



A Solution-Finding Report

Title: *Good Instruction and Decreased Suspensions and Expulsions*

Date: August 26, 2015

This Solution-Finding Report provides information, requested by the Michigan Department of Education Office of Education Improvement and Innovation, for any research “that demonstrates that good instruction (including relationships and high expectations) is a preventive measure or shows a correlation of a decrease in suspensions and expulsions.”

The following articles range from somewhat anecdotal (though with useful information) to those with more scientific rigor. Of special note are: Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007; Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011; Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Hinojosa, 2008; and REL Northwest, 2012.

Solution-finding Reports are intended to provide a quick response to the request for information; they are not intended to be a definitive literature survey or synthesis of the topic.

Advocates for Children and Youth. (2013). *Effective School Discipline for Maryland: A Shared Approach to Keep Children in School and Learning*. Baltimore, MD: Author.

<https://acy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/EffectiveSchoolDisciplineinMarylandBriefFinal.pdf>

According to this article, “Based on recent activities and the current climate supporting disciplinary reform, Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) has developed a public information campaign, *Effective School Discipline for Maryland*. The campaign is to create awareness about creating a positive learning environment while holding students accountable for their actions. This information to help schools and districts develop fair and effective discipline policies and practices. The campaign includes an online tool called the *Effective School Discipline Guide* which provides the steps necessary to create positive school climates with high expectations for academic achievement and student behavior.”

Crosnoe, R., Johnson, M. K., & Elder, G. H. (2004). Intergenerational Bonding in School: The Behavioral and Contextual Correlates of Student–Teacher Relationships. *Sociology of Education*, 77(1), 60–81.

<http://www.pearweb.org/conferences/sixth/pdfs/School%20Bonding-Crosnow,%20Johnson,%20Elder-2004.pdf>

The article begins, “To explore the significance of social integration in the educational system, this study examined whether student-teacher relationships predicted two important student behavior outcomes (academic achievement and disciplinary problems); whether these within-school intragenerational relationships were predicted by the structural, compositional, and climate-related characteristics of schools; and how the behavioral and contextual correlates of student–teacher relationships varied by race-ethnicity. Our findings, based on nationally representative panel data, indicated that stronger intergenerational bonding in school was associated with higher academic achievement, especially for Hispanic American girls, and with a lower likelihood of disciplinary problems, especially for white girls.”

Decker, D. M., Dona, D. P., & Christenson, S. L. (2007). Behaviorally at-risk African American students: The importance of student–teacher relationships for student outcomes. *Journal of School Psychology*, 45(1), 83–109.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022440506000872>

According to this scientific study, “After controlling for gender and grade level, the teacher's perspective of the student–teacher relationship uniquely accounted for explained variance in behavioral referrals and suspensions (11% and 23% of the variance, respectively)....As teacher-reports of positive student–teacher relationships increased, the number of suspensions students received decreased....This study suggests that the quality of the student–teacher relationship can either support or deter resiliency for at-risk students. Clearly, the next step is considering how positive student–teacher relationships can be promoted in the schools.”

Frey, S. (2014). *New Federal Guidelines Support Alternatives to Suspensions*. Oakland, CA: EdSource.

<http://edsources.org/2014/new-federal-guidelines-support-alternatives-to-suspensions/55852>

On January 8, 2014, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced new federal guidelines for school discipline that emphasized alternatives to suspension and expulsion. According to an EdSource article on the announcement, “Along with the guidelines, the department included resources for districts and schools on alternatives to suspensions and expulsions, such as setting high expectations for behavior, involving parents, and promoting social and emotional learning strategies.”

Gregory, A., Allen, J. P., Mikami, A. Y., Hafen, C. A., & Pianta, R. (2014). Eliminating the Racial Disparity in Classroom Exclusionary Discipline. *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*, 5(2), 1–22.

<http://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1212&context=childrenatrisk>

According to this article’s abstract, “Advocates call for schools with high suspension rates to receive technical assistance in adopting ‘proven-effective’ systematic supports. Such supports include teacher professional development. This call is justified given evidence that good teaching matters. But what types of professional development should be funded? Increasingly, research points to the promise of programs that are sustained, rigorous, and focused on teachers’ interactions with students. The current study tests whether a professional development program with these three characteristics helped change teachers’ use of exclusionary discipline practices—especially with their African American students.” The program in question is entitled the My Teaching Partner-Secondary (MTP-S) professional development program. The article states, “Rigorous experimental studies show MTP-S produces positive changes in teacher behavior and student performance. School districts throughout the nation have begun implementing the program. As of yet, however, no studies have examined whether MTP-S relates to teachers’ disciplinary practice, specifically their use of exclusionary discipline. MTP-S targets the quality of interactions in the classroom—a promising target to alter teachers’ utilization of exclusionary discipline....The current study contributes to the growing, yet still sparse published results of trials that focus on intensive coaching of middle and high school teachers. The MTP-S program uses a sustained, focused, and rigorous approach to open up the ‘black box’ of the classroom and systematically reflect upon and strengthen how teachers interact with their students in terms of their provision of emotional, organizational, and instructional supports. The current research showed that MTP-S intervention teachers tended to use less exclusionary discipline with their students compared to teachers not in the program.”

Gregory, A., Cornell, D., & Fan, X. (2011). The Relationship of School Structure and Support to Suspension Rates for Black and White High School Students. *American Education Research Journal*, XX(X), 1–31.

<http://www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Gregory-et-al.-The-Relationship-of-School-Structure-and-Support-to-Suspension-Rates.pdf>

The authors state, “An authoritative school climate should be characterized by high expectations for student performance accompanied by a respectful and encouraging attitude. We hypothesized that students would be most responsive to academic and behavioral demands made in the context of a supportive atmosphere, and as a result would be less likely to receive suspensions from school.” In the Discussion section, the authors find, “Study findings support the characterization of high school climate in terms of our model of authoritative structure and support. There were consistent relationships between schoolwide suspension rates and one measure of structure, based on the degree to which students perceive their teachers as having high academic press/expectations, and the measure of supportiveness, as reflected in student perceptions of teachers as caring and respectful.”

Gregory, A., & Ripski, M. B. (2008). Adolescent Trust in Teachers: Implications for Behavior in the High School Classroom. *School Psychology Review*, 37(3), 337–353.

http://www.researchgate.net/publication/228621819_Adolescent_trust_in_teachers_Implications_for_behavior_in_the_high_school_classroom

According to this article, suspended students are more likely to have low achievement, be retained, receive future suspensions, and experience dissatisfaction and alienation, and are at risk for such long-term negative outcomes as dropping out of school, becoming involved in the juvenile justice system, and later being incarcerated. “Given these negative consequences of school suspension, it is important to identify teacher approaches that are linked with students’ cooperative behavior....Results showed that the association between teachers’ relational approach to discipline and low student defiance was mediated by students’ perceptions of teacher trustworthiness. In other words, teachers who reported that they used a relational approach were more likely to have students who exhibited lower defiant behavior than those teachers who did not report using such an approach. This significant association between a relational approach and low defiant behavior was explained by student trust in teacher authority. The results are particularly striking, as they were found with a group of suspended students and were replicated when using both student and teacher reports of defiant behavior. In addition, the study found that students saw themselves as cooperative — engaged with the course material and activities — in classes with teachers who focused on building relationships to reduce discipline problems. Again, the link between the discipline approach and student-reported cooperation with the classroom tasks was mediated through their trust in the teacher authority. Although causation is impossible to claim given the correlational nature of the data, these findings suggest that students may be sensing their teachers’ relational approach and experiencing their use of authority as trustworthy and legitimate, which may be linked to their receptiveness to teacher rules and requests.”

Gregory, A., Skiba, R. J., & Noguera, P. A. (2010). The Achievement Gap and the Discipline Gap: Two Sides of the Same Coin? *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 59–68.

<http://www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Gregory-et-al.-The-Achievement-Gap-and-the-Discipline-Gap-Two-Sides-of-the-Same-Coin.pdf>

In this article, the authors write, “Freiberg and Lapointe (2006) reviewed 40 school-based programs targeting the reduction of behavior problems in schools. Of those, 29 were implemented with Black, Latino, urban, and low-income students and offered some evidence for their success in increasing student problem solving and/or reducing difficulties in classroom management for participants as a whole. Freiberg and Lapointe identified commonalities among those effective programs. The programs move beyond discipline, emphasizing student learning and self-regulation, not simply procedures for addressing rule infractions. They encourage “school connectedness” and “caring and trusting relationships” between teachers and students. Overall, the programs try to increase students’ positive experience of schooling and to move away from a reliance on punitive reactions to misbehavior. The programmatic commonalities described by Freiberg and Lapointe (2006) offer a promising direction for lowering the oversanctioning of Black, Latino, and American Indian students.”

Gregory, A., & Weinstein, R. S. (2008). The Discipline Gap and African Americans: Defiance or Cooperation in the High School Classroom. *Journal of School Psychology*, 46(4), 455–475.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022440507000829>

This article states, “Ethnographic researchers have found that teachers who communicate both warmth and demandingness are exemplary instructors of African American children (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Called “warm demanders” (Vasquez, 1988) and “compassionate disciplinarians” (Irvine, 2002), these teachers demand the best, exercise their authority, and show deep caring. Thus, they may not fall prey to behavioral stereotypes of students of color as aggressive or defiant. Whether this authoritative teaching style is optimal in earning African American high schoolers’ trust and cooperation has yet to be tested. Moreover, past research on teacher qualities related to warmth and demandingness have not tested their simultaneous effects (Noddings, 1992; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; Tyler & Degoey, 1995; Wu et al., 1982). Like authoritative parenting (Baumrind, 1968), teacher warmth and demandingness in concert may be linked with positive student outcomes. Some evidence in relation to achievement outcomes with diverse students suggests just this. With a diverse student sample, Gregory and Weinstein (2004) found that the greatest academic growth for adolescents from low socioeconomic backgrounds was predicted by a teaching style characterized by a combination of high demandingness and high responsiveness, as perceived by the student.”

Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Early Teacher–Child Relationships and the Trajectory of Children’s School Outcomes through Eighth Grade. *Child Development*, 72(2), 625–638.

http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/Hamre_Pianta_2003.pdf

This study found, “As hypothesized, this study suggests that the quality of teacher–child relationships is a stronger predictor of behavioral than of academic outcomes. Relational Negativity accounted for greater increments of explained variance for the behavioral outcomes than for the academic outcomes. Although previous work established associations between teacher–child relationships and socioemotional and behavioral functioning through second grade (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Howes et al., 1994; Pianta et al., 1995), the present study provides evidence of prediction for much longer term behavioral outcomes. Zero-order correlations suggested that negative relational styles appear to be especially strong predictors of subsequent disciplinary problems for boys. In regressions controlling for main effects of gender, ethnicity, verbal cognitive abilities, and problem behaviors, teacher–child Relational Negativity added significantly to the prediction of disciplinary performance in upper elementary school and middle school, although the findings for middle school outcomes suggest that this association was moderated by other factors, as discussed below. It is important to note that these findings do not pertain simply to an accumulation of minor infractions, as Relational Negativity scores also added to the prediction of suspension, a relatively severe penalty.”

Hinojosa, M. S. (2008). *Black–White Differences in School Suspension: Effect of Student Beliefs about Teachers*. *Sociological Spectrum: Mid-South Sociological Association*, 28(2), 175-193.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02732170701796429#.Vdy2wCVVhBc>

The author writes, “I expect that, in this analysis, student beliefs about teacher expectations, teacher fairness, and teacher caring will have a negative effect on student suspension. When students feel their teachers have higher expectations for them and display greater fairness and caring, student suspension will be lower. [I]f students feel that their teachers have a vested interest in them and their actions, they may feel a greater sense of commitment or attachment to school and thus be less likely to misbehave and be punished.” In the Discussion section, she writes, “Adding student beliefs about teachers to the model makes a significant contribution to predicting student suspension. When students believe that their teachers have higher expectations of them, their probability of out-of-school suspension is decreased by 26 percent, and probability of in-school suspension is decreased by 28 percent. Students’ beliefs about teacher fairness and caring has no effect on the probability of out-of-school suspension but has a negative effect on in-school suspension, with students being 27 percent more likely to have an in-school suspension with greater indications of teacher fairness and caring. Students’ beliefs about teacher caring and fairness means students agree that their teachers listen, care, can be trusted, keep promises, don’t get mad, and are fair. Overall, the measures of teacher expectations demonstrate that they make a significant addition to the model explaining in-school and out-of-school suspension. These findings reflect my earlier hypothesis that teachers play, to some degree, a role in the suspension outcomes of students.”

Kant, A. R., & March, R. E. (2004). Effective Strategies for Addressing Challenging Behavior in Schools. *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*, 1(3), 3–6.

[http://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/Journals/AASA_Journal_of_Scholarship_and_Practice/fall_04\(1\).pdf](http://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/Journals/AASA_Journal_of_Scholarship_and_Practice/fall_04(1).pdf)

This article says, “In order for schools to create safe and effective school environments, we need to stop looking at punitive measures that tend to remove students and prevent educators from using their most powerful intervention – teaching.”

Koran, M. (2014). *Oops: San Diego Unified Might Have Just Unwittingly Validated ‘Vergara’*. San Diego, CA: Voice of San Diego.

<http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/school-discipline/oops-san-diego-unified-might-have-just-unwittingly-validated-vergara/>

This article’s headline refers to *Vergara v. California*, a Los Angeles County Superior Court case where California students have argued that the weakest teachers disproportionately end up in low-income schools. The article begins, “Seniority-based hiring policies in San Diego Unified mean the poorest schools usually end up with the least experienced teachers. Black and Latino students who attend poor schools are disproportionately suspended and expelled. And one paragraph buried deep within a 63-page report from the school district shows that the two issues could be directly compounding each other.” The article states, “Referencing research from *The Journal of Negro Education*, the report says: ‘More likely, as the author suggested, it is better explained by an interaction of multiple factors, in which African American students tend to live in low-income neighborhoods, and schools in these neighborhoods tend to have a difficult time retaining experienced teachers. Inexperienced teachers may have a harder time responding to discipline issues effectively and serving students’ needs academically’” (the full report, entitled *Students Suspensions and Expulsions: 2011–12* and prepared by the San Diego Unified School District’s Office of Accountability Research and Reporting Department, is available at [http://www.boarddocs.com/ca/sandi/Board.nsf/files/9M5SFF6A9019/\\$file/Evaluating%20Discipline%20Report%20Appendix%20A.pdf](http://www.boarddocs.com/ca/sandi/Board.nsf/files/9M5SFF6A9019/$file/Evaluating%20Discipline%20Report%20Appendix%20A.pdf)).

REL Northwest. (2012). *What We Know About Reducing Disproportionate Suspension Rates for Students of Color: A Literature Summary*. Portland, OR: Author.

<https://www.cosa.k12.or.us/downloads/profdev/Safe%20Schools%20Summit/SOC.pdf>

This literature summary states, “The descriptive studies report that students experience fewer suspensions if their teachers are caring and have high expectations for them to achieve.... Teachers who develop positive, caring relationships with students, have high expectations for each student, teach self-management skills, and encourage student participation in decision-making have fewer discipline problems....In addition to setting high expectations, teachers and administrators of schools with lower rates of suspension were vocal about their beliefs that students of color can succeed academically (Murkuria, 2002; Way, 2011). [T]he literature summary identified practices associated with lower rates of discipline referrals and suspensions for students of color. High expectations, positive and caring teacher-student relationships, and structured learning environments were consistently associated with lower rates of suspensions.”

Wright, J. (2010). *Reducing Problem Behaviors Through Good Academic Management: 10 Strategies*. Springfield, IL: Intervention Central.

<http://www.interventioncentral.org/academic-interventions/general-academic/reducing-problem-behaviors-through-good-academic-management->

Many of this article's suggestions for reducing problem behaviors also apply to good teaching. The 10 suggestions are: (1) Be sure that assigned work is not too easy and not too difficult; (2) Offer frequent opportunities for choice; (3) Select high-interest or functional learning activities; (4) Instruct students at a brisk pace; (5) Structure lessons to require active student involvement; (6) Incorporate cooperative-learning opportunities into instruction; (7) Give frequent teacher feedback and encouragement; (8) Provide correct models during independent work; (9) Be consistent in managing the academic setting; and (10) Target interventions to coincide closely with 'point of performance'.

Wu, S., Pink, W., Carin, R., & Moles, O. (1982). Student Suspension: A Critical Reappraisal. *The Urban Review*, 14(4), 245–303.

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2FBF02171974>

In this study, the authors found that, while student suspension has a basis in the attitudes and behavior of students, student misbehavior is not the only factor determining whether or not a student will be suspended from school. To be specific, the author found six factors that, in addition to their behavior, increase students’ chances of being suspended – the first two being: “Teachers are seen by students as relatively uninterested in them” and “Teachers believe that students are incapable of solving problems.” Since good instruction would entail a teacher’s interest in each of his or her students and a belief that every student can learn to solve problems if the instruction is of a sufficiently high caliber, these factors link good instruction – or lack thereof – to student suspensions.