips and strategies for every educator. The best part? Educators receive one professional development credit for each webinar they complete.

–THE SHARE MY LESSON TEAM

Understanding Implicit Bias

(Continued from page 33)

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Hillary shares our values *on* education.

HILLARY'S PRIORITIES

- Work collaboratively with educators. *"It is just dead wrong to make teachers the scapegoats for all of society's problems. Where I come from, teachers are the solution. And I strongly believe that unions are part of the solution too."*

- End the fixation on high-stakes testing and oppose linking teacher evaluation to student test outcomes. *"I believe we need better, fewer, and fairer tests."*

- Address the impact of poverty on students. *"The federal government's job is to help deal with income inequity and its effects."*

- Hold charter schools accountable. *"Charters should be held to the same standards, and to the same level of accountability and transparency, to which traditional public schools are held."*

- Provide universal prekindergarten. *"Every child, regardless of parental income, deserves access to high-quality pre-K."*

- Increase college access and affordability. *"We cannot continue to increase tuition and cost on the backs of hard-working families and their kids."*

HILLARY'S RECORD

As a senator, Hillary:

- Opposed massive tax breaks for the wealthy and fought back against funding cuts in education, health, and job training. *(Dec. 21, 2005)*

- Successfully pushed for more resources for key education programs. *(March 14, 2008)*

- Took a stand for our neediest students, proposing $4 billion in special education funding, and $5 billion for Title I schools. *(Oct. 26, 2005)*

- Supported increased Pell Grant awards for middle- and low-income students. *(April 28, 2005; Oct. 3, 2007)*

- Voted in favor of the DREAM Act to provide more education opportunities to immigrant students. *(Oct. 24, 2007)*

- Backed legislation to authorize more spending on school repair and construction. *(May 16, 2001)*

- Opposed private school vouchers. *(June 11, 2001; Jan. 20, 2004)*

> "I walked away feeling confident that, in Hillary, we have a candidate who's willing to listen to classroom experts, not special interests. She understands the complexities of the issues facing students, parents, and teachers in education today."
>
> **—SARAH MARTIN**
> *Baltimore teacher and participant in AFT's education roundtable with Hillary Clinton on Nov. 9, 2015*

For more information on Hillary Clinton's priorities, go to **www.aft.org/election2016**. Sign up to join the Political Activist team and receive up-to-date election news. Text **VOTE** to **69238**.