

Health Impact Assessment of School Discipline Policies

Jonathan Heller
Director & Co-founder



Community Asset Development Re-defining Education



National HIA Meeting • Washington, DC • April 3rd, 2012

Exclusionary school discipline (ESD) policies:

Remove students from the classroom via automatic punishments for infractions, regardless of intent or circumstances

Previous research has shown that ESD is

- Associated with lower academic achievement and drop-out

- Ineffective at preventing future misbehavior and violence

- Harmful to student mental health

- Associated with incarceration

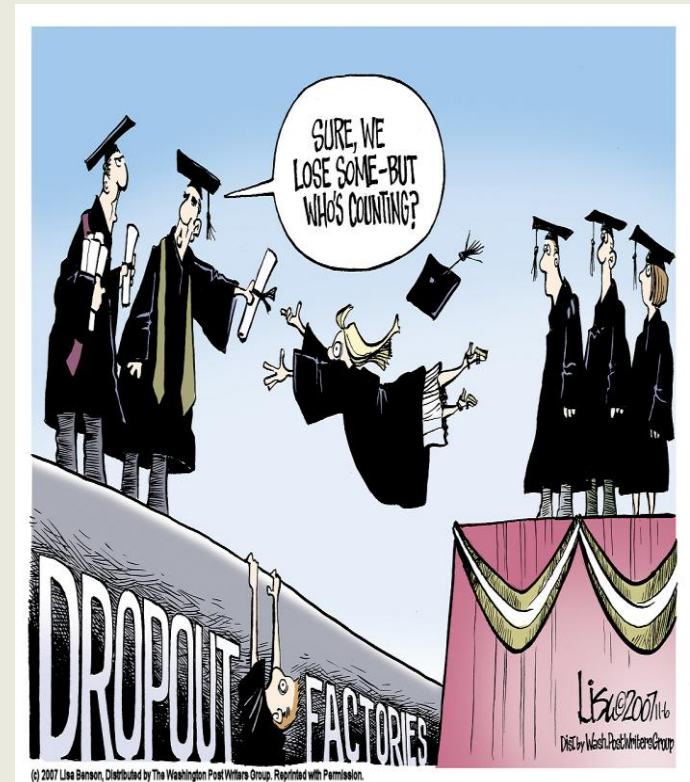
- Disproportionately used with African American students for less serious or more subjective reasons

- Used for nebulous offenses such as “defiance”

Some believe that, because of school policies, students fall behind academically, leading to dropout and, in the long-term, worse economic and health outcomes

Disproportionately impacts students of color

Creates an “opportunity gap”



Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS or SWPBS)

Fosters a healthier school climate of trust by establishing expectations and reinforcing positive behavior

Restorative Justice (RJ)

Seeks to repair harm done via open communication and respect agreements between all involved parties

Both have been shown anecdotally to reduce disciplinary events, improve school climate, and foster positive relationships



Challenges

Requires extensive staff training and resources

Both work best when a champion exists at the top level of administration

Student buy-in is key and necessary

Goals

Determine health impacts of ESD policies and potential impacts of PBIS and RJ

Recognize where gaps in equity occur

Provide recommendations for school districts

Increase awareness of ESD alternatives

Increase HIA as a tool for policy decisions

Funded by The California Endowment

Los Angeles Unified – SWPBS

Encouraging implementation of SWPBS policy

Oakland Unified – RJ

Provide support for nascent pilot program

Salinas/Alisal School District – RJ

Expand RJ to additional school districts

National advisory committee

Leaders in: education, PBIS/RJ implementation, school administration, policy analysis, public health



Quantitative and Qualitative

Literature Review

PBIS Effectiveness Study

California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) and
California School Climate Survey (CSCS)

Focus Groups

Interviews

Parent Survey in Los Angeles

Vulnerable populations considered in this HIA:

Lower income students

Non-English speaking students

Students of color



How did the HIA assess equity?

Conducted literature review on disproportionate impacts of ESD

When possible, school data was analyzed by race/ethnicity

Held focus groups with students from all backgrounds

Engaged South Los Angeles parents to speak out for the HIA

PBIS and RJ plausibly decreased suspension rates at pilot schools:

Evidence for improvements in disciplinary referral rates were quantified

Had South LA middle and high schools increased SWPBS implementation by 50% in 2009-10, 741 suspensions could have been prevented

Qualitative findings included that keeping kids in school may improve educational attainment and family cohesion, and reduce drug use, further misbehavior, drop-out, and incarceration

Impacts are likely to be dependent on how faithfully the alternative policies are implemented

Qualitative evidence fills in the story

All students and parents agreed that ESD practices don't improve behavior and many consider suspensions to be a "vacation"

Violence is a big issue in all three communities

Lack of trust and respect between students and staff was reported

Superintendent sees RJ as useful strategy for teaching life skills and helping students stay in school

Student perceptions and comfort levels for RJ were mixed

Reduce use of ESD; alternative discipline policies should continue to be implemented at pilot schools in the 3 sites

- Ends the negative effects of ESD policies and pushout

- Increases the dialogue between students and staff

- Brings students out of the shadows of stigma from discipline

- Improves school climate for all

More implementation time and data is needed

- The three sites should continue implementation, but should inform their processes with careful evaluation along the way

- Maintain a focus on equity and community engagement

- Develop more rigorous discipline events data tracking system

Releasing report in next month

LA/CADRE has used the process and preliminary findings

Health frame resonated with parent members

Parents gained experience with analytical research methods

Adding health frame to organizing strategy

Use HIA findings in actions (car march)

Hosting the HIA launch event in May

Challenges of doing this policy HIA

Post-implementation data for PBIS and RJ was premature or not available at all, and virtually no stratified data for evaluating equity

Local implementation plans varied, so communication products for the HIA also varied

Lessons learned

Engage partnerships and leverage their networks to gain access to vulnerable populations

Be realistic about quantitative analysis and don't hesitate to rely on qualitative data

Develop communication strategies before the reporting phase

Jonathan Heller

jch@humanimpact.org

Thank You!

