



Just Discipline

and the School-to-Prison Pipeline
in Greater Pittsburgh:

LOCAL CHALLENGES AND PROMISING SOLUTIONS

*An Education Area Report by
The Center on Race and Social Problems
University of Pittsburgh*

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Report made possible by generous support from
The Heinz Endowments African American
Men and Boys Initiative



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Executive Summary

For decades there has been concern in the educational and criminal justice communities around what has been called the **“SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE”** —

a phenomenon whereby school discipline policies lead to an increase in children’s involvement in the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Emerging research has also compellingly shown that over-reliance on exclusionary discipline practices like out-of-school suspensions and expulsions is detrimental to both the penalized students and the schools that overuse them. Further, because African American and Latino students tend to be disproportionately and unjustly affected by these approaches, these exclusionary practices have been shown to exacerbate racial inequalities in education.

In the Greater Pittsburgh region, there has indeed been substantial attention recently to exclusionary practice policies and their connections to the school-to-prison pipeline. And while there have been targeted investigations of specific districts, no current efforts have examined how we, as a region, are using suspensions. In response, this report examines the school-to-prison pipeline and the exclusionary school discipline practices that undergird it at both local and national levels. We begin by detailing the national rise in school suspensions and expulsions, and describe how these practices can facilitate youth contact with the criminal justice system. Next, using Pennsylvania Department of Education data, we examine the extent and impact of these practices in traditional public districts and charter school networks in Allegheny County. Following, we calculate the actual costs of school suspension use in our region in terms of diminished academic and economic productivity. Lastly, we present a set of best practices—which collectively form the Just Discipline Model—as guided by a review of the literature, available data, and what we have learned from schools and educators around the country who are succeeding in transforming disciplinary cultures.

I. The School-to-Prison Pipeline: A Brief History

The school-to-prison pipeline is the process whereby disciplinary experiences in school increase students’ likelihood of interaction with the juvenile justice system. This interaction in turn is associated with devastating personal, educational, and economic consequences for the youth affected. Historically, three developments have made the most substantial contributions to the pipeline’s growth into a large-scale, racially disproportionate phenomenon. First, there has been a dramatic rise in zero-tolerance practices in school discipline, which have doubled the percentage of students being suspended since the 1970s. In the same time span, the suspension rate for African American students has nearly tripled because of disproportionate use on members of that group. Second, a parallel rise in increased police presence in schools has meant that non-safety related offenses that were once handled by school staff might now be handled by law enforcement. This shift has resulted in more frequent school-based arrests and justice system contact.

Finally, tests of unconscious, or “implicit,” bias have shown that as many as 80% of Whites and 40% of Blacks are negatively biased against Blacks, consistently associating them with antisocial constructs such as aggression and laziness. Such biases have been demonstrated in school discipline, where African American and Latino students receive more frequent and harsher penalties for the same behaviors as their White counterparts with similar backgrounds. Because of societal racial biases, Black youth suffer the most deleterious consequences of the pipeline given their overexposure to its mechanisms. Taken together, these three factors serve as the cornerstones of the dramatic rise of harsh discipline in schools, and ultimately create a highly racialized school-to-prison pipeline.

II. The Use and Impact of School Suspensions in Allegheny County

To examine local use of suspensions, we reviewed Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Safe Schools Reports data from between 2013 and 2016 for 51 Allegheny County traditional public districts and charter networks serving mainstream students.

Findings suggest substantial challenges in either overall suspension rates or racial disparities in the vast majority of Allegheny County school districts and networks.

Overall Suspension Rates

Allegheny County as a whole was above the state average in 2015–2016, at 13.7 suspensions per 100 students. Of the 51 traditional public districts and charter networks in Allegheny County, just over one-third (18 of 51) were above the state average in suspensions rates (Figure E1). In general, districts in Allegheny County with more African American and low-income students tended to have higher suspension rates.

In terms of trends, across Allegheny County suspension rates dropped by approximately 2.6 percentage points (a 16% rate decrease) county-wide between 2012–2013 and 2015–2016: from 16.3 per 100 students in 2012–2013 to 13.7 per 100 in 2015–2016. Approximately 41% (21 of 51) of Allegheny County districts reduced their overall suspension rates in this time-period by at least one suspension per 100. Conversely, 12 of 51 (24%) of districts had increases in suspension rates over this period (Tables E1, E2).

Table E1: Districts with suspension rate reductions between 2012–2013 and 2015–2016 (Figures rounded to the nearest 1).

District	2012–2013 Suspensions per 100	2015–2016 Suspensions per 100	Reduction in rate per 100	Percent Reduction in Suspensions
ALLEGHENY COUNTY	16	14	-3	-16%
Penn Hills	47	10	-37	-78%
Sto-Rox	95	65	-30	-32%
Cornell	22	1	-21	-96%
Woodland Hills	61	41	-19	-32%
West Mifflin Area	38	20	-18	-47%
Pittsburgh	41	34	-8	-19%
East Allegheny	35	28	-7	-21%
Shaler Area	9	2	-7	-73%
Highlands	19	13	-5	-28%
Montour	8	3	-5	-61%
Manchester Ac. Charter	23	19	-5	-20%
Environmental Charter	7	4	-3	-44%
Avonworth	4	1	-3	-68%
Keystone Oaks	4	1	-3	-74%
Baldwin-Whitehall	7	4	-2	-37%
Plum Borough	4	2	-2	-45%
Brentwood Borough	3	1	-2	-57%
Riverview	2	1	-2	-76%
South Allegheny	5	4	-2	-30%
Moon Area	5	4	-1	-28%
Urban Pathways Charter	50	49	-1	-2%

Figure E1: Allegheny County districts with suspension rates above the state average (rounded for display purposes). The average free or reduced price lunch rate for this group is 79%.

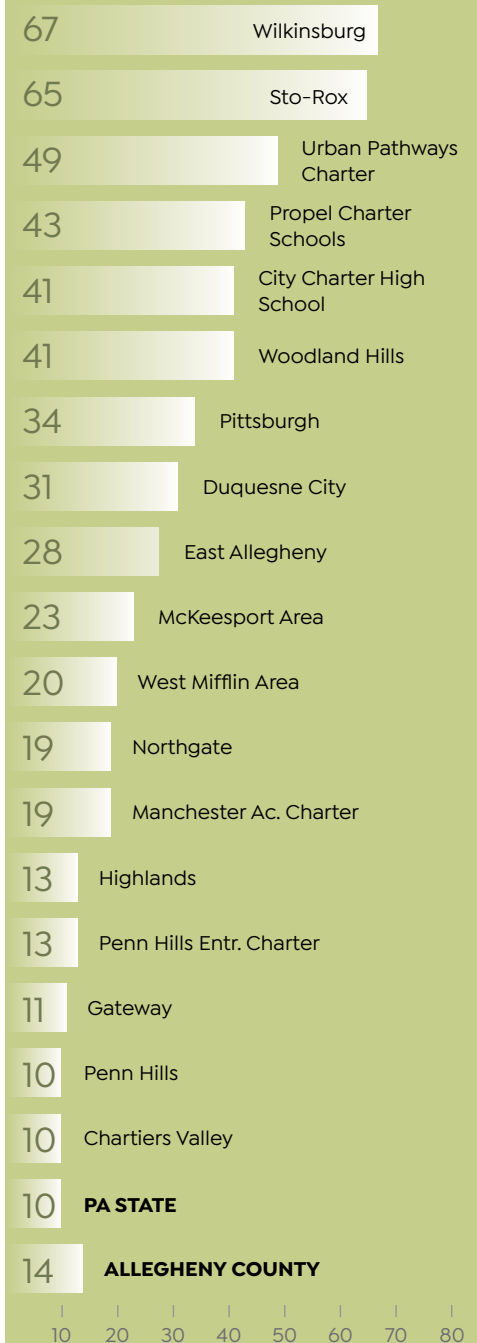


Figure E2: 2015–2016 Black vs. non-Black suspension rate ratios for districts with 1) at least 10 Black suspensions, and 2) where Black student rates were at least twice the rates of non-Black students. A complete listing can be found in Appendix A (Figures rounded to the nearest 1).



Table E2: Districts with increased suspension rates between 2012–2013 and 2015–2016 (Figures rounded to the nearest 1).

District	2012–2013 Suspensions per 100	2015–2016 Suspensions per 100	Increase in rate per 100	Percent increase in suspensions
Propel Schools	15	43	28	+181%
Duquesne City	10	31	21	+213%
Wilksburg	52	67	15	+29%
City Charter High School	32	41	9	+30%
Chartiers Valley	5	10	5	+87%
South Park	3	8	4	+135%
Urban Academy Charter	0	4	4	+400%
Young Scholars of WPA	2	6	4	+183%
Gateway	7	11	4	+54%
Clairton City	3	6	3	+108%
Elizabeth Forward	4	5	2	+46%
Penn Hills Entr. Charter	11	13	2	+14%

Racial Disparities in Suspensions

Our findings on racial disparities in local suspension use were startling. Overall, in 2015–2016, Black students across Allegheny County were suspended at a rate of approximately 41.0 students per 100, as compared to only 5.6 suspensions for every 100 non-Black students. This difference equates to Black students in Allegheny County being subjected to suspension rates that are 7.3 times higher than the rate of non-Black suspensions, a disparity rate that is above the statewide level of 5.5 to 1. In terms of individual districts, 73% (37 of 51) of Allegheny County districts had suspension rates for Black students that were at least double the rate of their non-Black counterparts.

Our analysis suggests this severe regional racial disparity seems to be the result of two intersecting patterns that simultaneously exert negative effects on Black students: (1) exceedingly high overall suspension rates in urban districts, where Black students tend to be concentrated; and (2) exceptionally high racial disparity rates in suburban, mostly White districts, as seen in Figure E2. When these issues are considered in tandem, more than 80% of Allegheny County Districts have a problem with overall suspension rates, racial disproportionalities in suspension rates, or both.

In terms of racial disparity trends, the disparity in absolute suspension rates decreased by approximately 12% between 2013 and 2016 in Allegheny County. Among individual districts there were four major observable patterns in disparity rates: (1) 13 districts reduced suspensions for both Black and non-

Black students, which usually resulted in reduced disparities; (2) nine mostly suburban districts reduced rates for Black students, but not for others (in most cases because the rates for non-Blacks were already very low); (3) six districts saw increases in Black suspension rates while over the same period maintaining or lowering suspension rates for other students; and (4) 10 districts saw increased rates for both Blacks and non-Blacks in this period, which typically led to larger disparities.

The Local Impact of School Exclusionary Practices

To date, there is essentially no evidence to suggest that exclusionary practices are associated with positive outcomes for students or schools. Meanwhile, an extensive body of research has demonstrated that there are serious negative consequences for the overuse of suspensions and expulsions at the individual, school, and community levels. Locally, our examination of discipline rates and achievement in Allegheny County districts suggests that districts with higher suspension rates on average have *lower academic performance* compared to districts with similar populations and lower suspension rates. Academic consequences of suspension rates include a 10-point difference in suspensions per 100 being associated with an approximately 3% difference in graduation rates across demographically similar districts. Economically, because of the connection between suspensions and dropping out, we estimate that school suspensions cost the region approximately \$30,000,000 per annual graduating cohort, mainly due to lost consumer and tax revenue and increased social costs over each cohort's working-age time span.

III. Solutions: Alternatives to Zero-Tolerance and Exclusionary Policies

Given the negative effects of over-reliance on suspensions, educators have begun developing new best practices that can address student behavioral needs in ways that benefit both the larger community and the students themselves. Our synthesis of the existing research and our work with successful practitioners has yielded the Just Discipline and Climate Model: an integrative approach to school discipline and climate that acknowledges the challenges and resources needed for successful school and district-wide disciplinary culture transformations (Figure E3). The key to the model's success is its hierarchical design, whereby the components at the bottom of the model are foundational to the success of the entire program. Below, we detail each of its components, which collectively serve as a starting point for schools and districts seeking to improve their behavioral climate in constructive and sustainable ways.

1. **School Community Buy-In.** Effective discipline reform requires a cultural shift, and as such, necessitates *buy-in from school leaders, teachers, staff, students, and families alike*. School and district leaders should start with sharing the philosophy behind the new practices with staff and community members and soliciting their feedback on the specifics of a contextually tailored implementation. Approaches to sharing and building coalition include open discussions with teachers and staff in professional development in-services, letters to and meetings with students and families, meetings with student leadership groups, and community forums. Effective schools often also have a Lead Team of teachers, administrators, and key support staff that help tailor programming to the needs and interests of all stakeholders.

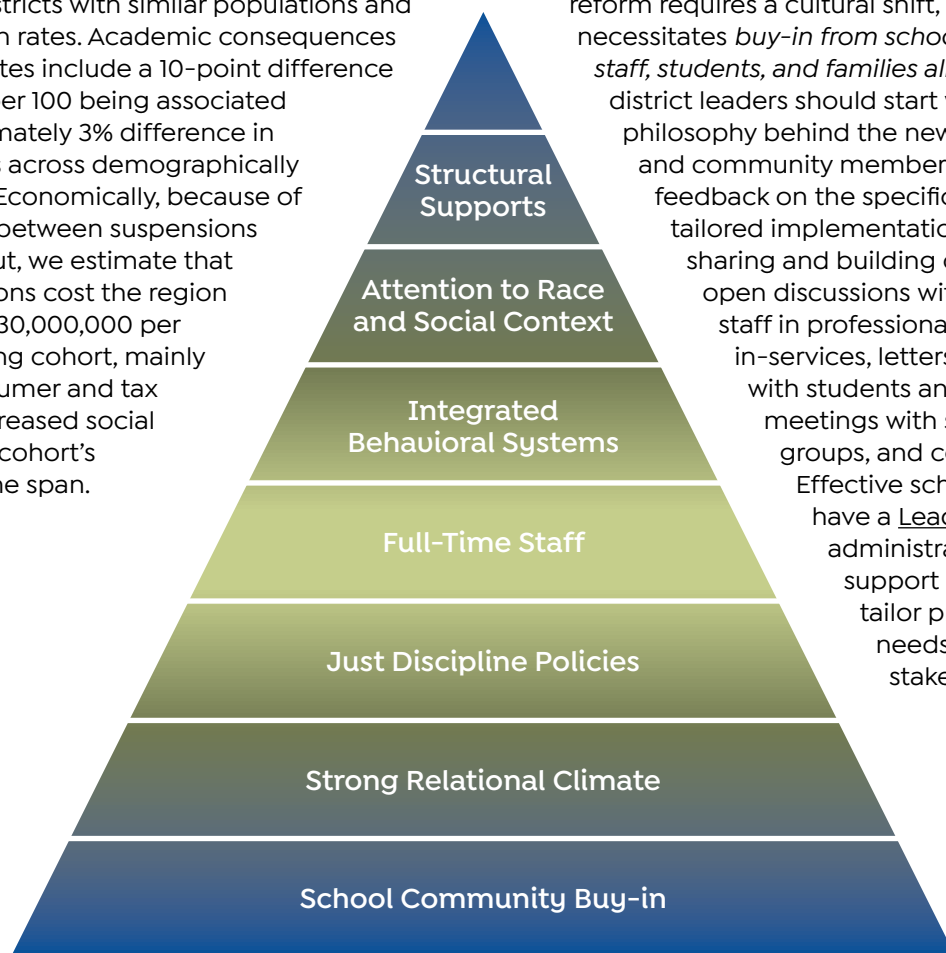


Figure E3: Just Discipline and Climate Model.

2. Strong Relational Climate. Effective discipline approaches actually start with students feeling a sense of caring community, or even family, at the school level. Positive relationships and culture need to exist prior to an infraction, so that when one does occur, it is a disruption of the communal fabric. As such, *attention to the overall climate of the school* is a prerequisite to the effective use of restorative practices or other more relational discipline approaches. This sense of belonging should be cultivated proactively rather than in response to problems, and should include whole school and classroom-level activities, assemblies, contests, and celebrations. As necessary, schools and districts may also want to invest in professional development focused on supporting teachers in building personal relationships with students.

3. Just Discipline Policies. The vast majority of all suspensions in schools are issued in response to less-severe infractions (e.g. defiance, insubordination, dress code violations), and not more severe violations like violence, drugs, or weapons. In fact, 70% of suspensions in Allegheny County in 2015-2016 were attributed to issues of “conduct” and not more severe school safety-related infractions. Suspensions for these more minor infractions—which are in most cases more discretionary—tend to be disruptive to individual learning and to collective learning cultures. They also tend to greatly disfavor students of color, with implications for racial achievement disparities and the school-to-prison pipeline. For these reasons, districts and schools should adjust their policies as necessary to *reduce or eliminate the possibility that minor offenses will lead to suspensions*. Indeed, several Allegheny County districts have undertaken such steps to revise their codes to reflect the need for more effective approaches to non-violent-, non-drug-related student behavioral problems. Once policies are in place at the district level, schools will have a strong incentive to master the relational and restorative processes that make these policies manageable and sustainable. These policy shifts also need to be *scaffolded with the resources* that schools and districts need for just discipline initiatives (described below). In addition, discipline policies need to include *accountability measures* at the state and federal levels that hold traditional public and charter learning communities accountable for reducing exclusionary discipline practices, both in the aggregate and across race, gender, and disability subgroups, as well as the intersections between them.

4. Full-Time Restorative Practice Staffing.

Relational and restorative policy reforms have their best chance at succeeding when they are accompanied by structured programmatic features that specifically address relational climate and behavior management, including the necessary personnel to oversee school climate shifts and initiatives. *Restorative practice* is one such state-of-the-art discipline approach that departs from the punitive model and instead uses a community-driven method to resolve conflicts where they arise, and to empathetically engage an offender in recognizing and repairing harm when it is caused. When done properly, restorative practices first establish a strong community of relationships that can then be drawn on to restore connectedness and make amends when a value is violated. Schools that have been successful implementing restorative practices suggest that there is perhaps no more important component to this work than *full-time staff implementing it*. Asking existing school staff to lead this work on top of their current duties may get the process started, but will ultimately result in burnout of the designated staff member. Instead, individual schools need their own full-time personnel leading restorative behavioral work and other relationally oriented approaches to climate. These restorative practice facilitators will work with students and staff in a variety of capacities, including implementing school climate activities and initiatives, training faculty and staff in restorative approaches, responding to acute behavioral cases and leading healing circles, providing professional development on understanding students in context, and supporting student leaders in restorative and community-building activities. With such personnel in place, relational and restorative practices can be a relief rather than a burden to teachers because of the extra supports they provide.

5. Integrated Behavioral Systems. While there is often a hope that a single behavioral program will provide panacean results, schools should instead strategically consider how various programs like PBIS, restorative practice, socio-emotional learning curricula, and other behavioral interventions complement each other. These programs often address distinct aspects of behavioral norms, such as building community, setting positive behavioral expectations, improving students’ emotional and relational capacities, and defusing conflicts as they arise. Rather than expecting one program

to address all behavioral and climate dynamics, wherever possible schools should strategically consider how their behavioral systems can be integrated to address their specific contextual needs.

6. Attention to Poverty, Social Context, and

Race. Overall suspension or expulsion rates can be reduced without any significant changes to the racial disparity rates unless direct attention is given to race and social context. As such, in their professional development agendas, schools must include programming on how implicit bias and race can impact practice, and how social context and modern histories of racial subordination inform students' and families' social positioning, family resources, as well as their cultural and relational expectations in school settings. In the process, school staff should *take readily available bias tests* as a baseline for further conversations. This work must then be supported by *disaggregated discipline data reviews* that make localized racial patterns plain, as well as by investments in *culturally responsive classroom management approaches*. Also critical to implementing racially just discipline efforts is having a *teaching staff with strong racial representation* from the groups that the school serves, an inclusion that has been shown to reduce racial disparities in school discipline.

7. Structural Supports. The structural skeleton supporting just discipline and climate implementation is composed of data systems and scheduling. *Nuanced data systems* should monitor

all manner of disciplinary actions, including referrals, in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, alternative school transfers, and expulsions. Each of these outcomes should be disaggregated by race and by other vulnerable subgroup delineations to the degree possible. Scheduling modifications give just discipline programming the actual space and time needed in which to operate. Key scheduling components include: (1) *common planning time* for teaching units to share behavioral management strategies; (2) regular relationship and community-building structures like *advisory periods* or *regular all-school meetings*.

8. Intensive Behavioral and Social Supports.

Lastly, although teachers and school personnel are often optimistic about restorative and relational approaches, many also acknowledge that there are still students whose needs transcend these discipline reforms, and who may require intensive mental health, social service, or physical health supports. School leaders have also lamented the lack of *adequate social work and counseling staff* to address severe issues among this segment of their student body. Thus, more in-depth supports should also be part of an overall approach to behavior and climate reforms for the small proportion of students that need them. We recommend that policy-makers and advocates ask school leaders what resources are necessary to meet these acute needs in their schools, and then work collectively as a region to provide these resources through revised policy allocations, philanthropy, university and private sector partnerships, and other means.

Conclusion

Nationwide, schools are in a struggle to revitalize antiquated discipline approaches, and the needs in our region are no different. Overall, suspension rates are above the state average in about one-third of Allegheny County school districts. At the current rates, our region is losing an estimated \$30 million per graduating cohort due to suspension-related school dropouts. These suspension rates also have severe consequences for our already problematic racial inequities in the Greater Pittsburgh region, given that Black students are suspended at more than 7 times the rate of other students. More than 80% of our districts have problems with either overall suspension use, racial disparities in suspensions, or both. Fortunately, most of the disciplinary practices that have led us to this position can be addressed, and there are successful reform models from which we can draw. The solutions are out there, and it is time to bring Pittsburgh to the fore of cutting-edge practice in cultivating our most valuable resource, our children.

Introduction

For decades there has been concern in the educational and criminal justice communities around what has been called the **“SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE”** —

a phenomenon whereby school discipline policies and practices lead to an increase in children’s contact with the juvenile justice system. Youths’ increased contact with this system holds two overarching concerns. First, this contact has been shown to have severe negative youth development consequences, including disengagement from school, poor educational achievement, and future incarceration.¹ Second, the processes involved in the school-to-prison pipeline at every level have been applied disproportionately to Black and Latino youth. Consequently, the shift in school discipline policy over the past 20 years has substantially increased the likelihood that youth of color in the United States will be involved with juvenile justice.

In addition to the risk of juvenile justice contact, emerging research has also shown that the reliance on exclusionary discipline practices—i.e. the removal of students from classrooms and schools through suspensions or expulsions—is detrimental to not only the penalized students, but also more broadly to the schools and communities that overuse them. These broader impacts occur because schools with higher suspension and expulsion rates also tend to have lower levels of achievement, even after accounting for student background characteristics. Additionally, because vulnerable populations like African American, Latino, LGBTQ, and students with disabilities tend to be disproportionately suspended and expelled, exclusionary practices have been shown to exacerbate socially significant disparities in educational outcomes.

In the Greater Pittsburgh region there has been a great deal of recent attention to these policies and their connections to the school-to-prison pipeline.² High rates of suspensions have been challenged by advocates in several districts,³ and early steps have been taken by some districts to begin implementing alternative policies and practices.⁴ Yet because large urban districts are typically the only targets for such critiques, less is known about the overall use of suspensions and racial justice implications in smaller and/or more suburban areas.

Additionally, too little attention has been given to trend data in examining how local districts may be increasing or reducing the use of exclusionary practices over time.

Examining these discipline dynamics is critically important given our region’s commitments to inclusive social and economic progress. In response, this report first briefly describes the history and mechanisms of the school-to-prison pipeline nationally, including the rise of exclusionary discipline approaches. Next, using Pennsylvania Department of Education data, we examine the recent local history and current status of one of the pipeline’s foundational pillars: out-of-school suspensions. In doing so, we analyze school suspensions in Allegheny County school districts serving general student populations—including both traditional public districts and public charter networks. Following, we estimate the costs of school suspensions to the region in terms of diminished academic and economic productivity. Lastly, we present a best practice model developed from reviewing the literature, conversations with experts in the field, and site visits with school leaders and restorative practitioners who have been working for disciplinary reform for years.

As we begin, we do want to acknowledge that while this frank discussion of the discipline practices in our local schools surfaces some difficult justice issues, it is important that these findings be reviewed with understanding and respect for the extremely challenging work that the thousands of educators in our region undertake every day. Our teachers, school leaders, counselors, school social workers, and other support staff are doing what they can to serve our area’s children, especially in the context of overall reduced funding for public schools in our state. Effective school discipline practices call for upgrades in our schools which, at scale, will require the support of policy-makers and the public more broadly, and ultimately success will require a regional commitment. Our hope is that this report will catalyze conversations and actions by demonstrating both the urgency of the current situation, as well as the promising benefits our region stands to gain by making the right investments in state-of-the-art school discipline practices today.

I. The School-to-Prison Pipeline: A Brief History

The school-to-prison pipeline is the process whereby disciplinary actions in school increase a student's likelihood of interaction with the juvenile justice system. This interaction in turn is associated with devastating personal, educational, and economic consequences for the youth affected. It has been demonstrated that this pipeline is both more pronounced today than it was decades ago, and that it has had especially damaging consequences for Black and Latino youth—the students who tend to be overexposed to it. Historically, three developments have made the most substantial contributions to the pipeline's rising emergence as a large-scale, racially disproportionate phenomenon: (1) the rise and eventual overreach of zero-tolerance school discipline policies; (2) the dramatic increase of police presence in schools; and (3) pervasive implicit racial biases in our institutions, particularly as they pertain to behavioral and threat assessments. These developments are described in detail below.

Zero-Tolerance Practices and Exclusionary School Discipline

Since the 1990s, the uses of suspension and expulsion as punishment has been closely connected to schools' commitments to zero *tolerance*, a broad term that generally reflects rigid, mandated-response approaches to school discipline.⁵ These policies, inspired by War on Drugs-era criminal justice reforms, were originally intended to send unequivocal messages that violence and drug use would not be tolerated on school grounds, and would be responded to with the perpetrating students' removal from the classroom or school setting. The 1994 Gun Free Schools Act, for example, required a 1-year expulsion for any student in possession of a firearm.⁶ However, over time zero-tolerance approaches have more frequently been applied to a broader range of lower-level school violations than were initially intended. This overuse is particularly problematic when levied to address discretionary, low-level school offenses—those that get labeled with ambiguous terms like “conduct” or “defiance.” Consequently, since the 1970s, school suspension rates have at least doubled, from approximately 3.7% to 7.4% of public school students in the nation being suspended at least once in an academic year.⁷ In fact, approximately 25% of all of public high school students in the United States have been suspended at least once in their academic lives.⁸ These trends are especially pronounced for students of color. While nationally,

since the 1970s the percent of White students suspended at least once in an academic year has increased from 3% to 5%, for Latino and Black students those same rates have increased from 3% to 7% and from 6% to 16%, respectively.⁹ Ultimately, in ways that parallel how drug-war policies exacerbated incarceration rates in the United States—particularly in communities of color—the rise of zero-tolerance policies in schools has contributed to similar patterns in terms of growth and racial disproportionality in the numbers of students receiving harsh penalties for infractions in school.

Increased Law Enforcement Presence in Schools

Concurrent with the rise in the use of zero-tolerance policies, the national rate at which police officers are present in schools has increased dramatically over the past several decades, from police being stationed in 1% of schools in 1975 to 30% in 2014.¹⁰ Although some of this increase has understandably been in response to severe safety concerns as a result of school shootings, rates of police presence in schools were already rising before Columbine, and in ways that were in step with drug-war law enforcement priorities.¹¹ This increase in police presence in schools has resulted in some students who would have otherwise been accountable to educators instead being handled by law enforcement, at times resulting in forceful confrontations even for non-violent violations.¹² Some have argued that the placement of police officers in schools can result in the criminalization of school discipline, as their increased presence

Since the 1970s, school suspension rates nationally have at least doubled.

The national rate at which police officers are present in schools increased from 1% in 1975 to 30% in 2013–2014.

results in higher rates of exclusionary responses for a wider range of infractions, and more non-violent infractions being addressed by law enforcement.¹³ Altogether, while safety concerns are critically important for school settings, an additional and undesirable consequence of increased police presence in schools has been the increased likelihood that developmentally normal youth defiance behaviors will be met with criminal justice responses rather than trained youth practitioner responses.

Stereotypes and Implicit Racial Bias

A growing body of research has pointed to *implicit racial bias* as an explanation for racial disparities in school discipline. Implicit biases are subconscious negative feelings we have toward certain groups that skew our judgments and actions, even when there is no conscious effort toward discrimination.¹⁴ Such biases have a long history in the United States, and have been well documented, going at least as far back as the famous Clark doll experiments of the 1950s.¹⁵ Today, modernized tests for unconscious racial biases reveal that as many as 80% of Whites in the United States hold anti-Black implicit biases, unconsciously associating Blacks with antisocial constructs such as being aggressive or lazy. And White Americans are not alone—tests for implicit bias among African Americans indicate that as many as 40% of Blacks themselves have demonstrated bias against their own racial group relative to their subconscious beliefs about Whites.¹⁶ Lack of exposure to a group and/or over-exposure to stereotypes about a group tend to inform these biases. And unfortunately, negative exposures as they relate to Black and Latino American stereotypes are ubiquitous in our social fabric.

In the US, 80% of Whites and 40% of Blacks have negative subconscious biases against Blacks.

Not surprisingly, these types of implicit biases have been shown to be present in school discipline. A recent study from Yale University demonstrated that when preschool teachers were asked to monitor videos of classrooms for discipline infractions, teachers of all races tended to track Black students, and Black males in particular, when anticipating negative behaviors. In reality, there were no behavioral infractions in the videos.¹⁷ These findings illustrate how in many of our classrooms, Black youth are anticipated to be problems even before any real impressions are formed.

These biases and negative anticipations for Black and Brown students are said to be at the root of unjust racial disparities in school discipline. Specifically, it has been shown that African American and Latino students receive more frequent and harsher penalties for the same behaviors as their White counterparts with similar backgrounds.^{18, 19, 20} Research also shows that African American males in particular are often unfairly perceived by teachers and school officials as threatening, dangerous, and unwilling to conform to the norms of the school, despite the lack of any violent or aggressive behavior.^{21, 22, 23} It is also worth noting that while Black males are the most targeted group for harsh discipline, some research has found that the disparity between Black and White females is larger than the gap between Black and White males, and that Black females face unique risks for harsh school discipline and juvenile justice involvement.^{24, 25}

Biases also run deeper than these baseline prejudices—they can be found in how we connect race and character as well. Research has shown that school infractions perpetrated by Black youth are more often associated by school staff with *who Black students are as people* than are infractions by their White peers, and thus Black students are seen as more intractable and likely to be continually problematic.²⁶ For White students, infractions are viewed more sympathetically, with this undesirable behavior being attributed to something White students have experienced—thus the behavior being more malleable or fleeting rather than part of their core character.²⁷ Also corroborating the bias effects is the fact that the majority of racial disparities in discipline are in discretionary areas such as defiance or disrespect, and not in more definitive behavioral categories like fighting, drugs, or weapons.²⁸ Thus, discipline decisions that rely on discretionary judgments tend to be less favorable for Black and Latino students.

Pre-school teachers have been shown to track Black students more frequently than they do White students when looking for bad behavior.

In sum, a combination of the rise in zero-tolerance policies and increased police presence in schools has created an atmosphere where schools have the potential to create highly punitive experiences for our children and youth, including exposure to the juvenile justice system. These trends have most seriously affected Black and Latino students, and much of that disparate impact has been attributed to biases held with regards to racial stereotypes. The sum of these dynamics has come to be known as the school-to-prison pipeline, where schools can serve as mechanisms for the criminalization of youth, and in particular Black males. Despite the popular belief that a tough, no-nonsense, behavioral approach is the right one in schools, the overuse of exclusionary discipline is a failed strategy for the schools and communities that rely on them.

The Impact of School Exclusionary Practices

The reliance on exclusionary discipline approaches, and school suspensions in particular, is associated with a wide range of negative outcomes for almost all stakeholders. The American Academy of Pediatrics notes, “Research continues to demonstrate that so-called zero-tolerance policies and out-of-school suspension and expulsion that are used too readily are ineffective deterrents to inappropriate behavior and are harmful and counterproductive to the student, the family, the school district, and the community as a whole, both short- and long-term.”²⁹ Below, we detail some of these impacts on individuals, schools, and communities in terms of academic, economic, and racial justice consequences.

Academic Consequences

Ironically, while increases in school suspensions and expulsions are designed to improve schools by making them safer places with fewer disruptions to learning, research has shown that something quite different occurs when these practices are overused. Among individual students with similar backgrounds attending demographically similar secondary schools, being suspended even once is associated with being between three to 10 times more likely to become involved

with juvenile justice or to drop out of school.³⁰ Part of the problem stems from the fact that suspended students miss a substantial amount of instructional time, which results in poorer performance and greater disengagement from school. Meanwhile, out-of-school suspensions also lead to increased unmonitored time for youth, and research has suggested that suspended or expelled students are twice as likely to get arrested during the months they were suspended compared to the months they attended school.³¹ There is also evidence that, as with recidivism in criminal justice, multiple suspensions lead to an increase—not decrease—in antisocial behaviors and eventual contact with the criminal justice system.³² Thus, while many people tend to assume that harsh punishment is corrective, in reality harsh punishment in school exacerbates rather than ameliorates negative behaviors.

Others assume that suspending disruptive youth improves classroom and school-wide achievement by creating safer and more focused learning environments for the remaining students. Yet research indicates that among schools with similar student bodies, those with higher suspension rates tend to be lower achieving.³³ Research has also shown that one of the strongest predictors of suspension use is actually the principal’s attitude toward exclusionary discipline, which predicts student suspensions more strongly than do student background characteristics like race, gender, and socio-economic status.³⁴ Lastly, and importantly, there is generally a complete absence of research demonstrating that increased suspensions and expulsions are related to increases in achievement at the student or school level. In sum, the research findings are clear: despite the appeal and convenience they hold for some, exclusionary practices are failing students and schools in ways that hold serious academic consequences.

Economic Consequences

More and more, suspensions and expulsions are being shown to have adverse impacts on local and national economies, largely because of their negative effects on promotion and graduation rates in schools.³⁵ A recent study in Texas found that students having to repeat a

Being suspended even once in secondary school is associated with being between three to 10 times more likely to become involved with juvenile justice or to drop out of school.

There is no evidence in the research that increased suspensions and expulsions are related to increases in achievement for students or schools.

year in school because of suspensions resulted in an extra \$178 million annually in educational expenses state-wide.³⁶ Suspensions have also been quantified in terms of their relationship to dropping out, and consequently their cost to individuals and local communities. Specifically, school suspensions alone have been estimated to decrease the six-year graduation rates in the United States by approximately 12%.³⁷ It has also been shown that over the course of their working lives, a single high school dropout will cost more than \$163,000 in lost tax revenue alone, and a total of more than \$527,000 to their local communities due to lost taxes, lost wages, increased social support needs, and reduced contributions to private sector economic drivers (retail, investments, charity, etc.).³⁸ Because of these economic losses, suspensions in just one national 10th grade cohort have been shown to be responsible for \$35.7 billion in economic losses for society.³⁹ To put that loss in perspective, this figure is equal to approximately half of the 2016 federal expenditures for education in the United States.⁴⁰ Keep in mind that this is only one cohort of students, and thus each national graduating high school class will be \$35 billion below their capacity over their working lives because of school suspensions. These estimations suggest that not only are suspensions ineffective educational policy, they are also poor economic policy as well.

Racial Justice Consequences

Zero-tolerance policies involving expulsions and suspensions tend to be enacted disproportionately on youth of color. While African American students make up only 18% of all students nationally, they comprise nearly 40% of school suspensions. These statistics are even more staggering among African American youth with disabilities, as approximately 25% have been suspended at least once in the past academic year, compared to only 9% of Whites with disabilities. In addition, African American youth, while making up only 18% of all public school students in the United States, make up 27% of all students who encounter the criminal justice system via school-related law enforcement referrals or arrests.⁴¹ Perhaps most troubling is how early these disparities start; even in preschool, Black students have been shown to make up 48% of children who receive more than one out-of-school suspension.⁴²

It is important to note that racial disparities in school discipline have been shown to exist above and beyond what socioeconomic indicators would predict. A recent study showed that after controlling for economic indicators, special education status, and family structure, African American students were still three times more likely to be suspended than their White peers.⁴³ Nor are they simply the result of African American students more frequently committing serious acts of aggressive or disruptive behavior within the classroom. To the contrary, the vast majority of racial disparities in discipline referrals occur in discretionary offenses like “defiance,” and not in serious offenses like weapons or drugs. Also, some research has suggested that these populations of students are more likely to be arrested on school grounds for low-level infractions.⁴⁴ Ultimately, disciplinary decisions based on subjective behavioral judgments by school officials and school resource officers lead to disproportionate exclusionary and criminal justice responses for students of color specifically. Much of the disparities in these outcomes are among otherwise similar students, and thus are likely attributable to negative racial stereotypes and resultant implicit racial biases.

In sum, the overuse of exclusionary discipline approaches is not only a failed practice for advancing higher achievement for students and schools, it is also associated with substantial economic and social consequences for broader communities. These approaches create a strain on our collective resources while simultaneously laying the brunt of the individual costs on our most vulnerable student populations. From academic, economic, and justice perspectives alike, the over-reliance on exclusionary practices in American schools is a problem that must be remedied. In the next section, we examine the degree to which our local school districts have been relying on school suspensions, and the implications these practices hold for the educational and economic prospects of Greater Pittsburgh.

II. The Use of Exclusionary Practices in Allegheny County Districts

The detrimental effects of school suspensions dictate that local communities vigilantly monitor their usage.⁴⁵ And while there are several efforts underway to examine rates in the city of Pittsburgh specifically,^{46, 47} broader regional analyses of Greater Pittsburgh are currently very limited. Yet there is reason for more regional concerns: a statewide report by the Pennsylvania ACLU found that among Pennsylvania's approximately 500 traditional public school districts,⁴⁸ five of the 11 districts with the highest suspension rates statewide were in Allegheny County: Sto-Rox (#2), Woodland Hills (#3); Wilkinsburg Borough (#4); Pittsburgh (#5); and East Allegheny (#11).⁴⁹ That analysis, however, did not include charter networks and relied on federal Department of Education data from between 2010–2012. In further exploring this regional pattern, here we present an analysis using more recent local information from the Pennsylvania Department of Education's district-level enrollment data and Safe Schools Reports. The analysis includes data on the years between 2013 and 2016 for 51 Allegheny County traditional public and charter networks serving mainstream students.⁵⁰ The Safe Schools Reports provide school, district, county, and state-level data for suspension totals, as well as suspensions disaggregated by race. We used these reports to compare district-level rates for suspensions overall, racial disproportionalities in these suspension rates, and trends over time in both cases. Suspension rates are captured by the number of suspensions a district issues per every 100 students enrolled. This measure indicates the total number of suspensions given in proportion to the number of students a district has, including suspensions issued to repeat offenders. In interpreting these findings, it is important to note that because this measure includes repeat offenders, it is not a measure of how many unique individual students in a district were suspended, i.e. the percent of students suspended at least once. Analyses using the percent of students suspended at least once tend to understate the extent of suspension use in schools and districts, and thus underestimate the pervasiveness of harsh discipline in the culture.⁵¹ Suspensions per 100 measure gives us the truest idea of how reliant a district is on suspension usage because it incorporates all suspensions issued, including repeatedly suspending individual students, which is a particularly ineffective disciplinary approach.⁵²

Figure 1: Allegheny County districts with suspension rates above the state average. The average free or reduced price lunch rate for this group is 79% (Figures rounded to the nearest 1).

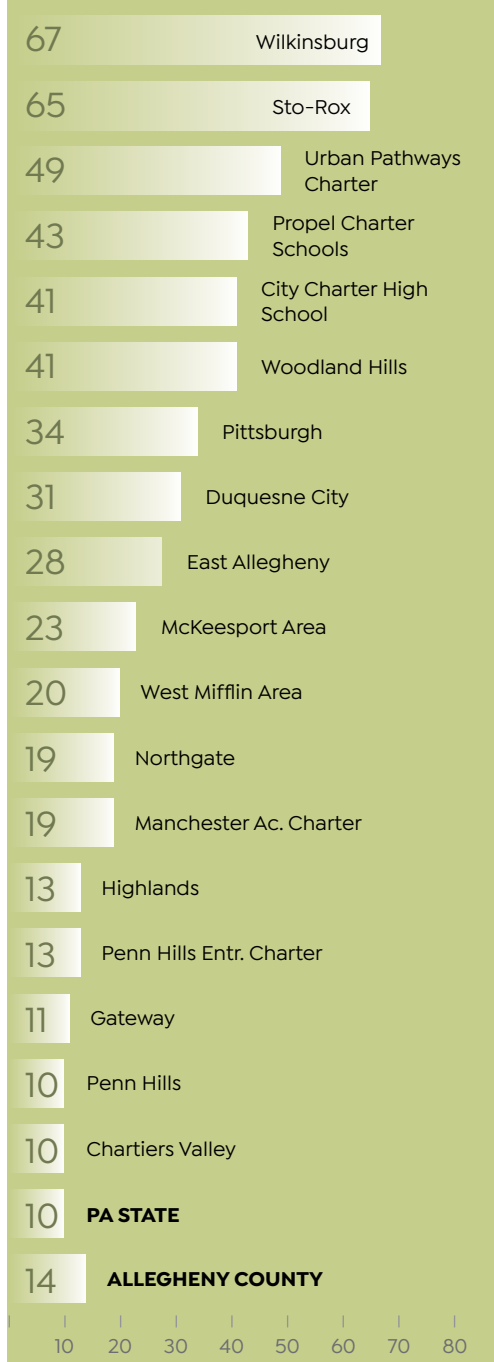


Figure 2: Allegheny County districts with suspension rates below the state average. The average free or reduced price lunch rate for this group is 35% (Figures rounded to the nearest 1).



Overall Suspension Rates

We use the state average suspension rate in Pennsylvania as a point of reference for local districts, and across Pennsylvania in 2015–2016 there were 9.7 suspensions for every 100 students. Locally, Allegheny County as a whole was above the state average in 2015–2016, at 13.7 suspensions per 100 students. Of the 51 traditional public districts and charter networks in Allegheny County, just over one-third (18 of 51) were over the state average in suspensions per 100 (Figure 1). Among them we see a clear top tier of two districts that had rates in 2015–2016 that were approximately seven times the state average: Wilkinsburg (67 per 100) and Sto-Rox (65 per 100).⁵³ Another six districts in our area had rates that were at least three times the state average in 2015–2016: Urban Pathways schools, Propel Schools, City Charter High, Woodland Hills, Pittsburgh, and Duquesne City.⁵⁴ It could be said that these districts represent the bulk of our urban core in Allegheny County, and thus collectively demonstrate much of the experience of students in our urban schools.

Over one-third of Allegheny County districts were above the state average for student suspensions in 2015–2016.

The national debate on school discipline has sometimes focused on differences between rates in charter and traditional districts. Our research findings would generally support the notion that charter school suspension rates in our area tend to be similar to those of schools with similar student demographics (typically urban schools), with just a few exceptions. Manchester Academic Charter School, while above the state average, was generally below the suspension rates of other schools serving majority African American populations in 2015–2016 (their student population was 96% African American). Urban Academy of Greater Pittsburgh (formerly Urban League of Pittsburgh) had exceptionally low rates of suspensions, being well below the state average at 4 suspensions per 100 in 2015–2016 (Figure 2). It should be noted that although Environmental Charter School also had notably lower school suspension rates than geographically proximal urban districts, their student composition has been much different than their neighboring urban core peers: Environmental Charter’s African American population was only 17% in 2015–2016, as compared to 53% in Pittsburgh, 65% in Woodland Hills, and 95% in Wilkinsburg. Demographically, they are best compared to majority White suburban districts and, in that regard their rates are similar to their demographic peers in terms of overall suspension use. Other research has suggested that nationally, urban charters often have fewer special needs students and English-language learners than do traditional urban districts, even when having comparable levels of impoverished students more generally.⁵⁵ While it is beyond the scope of this study to make comparisons that account for these important subgroups, future inquiries certainly should.

Figure 2 displays the schools that were below the state average in suspensions for 2015–2016, and together with Figure 1 they demonstrate an important general pattern. Across these districts we can see that with

Suspensions are especially harmful to children in poverty. Their higher prominence in urban schools compounds the challenges facing our most vulnerable students.

very few exceptions, those that suspend few students tend to be located in more affluent communities. In fact, while districts above the state mean for suspensions have on average 79% of their students receiving free or reduced price lunch, the low suspension districts in Figure 2 on average have only 35% of their students receiving lunch assistance. Thus, having high overall suspension rates tends to be a phenomenon more specific to schools in less-resourced communities, a pattern that is common nationally.

One popular rationalization for this pattern is that more affluent districts do not need to suspend as much; they have fewer behavior problems because their students face fewer challenges of poverty and associated environmental factors. We certainly recognize the unique challenges of high-poverty school contexts and the tireless work of urban educators, who are often unfairly expected to solve poverty. Still, the problem with accepting this rationalization is two-fold. First, because the reliance on suspensions is actually a hindrance and not a help to schools, their higher use in urban schools increases the cumulative risk of our most vulnerable students. In fact, suspension use may be uniquely harmful to children in poverty and of high-need backgrounds. As described by the American Academy of Pediatrics, “For students with major home life stresses, academic suspension in turn provides yet another life stress that, when compounded with what is already occurring in their lives, may predispose them to even higher risks of behavioral problems.”⁵⁶ Second, nationally and locally we see wide variation in how schools with similar student bodies use suspensions, and that there are schools in high-need communities that suspend very few students. Accordingly, it seems there are opportunities to reduce suspension rates in high-need districts, and lessen the degree to which our most vulnerable populations bear the brunt of the harm from overuse of failed practices.

Racial Disproportionality in Local Discipline Practices

As previously noted, a primary problem with the overuse of suspensions is that they tend to be disproportionately handed out to African American and Latino students. In a region like Greater Pittsburgh, with a sizable African American population and stark economic inequality along racial lines,⁵⁷ disparities in school discipline have the potential to severely undermine long-term efforts at inclusive social and economic progress.

To explore the extent of these disproportionalities, we individually examined the suspension rates for Black and non-Black students in local districts.^{58, 59} Our findings on racial disproportionalities in local suspension use were startling. Overall, in 2015–2016, Black students across Allegheny County were suspended at a rate of approximately 41.0 students per 100, as compared to only 5.6 suspensions for every 100 non-Black students. This difference equates to Black students in Allegheny County being subject to suspension rates that are 7.3 times higher than the rate of non-Black suspensions, a disparity that is above the statewide margin of 5.5 to 1. Overall, 68% of all suspensions in Allegheny County went to Black students.⁶⁰ In terms of individual districts, 73% (37 of 51) of Allegheny County districts had suspension rates for Black students that were at least double the rate for their non-Black counterparts. Our analysis suggests this severe regional racial disparity seems to be the result of two intersecting patterns that simultaneously exert negative effects on Black students: (1) exceedingly high overall suspension rates in urban districts, where Black students tend to be concentrated; and (2) exceptionally high racial disparity rates in suburban districts, where Black

Figure 3: Black vs. non-Black suspension disparity rates by the percent of Black students in Allegheny County districts.

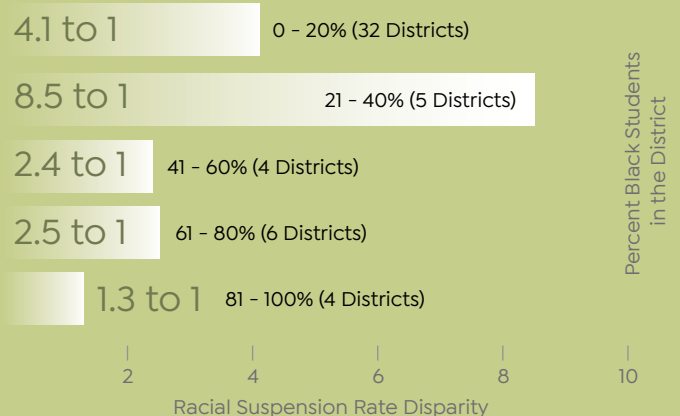


Figure 4: 2015–2016 Black vs. non-Black suspension rate ratios for districts with 1) at least 10 Black suspensions, and 2) where Black student rates were at least twice the rates of non-Black students. A complete listing can be found in Appendix A.



students are typically having a very different disciplinary experience than their peers. To the latter point, as seen in Figure 3, the greatest racial disparities in school suspension rates existed in districts that were mostly White but have critical masses of Black students—particularly where Black students were between 20% and 40% of the population. In these districts, on average the Black suspension rates were 8.5 times higher than those of other students.⁶¹ Districts where Black students were less than 20% of the population also tended to have notably high disparity rates, but the peaks were clearly in districts that were more integrated, though still largely White. Meanwhile, once districts were more than 40% Black, racial disparity rates actually tend to be lower, albeit in places that tended to have higher suspension rates overall. It is beyond the scope of this report to examine why Black students tend to be suspended at such dramatically higher rates than their non-Black peers in majority White suburban districts, but this pattern is well worth examining in future efforts.

Figure 4 illustrates how much higher the 2015–2016 Black suspension rates were than the non-Black rate in the districts with substantial disparities. Most extreme among these districts was Young Scholars of Western PA Charter (YSWPA), a single-school charter district of 283 students in 2015–2016.⁶² The district mirrored the demographic profile of many suburban districts in that it had a moderate but critical mass of Black students (75 of 283, or 27%). Also, as with demographically similar districts, YSWPA gave out relatively few suspensions among students overall; they recorded only 18 suspensions total in 2015–2016, and their rate was below the state average at only 6 suspensions per 100 students. However, 16 of 18 suspensions they did hand out went to their Black students. Consequently, the Black suspension rate in 2015–2016 at YSWPA was 21.3 per 100, while the rate for the rest of the students was just under 1 per 100 students. It should be noted that this result represents an outlier year for YSWPA; in previous years they had disparities that were more similar to other districts with similar racial compositions. However, between 2012–2013 and 2015–2016 there was a fairly consistent upward trend in YSWPA’s Black suspension rates, and that trend lends some credence to the need for particular concern over this recent extreme disparity.

This suspension rate for Black students in Allegheny County was over 7 times the rate for non-Black students in 2015–2016.

In over 70% of Allegheny County districts, the African American suspension rate was at least double that of non-Black students in 2015-2016.

Several other districts typify the pattern of exceedingly high racial disparity rates in majority White locales. The second highest notable racial disparity in the county was in Steel Valley, a district that was 33% Black in 2015-2016 and where the Black suspension rate was 7.8 times the rate of that for non-Black students. In addition to YSWPA and Steel Valley, nine other majority White districts had Black suspension rates were at least four times the non-Black rate in 2015-2016: North Hills (6.9 to 1); Montour (5.9 to 1); Plum (4.5 to 1); East Allegheny (4.5 to 1); West-Mifflin Area (4.4 to 1); Baldwin-Whitehall (4.3 to 1); Environmental Charter (4.1 to 1); Moon Area (4 to 1); and Highlands (4 to 1).

Despite these alarming disparity rates, most of these 11 districts do not suspend many students overall. Only three among them had overall suspension rates above the statewide average: East Allegheny (27.8 per 100), West Mifflin (19.9), and Highlands (13.5). In five of the remaining eight districts, however, while they are below the state average for all students, for Black students the disciplinary context was much different. In Steel Valley, the suspension rate for Black students was 16.7 per 100, while the rate for non-Black students was just 2.1 per 100. Similar extreme disparities were found in several other districts in 2015-2016: YSWPA (21.3 per 100 for Black, 1.0 per 100 for non-Black); Baldwin-Whitehall (15.5 for Black, 3.6 for non-Black); Montour (15.0 per 100 for Black, 2.5 per 100 for non-Black); Moon Area (13.1 compared to 3.3); and

Environmental Charter (10.2 for Black, 2.5 for non-Black). Two other districts had Black rates that were at least four times higher than non-Black rates, but where Black rates were still at or below the state average for all students: North Hills was 7.4 per 100 for Blacks, but only 1.1 per 100 for non-Blacks; and Plum was 9.0 per 100 for Blacks, and 2.0 per 100 for non-Blacks.

Even beyond these very disparate districts, disproportionality rates were generally the norm and not the exception in Allegheny County. While only 15 out of 51 (29%) of Allegheny County districts had suspension rates for non-Black students that were above the state average for all students, twice that many (30 out of 51, 59%) had Black suspension rates above that average. A complete list of Black and non-Black suspension rates for districts can be seen in Appendix A.

Overall, it is clear then that when it comes to racial disparities, even for districts that seemed to do well in limiting suspensions in general, African American students were still likely to be at heightened risks for damaging suspension effects. In this way, this racial disproportionality problem was not specific to high-need schools, traditional public schools, or charter schools. It seems to be a pervasive problem across the majority of school districts in our area. Moreover, what the combined analyses of both overall suspension rates and racial disproportionality rates ultimately tell us is that the overuse of suspensions is a massive regional problem with strong racial implications. In urban schools, which the majority of Black students attend, we saw much higher suspension rates overall. Yet, in majority White, more suburban schools, we saw dramatic racial disparities in suspensions that disfavored Black students. Considered together, more than 80% of districts in Allegheny County had a problem with either overall suspension rates, racial disproportionality issues, or both. Fortunately, many have already recognized and begun addressing these issues, and in our next section on trends we will see how local districts have fared over time in recent years.

More than 80% of districts in Allegheny County had a problem with either overall suspension rates, racial disproportionality in suspensions, or both.

Trends in Suspensions and Disproportionality

Despite the troubling overuse of suspensions across most of our region, an examination of trend data does suggest that positive changes have happened overall in recent years, including in some of our largest districts with sizable African American populations. Other districts, however, were moving in the opposite direction in the period examined here.

Trends in overall suspension rates

To examine trends over time, we compared districts' suspension rates in 2015-2016 to their rates three years earlier in 2012-2013.⁶³ These descriptive differences are subject to random fluctuations and outlier years, and thus should be interpreted with some caution. Still, in most cases these comparisons do represent general trends seen in year-by-year data, a complete listing of which is presented in Appendix B. Overall, the findings in the narrative below give us a valuable window into the general direction and size of changes in schools' suspension usage throughout the county.

Across Allegheny County suspension rates dropped by approximately 2.6 percentage points (a 16% rate reduction) between 2012-2013 and 2015-2016: from 16.3 per 100 in 2012-2013 to 13.7 per 100 county-wide in 2015-2016. This trend slightly outpaces the generally stagnant state-level rate in this same time period. Also, 41% (21 of 51) of Allegheny County districts reduced their overall suspension rates in this time period by at least one suspension per 100. Table 1 presents a summary of the districts with rates that were reduced by at least one full student per 100 between 2012-2013 and 2015-2016.⁶⁴

Among districts reducing suspensions, five had double-digit reductions in their absolute number of suspensions per 100 in this time span: Penn Hills (37 fewer per 100), Sto-Rox (30 fewer); Cornell Schools (21 fewer); Woodland

Table 1: Districts with suspension rate decreases of at least 1 full student per 100 between 2012-2013 and 2015-2016.

District	2012-2013 Suspensions per 100	2015-2016 Suspensions per 100	Reduction in rate per 100	Percent Reduction in Suspensions
ALLEGHENY COUNTY	16.3	13.7	-2.6	-16%
Penn Hills	47.09	10.4	-36.7	-78%
Sto-Rox	94.66	64.7	-30.0	-32%
Cornell	21.67	0.8	-20.9	-96%
Woodland Hills	60.52	41.1	-19.4	-32%
West Mifflin Area	37.59	19.9	-17.7	-47%
Pittsburgh	41.44	33.7	-7.7	-19%
East Allegheny	35.19	27.8	-7.4	-21%
Shaler Area	9.00	2.4	-6.6	-73%
Highlands	18.70	13.5	-5.2	-28%
Montour	8.02	3.2	-4.9	-61%
Manchester Ac. Charter	23.29	18.7	-4.6	-20%
Environmental Charter	6.86	3.8	-3.0	-44%
Avonworth	4.13	1.3	-2.8	-68%
Keystone Oaks	3.71	1.0	-2.7	-74%
Baldwin-Whitehall	6.70	4.2	-2.5	-37%
Plum Borough	4.36	2.4	-2.0	-45%
Brentwood Borough	3.12	1.3	-1.8	-57%
Riverview	2.14	0.5	-1.6	-76%
South Allegheny	5.27	3.7	-1.6	-30%
Moon Area	5.24	3.8	-1.4	-28%
Urban Pathways Charter	49.82	48.6	-1.2	-2%

Hills (19 fewer); and West Mifflin (18 fewer). Pittsburgh Public was just shy of a double-digit decrease over this span with a reduction of 8 per 100, although they had reduced their rate by 24.5 per 100 since 2011-2012.

Not surprisingly, several of these districts have made public and active commitments to reducing the use of suspensions through policy changes and the introduction of more promising practices to their behavior management strategies,⁶⁵ and future district-specific research should examine what mechanisms are helping schools effectively sustain decreases in their rates over time. It is worth noting that although Sto-Rox is down 30 suspensions per 100 since 2012-2013, they were still one of the very highest suspending districts in the county in 2015-2016. In fact, before the recent decline

suspensions, rates in Sto-Rox rose to 114 suspensions per 100 students in 2013-2014, including an astounding 161 suspensions per 100 for Black students specifically. Because their rates were so extreme in previous years, their reductions still left them at higher rates than all other districts on many suspension measures, including Black students still being suspended at rate of 93 suspensions per 100 in 2015-2016.

Conversely, 12 of 51 (24%) of districts had increases in suspension rates by 1 student per 100 or more between 2012-2013 and 2015-2016 (Table 2). Most notably, three districts and charter networks had suspension rates with double-digit increases in this time period: the Propel Schools increased by 28 students per 100, Duquesne City by 21 students, and Wilkinsburg by 15 students.⁶⁶ City Charter High's increase in this period was just shy of that threshold with an increase of approximately 9 suspensions per 100. Two other districts had less dramatic but still substantial increases that ultimately pushed them above the state average in suspensions for 2015-2016: Gateway and Chartiers Valley. YSWPA's steady climb in suspension rates was alluded to earlier, and South Park seemed to have an outlier year given that the previous 3 years they were between 2.6 and 4.4 suspensions per 100.

In other districts, increases may be somewhat negligible, either because their increase total is well within expected annual fluctuations, and/or because despite increases they are still below the state average in suspensions per 100. Districts with high and/or rising rates should closely scrutinize year-by-year data to turn any trends around given what we know about the negative consequences of suspensions for students, schools, and communities.

Table 2: Districts with increased suspension rates between 2012-2013 and 2015-2016.

	2012-2013 Suspensions per 100	2015-2016 Suspensions per 100	Increase in rate per 100	Percent increase in suspensions
Propel Schools	15.4	43.3	27.9	+181%
Duquesne City	9.9	31.0	21.1	+213%
Wilkinsburg	51.9	67.1	15.1	+29%
City Charter High School	31.8	41.3	9.5	+30%
Chartiers Valley	5.4	10.2	4.7	+87%
South Park	3.2	7.5	4.3	+135%
Urban Academy Charter	0.0	4.1	4.1	+400%
Young Scholars of WPA	2.2	6.4	4.1	+183%
Gateway	7.1	11.0	3.9	+54%
Clairton City	2.8	5.8	3.0	+108%
Elizabeth Forward	3.6	5.3	1.7	+46%
Penn Hills Entr. Charter	11.1	12.6	1.5	+14%

Table 3: Districts and networks in Allegheny County that have reduced suspensions for both Black and non-Black students, sorted by the change in suspension disparity (Figures rounded to the nearest 1).

District	Total Per 100 Rate Change over Time	Total Black per 100 Rate Change over Time	Total non- Black per 100 Change over Time	Change in Black White Difference
Penn Hills	-37	-52	-16	-36
West Mifflin Area	-18	-41	-10	-30
Shaler Area	-7	-32	-6	-26
Woodland Hills	-19	-28	-3	-25
Avonworth	-3	-26	-2	-25
Sto-Rox	-30	-40	-22	-18
Cornell	-21	-36	-19	-17
Baldwin-Whitehall	-2	-18	-1	-17
East Allegheny	-7	-15	-5	-9
Plum Borough	-2	-7	-2	-5
Montour	-5	-9	-5	-5
South Allegheny	-2	-5	-2	-4
Pittsburgh	-8	-8	-6	-3

41% of Allegheny County districts reduced their overall suspension rates between 2013 and 2016.

Table 4: Districts that lowered Black student suspension rates but saw no change in suspension rates for other students, sorted by Black suspension rate change (Figures rounded to the nearest 1).

District	Total Per 100 Rate Change over Time	Total Black Per 100 Rate Change over Time	Total non-Black Per 100 Change over Time	Change in Black White Difference
Deer Lakes	0	-22	0	-21
Environmental Charter	-3	-13	0	-14
Carlynton	-1	-8	0	-8
Moon Area	-1	-7	<-1	-6
North Allegheny	-1	-5	0	-4
Upper St. Clair	-1	-4	0	-4
Fox Chapel Area	0	-2	0	-1
South Fayette	0	-1	0	-1
West Jefferson Hills	0	-1	0	-2
McKeesport Area	<-1	-5	+2	-7

Race and Suspension Rate Trends

In addition to overall suspension rates, we also examined the degree to which race-specific trends were visible, and results show that county-wide the suspension rates for both Black and non-Black students decreased over this time span. The greater absolute decrease happened among Black students, with the overall suspension rate for this group decreasing by 7.4 percentage points, from 47.4 per 100 in 2012-2013 to 41.0 per 100 in 2015-2016 (a 14% rate reduction). The decrease for non-Black students was much more modest in absolute terms, but still notable—from 7.0 in 2012-2013 to 5.6 per 100 in 2015-2016. Statewide, there was a slight increase in the Black suspension rate in Pennsylvania over this time period—from 30.5 per 100 to 32.0 per 100—with no substantial change in non-Black rates.

To examine disparity trends in individual districts, below, we present four major observable patterns in terms of race and suspension rate trends.⁶⁷ The first two groups lowered racial disparities in suspensions in two different ways: (1) a group of 13 districts reduced suspensions for both Black and non-Black students; (2) a group of nine districts reduced rates for Black students, but not for others (in most cases because the rates for non-Blacks were already very low). Conversely, there were two other groups where disparities generally grew: (3) a group of six districts that saw increases in Black suspension rates while over the same period maintaining or lowering suspension rates for other students; and 4) a group of 10 districts that saw increased rates for both Blacks and non-Blacks, which typically led to larger disparities. A complete listing of suspension-rate disparities over time for all districts can be found in Appendix C.

Districts with reduced suspension rate disparities

Reductions with lower suspension rates for all. Overall, 13 districts across Allegheny County reduced suspension disparities between 2013 and 2016 by way of suspension reductions for both Black and non-Black students (Table 3).⁶⁸

Among this group, Penn Hills, West Mifflin, Shaler, Woodland Hills, and Avonworth saw declines in their differences between Black suspension rates and non-Black suspension rates by 25 or more suspensions per 100. Sto-Rox, Cornell, and Baldwin-Whitehall also experienced double-digit reductions in the absolute size of their disparities in the same

timeframe. Several other districts, including Pittsburgh, also had reductions in both groups that resulted in reductions in racial disparities. In all cases in this group, Black suspension rates were reduced at a faster pace than the non-Black rates, leading to overall reductions in disparities.⁶⁹

Lower suspension rates for Black students only.

A few other districts were successful at lowering rates for Black students without any marked changes in rates for non-Black students over the period examined. As shown in Table 4, there were nine such districts in Allegheny County, and in general, these districts tended to be suburban, mostly White, and with low suspension rates overall (none was above the state average in 2015-2016). It's worth noting that of this group, in 2015-2016, all of these districts also had Black suspension rates that were below the state average with the exception of Environmental Charter, which was just above it (10.2 Black suspensions per 100). In these districts, any work at reducing suspension rates would likely be especially beneficial to Black students, given that their non-Black rates were generally already so low as to have little tangible room for improvement.

Also seen in Table 4 is McKeesport Area, which has the distinction of being the only district that simultaneously experienced substantial reductions in Black suspensions rates alongside a small but noteworthy increase in non-Black rates.⁷⁰ In this case, the inverted trends do result in narrowed rate disparities, but not in ways one would hope. McKeesport Area should investigate why this pattern emerged across this timespan.

Districts with increased suspension rate disparities Higher suspension rates for Black students.

Six districts in Allegheny County saw increases in suspension rate disparities between 2013 and 2016 that were related to increases in rates for Black students alongside simultaneous reduced or unchanged rates for non-Black students (Table 5). Among these districts, the highest disparity rate increases in this three-year period belongs to Wilkinsburg (pre-secondary school merger with Pittsburgh Public), where the Black suspension rate increased by 19 per 100 while the non-Black rate decreased by 39 per 100. Another three districts—Highlands, YSWPA, and Northgate—had increases in Black suspension rates of between 13 and 25 students per 100 between 2012-2013 and 2015-2016, while simultaneously lowering non-Black rates in this same time period.

Finally, Steel Valley and North Hills saw relatively slight overall disparity expansions that were caused by modest increases in Black suspension rates alongside no changes in non-Black rates. As noted above, both of these districts are generally low in suspensions overall. For North Hills in particular, the Black suspension rate of 7 per 100 in 2015-2016 was still below the state average. Nevertheless, Steel Valley and North Hills had two of the largest suspension rate disparities in the county in 2015-2016. Thus, any trends in the wrong direction should certainly merit internal scrutiny in those districts.

Table 5: Districts with substantial increases in Black suspension rates in 2015-2016, along with either decreases or no change in non-Black suspension rates, sorted by disparity increases (Figures rounded to the nearest 1).⁷¹

District	Total Per 100 Rate Change over Time	Total Black Per 100 Rate Change over Time	Total non-Black Per 100 Change over Time	Change in Black White Difference
Wilkinsburg	15	+19	-39	+58
Northgate	-1	+25	-5	+29
Highlands	-5	+13	-7	+20
Young Scholars of WPA	4	+17	-1	+17
Steel Valley	1	+3	0	+3
North Hills	0	+3	0	+3

Table 6: Districts that have increased in both Black and non-Black suspension rates since 2012-2013 (Figures rounded to the nearest 1).

District	Total Per 100 Rate Change over Time	Total Black Per 100 Rate Change over Time	Total non-Black Per 100 Change over Time	Change in Black White Difference
Propel Charter Schools	28	35	13	+22
South Park	4	15	4	+11
Chartiers Valley	5	9	5	+4
Gateway	4	7	3	+4
Clairton City	3	3	3	<1
City Charter High School	9	5	15	-10
Duquesne City	21	15	35	-20

Higher suspension rates for all. Seven districts had substantial increases in suspension rates for both Black and non-Black students between 2012-2013 and 2015-2016 (Table 6). In five of these districts, the Black rate growth outpaced the non-Black rate, resulting in widening racial disparities over the same period. Among them, Propel Schools demonstrated the largest increase in overall rates and in Black rates. In fact, Propel Schools, a majority African American charter network with an urban district profile, had consistent suspension rate increases for both Black and non-Black students over each of the four years examined here. In 2015-2016, Propel still had total suspension rates that were generally comparable to their urban core peers, but because they are one of just a few districts or school networks that saw increases in suspension rates for all students over this period, they could substantially outpace other similar districts in the near future if this trend continues. Disproportionately increasing rates at South Park, Chartiers Valley, and Gateway are also concerning. Each of these districts had Black suspension rates that were

Racial disparity in school discipline is a pervasive problem across the majority of school districts in our area.

Increasing suspensions is a counterproductive approach to promoting achievement.

well above the state average for all students in 2015–2016, while Chartiers Valley also had a non-Black rate that was above that average.

Additionally, two districts experienced increased rates for both Black and non-Black students, but with substantially larger increases for non-Black students. In Duquesne City, between 2012–2013 and 2015–2016 the non-Black suspension rate increased by 35 students per 100; while in the same period, the Black suspension rate increased by 15 per 100. At City Charter High School the suspension rate for non-Black students increased by 15 per 100, while the suspension rate for Black students increased by 5. The net results present an unusual trend of increased suspension rates for all, but with narrowed disparities. In these districts there should be strong attention to disciplinary approaches overall.

In sum, while there was an overall reduction county-wide in the racial disparity rates for suspension use between 2013 and 2016, there was also wide variation across individual districts in the direction and size of changes seen. A large number of districts have reduced their Black suspension rates, with the majority of that group also reducing rates for non-Black students overall. Others had non-Black suspension rates that were already so low they were largely unchanged while Black rates fell. In most cases across these districts, disparity rates narrowed as overall rates were reduced. In another set of districts, Black suspension rates increased while non-Black suspension rates were unchanged or decreased. In a fourth group, rates increased for all students in ways that typically exacerbated disparities. In these last two groups, we suggest major efforts at examining the mechanisms for these rate increases in a time when overwhelming evidence supports the reduction in suspension rates. Lowering the rates in these districts is imperative to our regional educational, social, and economic aspirations.

Local Impact of the Overuse of Suspensions

As noted previously, national research has shown that suspensions have serious negative academic and economic consequences for students individually and communities collectively. As such, here we sought to examine the impact of suspension use on our local schools and economy.

Local academic impact. In terms of academics, we sought to determine whether schools with higher suspension rates had higher or lower achievement outcomes after accounting for district demographics (i.e., race and socio-economic status). Our findings suggest that across multiple analyses, all relationships between suspensions and achievement outcomes were negative, suggesting that increasing suspensions is likely a counterproductive approach to promoting district-wide achievement in our region.⁷² For graduation rates specifically, our findings suggest that among districts with comparable student demographics in 2015–2016, a 10-point difference in suspensions per 100 was associated with an approximately 3% lower graduation rate (see regression results in Appendix D). When combined with what we know about the effects of suspensions on the academic performances of individual students, the evidence is strong that in our local region, our over-reliance on school suspensions is a failing educative approach for our students and schools.

Local economic impact. We also utilized emerging techniques to estimate what school suspensions are costing our local economy. As stated earlier, scholars have estimated that approximately 12% of the dropout rate nationally is associated with school suspensions.⁷³ Locally, available data suggest that 480 students dropped out of school in Allegheny County in 2014–2015. If 12% of those dropouts resulted from suspension experiences, then a total of approximately 58 students in Allegheny County who would have otherwise graduated dropped out in 2014–2015 because of school suspensions. National estimates tell us that over the course of a working career, an individual who drops out of school costs the local economy \$163,000 in lost tax revenue, and \$527,000 in other social costs over that same period (reduced consumer spending, additional social supports required, etc.). By these calculations, school suspensions in this single cohort of dropouts in Allegheny County will cost over \$9 million in lost tax revenue and more than \$30 million in total social costs over the course of their careers. Moreover, these

estimates are for only one cohort, and do not account for the fact that there is a new cohort every year. These costs quickly become astronomical, and they are also greatest for African American students, who in 2015–2016 represented 68% of all suspensions in Allegheny County. It seems clear that this unseen cost of school suspensions poses a barrier to our region’s economic growth, and in particular to our racially inclusive economic efforts.

Summary of Local Findings

The overuse of school suspensions represents a pressing and costly problem to the Greater Pittsburgh region. More than one-third of our traditional public and charter districts have suspension rates above the state average. In nearly three-fourths of our districts, Black students are suspended at rates that are at least twice the rates of non-Black students. Across the county overall, the suspension rate for Black students is more than seven times the suspension rate for non-Black students. Overall, more than 80% of local districts have issues with either high suspension rates, high disproportionality rates, or both. Thus, the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices is not simply an issue of poverty, urbanicity, or tough schools with tough kids. It is a region-wide problem, and one that disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable students.

These issues are not only concerning from a moral perspective, they also have very real academic and economic consequences. We have seen that beyond the costs to individual students, school suspensions are associated with lower test scores and graduation rates

at the district level, even after accounting for population demographics. Moreover, because suspensions are associated with substantially higher dropout rates, the economic cost to the region is severe; one year’s suspension-related dropouts alone will eventually cost the local economy more than \$30 million, with the largest burden falling on our African American students, who receive 68% of all suspensions in Allegheny County in 2015–2016. However, the economic and social consequences mean that we are all bearing the cost of our collective over-reliance on ineffective disciplinary approaches.

The good news here is that there are some positive trends in terms of both overall suspension rates and racial disparities in the region. Many of the districts that showed the most improvement made well-documented policy and practice shifts in the years analyzed here. And while it is beyond the scope of this report to do in-depth analysis on individual districts, our understanding from both these trend data and from our knowledge of the field nationally is that schools and districts that make intentional and purposeful efforts to move in the direction of change can have significant and immediate impacts. Conversely, however, several districts seem to be on the opposite course, experiencing sizable increases in overall suspension use and/or racial disparities. It is unclear why these rates are climbing in the face of overwhelming evidence of the ineffectiveness of such approaches. Regardless, below, we present a synthesis of emerging practices that have been demonstrated to reduce suspension rates in ways that are sustainable for school districts and their staff over the long term. Ultimately, we believe our region is primed for a large-scale shift in discipline practices, a shift that has an invaluable potential to hasten our progress in education, economics, and racial justice.

The overuse of exclusionary discipline practices is a region-wide problem that disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable students.

III. Solutions: Alternatives to Exclusionary Approaches

In light of the problems described with relying on suspensions as a default discipline strategy, a great deal of work has been conducted recently across the nation to identify alternative discipline approaches that can be effectively used in schools. To support our own region in moving forward in this area, we have scanned this literature, met with leading practitioners, and have performed site visits to urban schools in the trenches of this work. The results of these efforts, presented below, informed what we call the Just Discipline and Climate Model: an integrated approach to school discipline and climate that acknowledges the resources needed to support the sustainable implementation of district-wide policies, school-wide practices, and targeted behavioral approaches necessary for successful school behavioral transformations (Figure 5). To be sure, reforming discipline approaches is very challenging work, and it takes time and patience as schools work through what are ultimately cultural shifts. However, we have also seen that this work can be done well when the commitment and necessary resources are in place, and the Just Discipline Model has the potential to prove successful for districts in constructive and sustainable ways.

Note: It's About More than Restorative Practice

Much of the discussion around school discipline reform involves the notion of restorative practice. Restorative practice is an alternative discipline approach that departs from the punitive model and instead uses a community-driven method to resolve conflicts where they arise, and to empathetically engage an offender in recognizing and repairing harm when it is caused. When done properly, restorative practices first establish a strong community and web of relationships that can then be drawn on to restore connectedness and make amends when a community value is violated. Indeed, restorative practice is an essential component of an effective discipline system. However, cultivating effective behavioral climates also takes much more than a single add-on disciplinary program in the way that restorative practices are sometimes conceived. Instead, this work takes sustained and multi-faceted efforts at school climate change, which create the fertile ground necessary for restorative justice and other relational approaches to take root. Accordingly, the model presented here is layered, and the key to its success is its hierarchical design.

The components at the bottom of the model are foundational to the success of the entire program, and every layer can only have the desired effects if the steps beneath it are reasonably fulfilled. Just below, we describe each of its components in detail, from the bottom up.

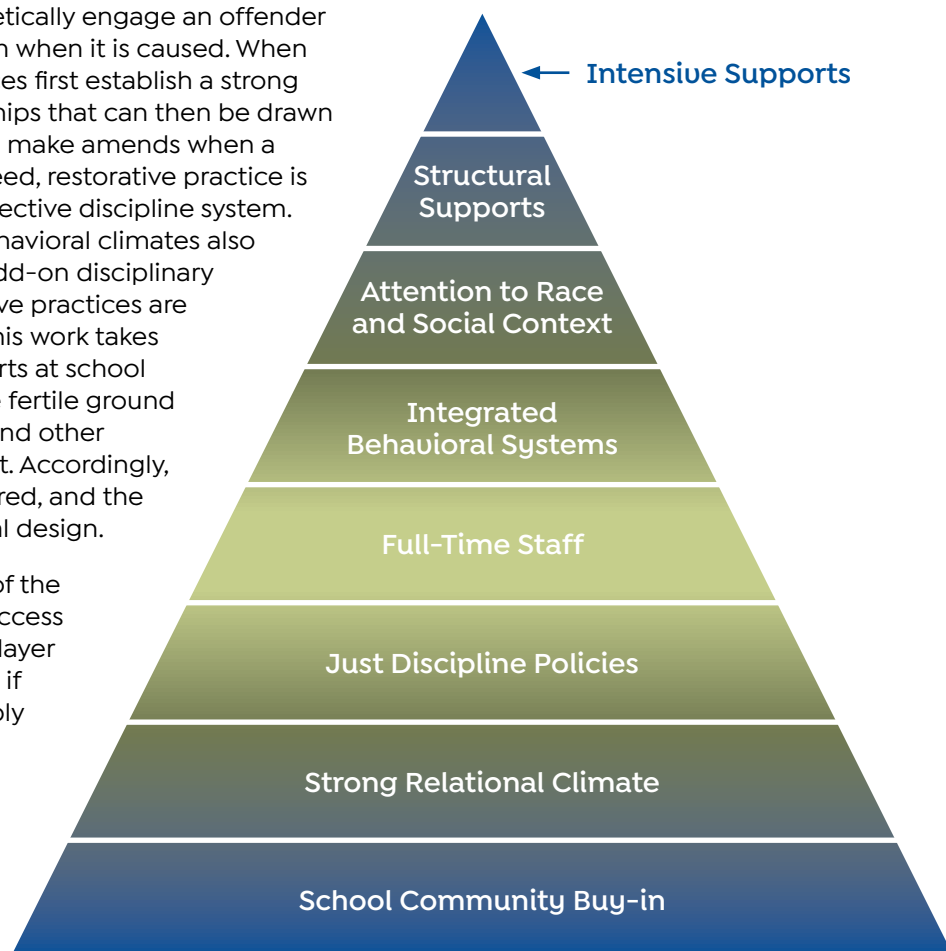


Figure 5: Just Discipline hierarchical model of behavioral and climate change in schools.

1. School Community Buy-In

Using restorative practice and other relational approaches effectively does not simply mean implementing talking-circle mediations at your school in response to behavioral problems. These approaches require broader cultural shifts, and those shifts cannot be implemented simply as a top-down mandate from the school or district leadership. As one school leader notes, top-down programs to change discipline are “dead in the water.”⁷⁴

Top down programs
to change discipline are
“dead in the water.”

Instead, implementing just discipline and climate starts with sharing the concepts behind the new practices with staff and community members, and soliciting their feedback on any potential plan. For this reason, while there is a basic, common conceptual framework presented here on what we consider just discipline approaches, the details of implementation can be tailored to individual school and community settings. The best ways to communicate the philosophy and to solicit feedback from key stakeholders include open discussions with teachers and staff in professional development in-services, letters to and meetings with students and families, meetings with student leadership groups, and community forums. While district and school leaders may determine that the general direction of moving toward relational and restorative reforms is not negotiable, the design process should be co-constructive, giving stakeholders a chance to help customize the program to their community contexts.

For teachers and school staff, leaders must also account for the potential of *initiative fatigue*, whereby school personnel are overburdened with new initiative after new initiative, and the accumulation of administrative and performance responsibilities that do not coalesce with their core work with students. In these instances, school and district leaders may have to reevaluate the initiative and administrative burdens placed on teachers and staff, and if necessary cut back on stale or ineffective programs to make way for these new approaches. Overall, when the need for buy-in is acknowledged and concrete steps are taken, rather than the feelings of burden and skepticism that meet many new initiatives in schools, the just discipline approach can begin with excitement and energy from the community stakeholders.

2. Relational Climate Focus

Once the community buys into the new approach that they helped develop, efforts at school discipline reform should then commit fundamental attention to school climate and culture. Most practitioners and researchers agree that a culture of strong student-teacher and student-student relations in a school are the building blocks for any pre-packaged approaches to discipline reform. To put it plainly, the key to “restorative” practice is, as the name suggests, restoration of something that previously existed but was harmed by a particular violation. As one practitioner notes, in order for restorative practices to work, “you actually have to have something you want to restore.”⁷⁵ In the school context, positive relationships and culture need to exist prior to an infraction, so that when a violation occurs, it is a disruption of the communal fabric. As such, committing to a focus on relational climate is a prerequisite for effective use of restorative practices or other more relational discipline approaches.

Central to the climate shift is fostering a sense of community, or even “family,” as some have called it, across the school. School pride is something that most learning communities embrace in one form or another, and just discipline approaches are similar in that they cultivate this sense of belonging through relationships and connectedness in the community. Senses of belonging and unity can be cultivated through events at the grade- and/or school-level, depending on what the school can accommodate. Schools have implemented regular assemblies (weekly or monthly) designed to celebrate student achievements, discuss issues relevant to the school community in an inclusive way, and add an element of fun to the student experience. Interested students and teachers, including student leadership groups or faculty who are leading school climate efforts, can support and help plan these meetings. Other efforts may include special school-wide activities and contests, such as essay or poetry writing, or donation campaigns that promote spirit and connectedness with the school. As discussed below, these relational efforts also coalesce nicely with the school-wide programming of many other behavioral interventions like positive behavioral intervention and supports (PBIS).

At the smaller group and interpersonal levels, community-building and support circles, key features of restorative practice, are excellent ways to build a sense of inclusion and care for students. It cannot be emphasized enough that restorative

“You actually have to have something you want to restore.”

practices do not start with responding to serious infractions in the community; they start with community-building efforts, including community circles that can feature simple and fun questions like, “If you were a car, which car would you be and why?” Other circles can be used to give student voice to school-wide issues, like deciding the choice of theme for the winter ball, how to address vandalism in the bathroom, or even discussing news stories or troubling events off-campus that affect the school community. These types of circles help build the kind of community or family environment that can make students less inclined to engage in poor behaviors, particularly when they know those behaviors compromise the bonds and belonging they collectively share. These efforts also fundamentally serve as the foundation on which purely restorative processes build when infractions do arise.

Lastly, students need to feel connected to adults in the building. They need to feel like the adults around them are personally invested in their life and success, that they will be treated fairly, and that these are relationships they want to maintain and not disrupt. Some faculty may need support in this aspect of the work, and we recommend that professional development investments be made in helping faculty who may be instructionally strong, but less effective in terms of building individual relationships with students. In all, relationships are absolutely essential to just discipline approaches. At the start of this cultural shift, schools may want to invest in surveys of students and teachers to ascertain their perceptions of the relational climate at their schools in the student-student and teacher-student domains.

3. Just Discipline Policies

Much of the problem with the overuse of suspensions—particularly as it pertains to racial disparities in discipline—rests in their usage in response to more low-level, and typically more subjective rules infractions such as willful defiance, dress code violations, or—ironically—attendance issues.⁷⁶ These less-severe infractions tend to comprise the majority of all suspensions in schools. In 2015–2016, nearly 70% of suspensions in Allegheny County were for issues related to “conduct,” and not more severe violations like violence, drugs, or weapons. Suspensions are appealing in part because they are convenient. Often, when a student is presenting with a challenging behavior, a suspension provides an immediate relief to the problem by removing that student from the environment, creating temporary ease for the teacher and even for fellow students. Moreover, when policies don’t require school staff to think differently and more judiciously about suspensions, it is harder to shift away from them because of how expedient they can be at providing short-term relief. Nevertheless, suspensions for minor infractions create a slippery slope because they are at the heart of punitive cultures in schools that are known to negatively impact individual and school-wide achievement. The discretionary nature of these smaller infractions also tends to disfavor students of color, with implications for racial achievement disparities and the school-to-prison pipeline.

For these reasons, districts and schools should adjust their policies as necessary to reduce or eliminate the possibility that minor offenses will lead to suspensions. Local advocacy groups in Greater Pittsburgh have been pushing for such changes in codes of conduct.⁷⁷ Allegheny County districts, including Pittsburgh Public Schools, have undertaken steps to revise their codes to reflect the need for more effective approaches to non-violent, non-drug related student behavioral problems.⁷⁸ Districts that do undertake these policy efforts can immediately begin reducing their suspension rates. Once policies are in place at the district level, schools will have a strong incentive to master the relational and restorative work that actually makes these more humane policies manageable and sustainable.

In addition, just discipline policies need to occur at the state and federal levels. States can and should undertake school discipline reviews in ways similar to the federal Office of Civil Rights, holding districts and schools to certain discipline reporting and

action standards. These standards should include numbers that are disaggregated to monitor groups that have been historically tied to overexposure to exclusionary practices, and there should be accuracy checks to assure the integrity of reporting. Such data should be also be made publicly available to families, advocates, and researchers, and should be sensitive to interactions between race, gender, and disability categorizations—three factors with distinct intersections that are known to be highly associated with harsh discipline. Indeed, disciplinary issues among females are vastly understudied, even while the proportion of females in the juvenile justice system is increasing.⁷⁹ Also often overlooked are unique challenges that Black girls face in particular that have implications for disciplinary and justice outcomes, such as heightened risks of sexual abuse and being viewed as adult-like more often than are White or male peers of the same age.⁸⁰ Additionally, charter schools in Pennsylvania should not be exempt from this reporting under any policy acts.⁸¹ Finally, as we will see in the next section, policymakers on school boards, city councils, and legislatures should assure that schools have the resources they need for just discipline initiatives.

4. Full-Time Staff for Just Discipline Programming

Having the proper buy-in, cultural focus, and humanizing policies in place essentially serve as the bedrock of just discipline and climate success. Programmatically, however, stopping at the discipline policy-level, which is what happens initially in some districts, is problematic in that it essentially takes away things that feel like tools for managing behaviors without providing viable alternatives. Thus, in tandem with these policy shifts, districts should turn their attention to structured programmatic features that specifically address relational climate and behavior management. At this point, restorative practice programming is a good place to start. The Federal Departments of Education and Justice have jointly stated that restorative practices “promote strong interpersonal relationships and community

building. They also provide students with meaningful opportunities to be accountable for their actions and responsible for helping to make their school a safe and nurturing place...Adults learn to employ a continuum of preventive restorative practices, most of which address problems that could spark misbehavior if left unattended.”⁸² In terms of effective implementation, educators that have been successful implementing restorative practices suggest that there is perhaps no more important component to this work than full-time staff implementing it in schools. Asking existing school staff to lead this work on top of their current duties may get the process started, but it is not a long-term solution for enduring discipline and climate shifts. These add-on approaches do not provide sufficient human capital for the design and implementation of these programs, and may result in burn-out of the designated staff member. This lack of adequate human resources is often why many discipline reform initiatives struggle to provide programming that will sustain meaningful suspension reduction policy mandates.

Instead, individual schools need their own full-time personnel leading restorative behavioral work and other relationally oriented approaches to climate. Schools that are effective often have one or more restorative practice facilitators that work with students and staff in a variety of capacities, including implementing school climate activities and initiatives, training faculty and staff in restorative approaches, responding to acute behavioral cases and leading healing circles, providing professional development on understanding students in context, and supporting student leaders in restorative and community-building practices. Restorative practitioners are different from behavioral specialists, who are specifically trained to work intensively with consistently challenging individual students to help them process and manage problematic behaviors. Restorative practitioners’ work is also distinct from the counseling, advocacy, and support procurement that school social workers may provide. School social workers deal with more acute student and family issues that may transcend what restorative approaches are designed to do. Rather, restorative practice facilitators are focused on community, climate, and relational dynamics

Restorative programs
are effective because of
strong full-time personnel.

within the school in ways that will be effective at changing and maintaining behavioral norms in the student body. They are keepers of the school culture that undergirds the school's behavioral fabric, and work alongside school social workers, counselors, and behavioral specialists to support individual and collective student outcomes.

With such personnel in place, community building and restorative practices can be a relief rather than a burden to teachers because of the extra supports they are provided. Having these personnel is critical to effective just discipline reform. To be sure, the resources that are necessary to do this work adequately will invariably be weighed against other priorities in an era of reduced state funding for public education in Pennsylvania. That said, many schools nationally have seen that the behavioral and cultural transformations associated with having these restorative practitioners have led to the academic improvements desired, such that these staff are a fruitful investment. These positions may initially be supported by individual schools' discretionary funds, or by foundations and other philanthropic sources. However, districts and governing bodies should make it part of a long-term strategy to allocate sufficient human resources to establish restorative practitioners in their individual schools.

5. Integrated Behavioral Systems

Prior to considering restorative practices or other emerging alternative discipline approaches, many prospective schools already have one or more programs dedicated specifically to improving the school's behavioral norms. These programs include social emotional learning curricula, tiered behavioral strategies like positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), anti-bullying efforts, and character/value education curricula. Many of these programs can be used in combination each other and with relational discipline approaches like restorative practices, but schools often invest in just one of these approaches in hopes that it by and of itself will be transformational.⁸³ In conversation with leading practitioners, our findings suggest that these programs are more likely to have lasting success when they are interwoven as systems with distinct but related contributions to just discipline approaches and strong relational climates.

When it comes to race,
“You can’t fix what you don’t
look at.”

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) programs, PBIS or school-wide PBIS (SWPBIS), and restorative practices each tackle unique aspects of climate and culture. Socio-emotional learning explicitly instructs students in developmentally appropriate ways on the interpersonal and intrapersonal understandings that undergird behaviors. Positive behavioral interventions and supports promote clear expectations around positive behavioral norms, often with reward systems for prosocial and conscientious community membership. Restorative practices are fundamentally designed to build community, promote holistic and contextualized understandings of student behaviors, and effectively restore relationships after perceived and actual offenses. Each of these types of programs can provide a distinct essential function geared toward establishing strong behavioral and relational norms in a school, and it would be unwise to expect any one of these programs to independently do the work of the others. In many cases, a lead team of teachers can be developed to assist school administrators in leveraging and coordinating the use of various programs where they coexist within a school.

As part of this integrated behavioral system, schools need to be attentive to foundational classroom management skills in their staff as well. The effectiveness of add-on behavioral management systems is generally predicated on teachers being well-trained and supported in classroom management. Schools and districts should not expect PBIS, restorative practice, or other behavioral systems to be deeply effective if the classroom management in their spaces is ineffective. We recommend schools thoughtfully approach the integration of these programs in an overall climate improvement plan that complements efforts toward effective classroom management.

6. Attention to Race and Social Context

While the rising tide philosophy would suggest that the introduction of just discipline approaches is good for all students, studies show that overall suspensions or expulsions can be reduced in schools without any significant changes to the racial disproportionality in discipline outcomes.⁸⁴ These shortcomings typically happen because of lack of attention to racial issues in reform efforts. When it comes to race and school discipline reforms, Carter and colleagues say plainly, “You can’t fix what you don’t look at.”⁸⁵

The challenge here is in the fact that the root of many racial discipline disparities, as mentioned previously, is in implicit biases that are largely a result of pervasive stereotypes in society.⁸⁶ Yet while the vast majority of educators would denounce any racist views and student treatments, the research is clear that African American students are targeted and referred for discipline problems more frequently and receive harsher punishments than their non-Black peers who commit similar infractions, even among students with otherwise similar backgrounds. The pervasiveness of implicit racial biases requires that schools start acknowledging the effects these beliefs have on students of color. This can happen through professional development, where staff take readily available bias tests as a baseline for further conversations. Additional activities can include practitioners reflecting on how their work might manifest unconscious—or even conscious—race beliefs. This exploration must then be supported by disaggregated data reviews that make localized racial patterns plain, and findings from those reviews should be examined at the classroom, school, and district levels. Such findings could lead to additional investments in known culturally responsive classroom management and school climate approaches, including cultural congruency of instruction, and the combination of high expectations and strong interpersonal support for students of color.

We also suggest that professional development be highly infused with efforts toward understanding the roots of racial inequality in America, and exploring White privilege. Many traditional and alternative educator training programs do a poor job covering issues of racial injustice, particularly in moving beyond slavery and discussing 20th-century mechanisms that continue to have devastating

consequences on communities and families of color, including intentional economic suppression,⁸⁷ exclusions from homeownership,⁸⁸ and mass incarceration.⁸⁹ These omissions make it possible for educators and school support staff to undervalue the role that racial justice plays in their work, even as they may paradoxically endorse ideals of social justice. These racial justice issues must be elevated in training programs so that efforts toward discipline reforms are grounded in a true understanding of certain students’ elevated vulnerability to unjust discipline practices.

Finally, critical to implementing racially just discipline efforts is having a teaching staff that has strong representation from the racial groups that the school serves. Recent studies have shown that the race-match between teachers and students does affect the interpretation of student behaviors in important ways, and that as a result, Black students benefit from having more Black teachers on the staff.⁹⁰ As cited earlier, rates of anti-Black biases are much lower among Blacks than they are among Whites (although they do exist). All of these findings point toward employing more faculty of color in our schools as an important approach to reducing racial disproportionality in school discipline.

7. Structural Supports: Data and Scheduling

The structural skeleton supporting just discipline and climate implementation is composed of data systems and scheduling. Nuanced data systems should monitor all manner of disciplinary actions, including referrals, in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, alternative school transfers, and expulsions. Each of these outcomes should be disaggregated by race and by other vulnerable subgroup delineations to the degree possible. For office referrals in particular, such systems must be able to capture detailed information about the nature of the initial referral, as well as what best practices were used to address the situation before the student was sent to the office. These types of data systems are powerful tools for accountability within schools. It is not uncommon for example to find that a large portion of a school’s discipline referrals come from a small number of the same classrooms that are struggling with management. With the proper data systems in place, school leaders can effectively address these issues, including any disproportionalities involved.

Scheduling modifications give just discipline program features the actual space and time in which to operate. Key scheduling components to just discipline include: (1) having a common planning time for teachers to talk about students specifically and to share behavioral management strategies that seem to be effective with particular youth; and (2) incorporating regular relationship and community-building structures—like advisory periods or regular all-school meetings—into school activities. These mechanisms are essential and likely require adjustments to existing school calendars and other timetables to facilitate effective discipline and climate reforms.

8. Intensive Behavioral, Emotional, and Mental Health Supports

Lastly, when we talk to teachers and school personnel, they are often optimistic about the positive impact that using more relational and less punitive approaches to discipline will have for the vast majority of their students. Yet many also acknowledge that there are still students they are serving in their schools whose needs transcend these discipline reforms, and who may require intensive mental health, social service, or physical health supports. School leaders have also lamented the lack of adequate social work and counseling staff to address severe issues among this segment of their student body.⁹¹ Others have pointed out

that investments in social workers in particular can improve schools' preventative abilities to identify students in need of mental health supports before violence occurs.⁹² Thus, more in-depth supports with the least academic restrictiveness should also be part of an overall approach to behavior and climate reforms for the small proportion of students that need them. We recommend asking school leaders what resources are necessary to meet these acute needs in their schools, and then working collectively as a region to provide these resources through policy allocations, philanthropy, university and private sector partnerships, or other means.

A word of caution on addressing acute student needs: care must to be taken not to over-label students as having severe issues without culturally informed perspectives. The dangerous tendency to over-identify vulnerable students—especially students of color and LGBTQ students—as emotionally and/or cognitively disabled is well documented. In reality, the number of students who have issues that transcend relational and just climate initiatives is typically a small proportion of the school, even in challenging school contexts. As such, schools should be cautious with labels, particularly given the difficulty students have breaking back into mainstream academic environments once they are diverted from them.

Summary of Recommendations

Taken together, these eight components of the Just Discipline and Climate Model are informed by research and best practices in the field, and they build on one another hierarchically to facilitate lasting transformations in school discipline and school climate. In essence, this approach first treats a common source of widespread behavior problems in schools: poor relational culture. This primary prevention work serves to make behavioral issues less frequent, and then is supplemented with relationally responsive behavioral programming that addresses difficulties as they arise. The work is not easy, but it is certainly possible and is occurring throughout the country. It is time to build more significantly on what a few local districts have started, and to fully develop this or similar models throughout our region's schools.

IV. Limitations and Future Directions

There are a few important limitations to this report that we believe can be addressed in future efforts.

First, the data in this report are subject to the accuracy with which they were reported to the state. In our compilation of data, we did find inconsistencies that call into question the fidelity with which this reporting is being done and/or monitored. One limitation resulting from these report inconsistencies is that we were unable to analyze levels and trends in different suspension types across the region (i.e. conduct vs. drugs vs. violence, etc.). It seemed from our review of the data that one district might report the bulk of their suspensions to be conduct related (which is what we would expect based on the literature), while another district might report zero conduct suspensions and instead have a conspicuously large number of violence suspensions (suggesting they characterize their common infractions as violence). These inconsistencies in reporting made it impossible to analyze suspension types reliably, although it is certainly a key question for future research. Ultimately, the accuracy of this report—and all reports based on these state data for that matter—is contingent on the integrity of the data that districts report to the state. At the state level, there should be increased scrutiny for how schools report these data so as not to undermine the purpose of collecting them in the first place.

Second, because findings here are compiled at the district level, they are not sensitive to what happens in individual schools or levels of schooling within those districts (elementary, secondary, etc.). Our intent here has been to provide regional coverage and not targeted school-by-school examinations of issues. There are current school-by-school efforts

that target local urban districts specifically, but future research at the school level should be conducted across the region. Third, race and gender intersectionality, a critically important dynamic of school discipline, could not be examined here because of the lack of available intersectional data in the Safe Schools Reports. These intersectional delineations should certainly be accounted for in future iterations of these reports from the Pennsylvania Department of Education. More immediately, emerging work should be conducted using individual-level data sets to explore the nature of these patterns across key intersections.

Lastly, this report cannot account for the use of alternative schools or extensive in-house suspensions in districts as a way to reduce out-of-school suspensions while still restricting access to classroom learning. In other words, it is impossible to tell from these data whether districts are artificially lowering their suspension rates by shuffling students to exclusionary situations that still have many of the negative drawbacks of out-of-school suspensions. Generally, the research suggests that alternative schools and in-school suspensions still have restrictive learning environments, lower levels of rigor, and can socialize students into problem behaviors rather than out of them. As such, students who are frequently caught in these alternative spaces tend to experience negative effects over time. We recommend that future research in our region build on this report by examining these factors across individual districts and perhaps collectively.

V. Conclusion

Schools nationwide are in a struggle to revitalize antiquated discipline approaches, and the needs in our region are no different.

Overall, suspension rates are above the state average in about one-third of Allegheny County school districts and at the county-level overall. At the current rates, our region is losing an estimated \$30 million per cohort of students because of suspension-related school dropouts. We also know that suspensions are associated with negative academic outcomes at the student and school levels, effects that no doubt further limit the capacities of youth individually and collectively. Moreover, these suspension rates have severe consequences for our already problematic racial inequities in the Greater Pittsburgh region, where Black students are suspended at more than seven times the rate of other students. More than 80% of our districts have problems with either overall suspension use, racial disparities in suspensions, or both. Taken together, our region has a problem that is not only a social justice issue, but also an economic one that is hampering our collective well-being and future.

Fortunately, the disciplinary practices that have led us to this point can be revamped, and have been successfully implemented in many schools and districts nationwide. Thus, the purposes of this report were to discuss both the antiquated rationales that led us here, and to provide best practices that can redirect efforts toward a more just model. Thanks to the work of local educators, advocates, policy-makers, and philanthropists, some of these practices have been adopted by area districts, including policy shifts, restorative practices, and expert personnel. Our aim is to build on this work by showing how these approaches fit into a larger framework, one that must be embraced holistically if we want to create impactful and sustainable changes. As we all work to continue the resurgence of the region, our choices are clear: we can continue to use ineffective and unjust practices that have devastating social and economic impacts, or we can adopt just and inclusive approaches that are working in districts around the country. Collectively, it is imperative that we choose the latter. The solutions are out there, and it is time to bring Pittsburgh to the fore of state-of-the-art practices in cultivating our most valuable resource, our children.

Appendix A: 2015-2016 Suspension Rates and Racial Disproportionalities⁹³

	Total 2015-2016 Suspensions	Overall Suspensions Per 100	Total Black Suspensions	Black Per 100 Rate	Non-Black Per 100 Rate	Black Rate Times Higher
ALLEGHENY COUNTY	19,155	13.7	13,094	41.0	5.6	7.3 to 1
PA STATE	168,622	9.7	82,400	32.0	5.9	5.5 to 1
Allegheny Valley	42	4.4	1	10.0	4.3	2.3 to 1
Avonworth	21	1.3	6	14.0	1.0	14.6 to 1
Baldwin-Whitehall	177	4.2	36	15.5	3.6	4.3 to 1
Bethel Park	81	1.9	8	6.7	1.8	3.8 to 1
Brentwood Borough	16	1.3	4	5.8	1.1	5.5 to 1
Carlynton	46	3.3	12	6.3	2.9	2.2 to 1
Chartiers Valley	342	10.2	24	20.9	9.8	2.1 to 1
City Charter High School	255	41.3	152	49.5	33.2	1.5 to 1
Clairton City	44	5.8	35	6.8	3.6	1.9 to 1
Cornell	5	0.8	3	3.6	0.4	9.9 to 1
Deer Lakes	63	3.2	1	5.6	3.1	1.8 to 1
Duquesne City	101	31.0	59	26.7	40.0	0.7 to 1
East Allegheny	459	27.8	296	61.9	13.9	4.5 to 1
Elizabeth Forward	124	5.3	6	9.0	5.2	1.7 to 1
Environmental Charter	24	3.8	11	10.2	2.5	4.1 to 1
Fox Chapel Area	32	0.8	4	2.8	0.7	4.0 to 1
Gateway	371	11.0	203	25.6	6.5	3.9 to 1
Hampton Township	109	3.7	10	33.3	3.4	9.7 to 1
Highlands	353	13.5	95	43.2	10.7	4.0 to 1
Keystone Oaks	18	1.0	1	2.0	0.9	2.1 to 1
Manchester Ac. Charter	61	18.7	59	18.8	15.4	1.2 to 1
McKeesport Area	824	22.8	531	33.7	14.4	2.3 to 1
Montour	90	3.2	22	15.0	2.5	5.9 to 1
Moon Area	141	3.8	26	13.1	3.3	4.0 to 1
Mt. Lebanon	38	0.7	1	1.3	0.7	1.8 to 1
North Allegheny	58	0.7	1	0.7	0.7	0.9 to 1
North Hills	56	1.3	11	7.4	1.1	6.9 to 1
Northgate	225	18.9	78	48.1	14.3	3.4 to 1
Penn Hills	399	10.4	346	13.7	4.0	3.4 to 1
Penn Hills Entr. Charter	38	12.6	33	14.7	6.5	2.3 to 1
Pine-Richland	72	1.6	4	8.7	1.5	5.8 to 1
Pittsburgh	8,163	33.7	6,314	49.3	16.3	3.0 to 1
Plum Borough	91	2.4	18	9.0	2.0	4.5 to 1
Propel Charter Schools	1,541	43.3	1,304	56.2	19.2	2.9 to 1
Quaker Valley	39	2.1	9	11.7	1.7	7.0 to 1
Riverview	5	0.5	0	0.0	0.6	0.0 to 1
Shaler Area	108	2.4	5	5.2	2.4	2.2 to 1

Appendix A (continued)

	Total 2015-2016 Suspensions	Overall Suspensions Per 100	Total Black Suspensions	Black Per 100 Rate	Non-Black Per 100 Rate	Black Rate Times Higher
South Allegheny	55	3.7	6	10.0	3.4	2.9 to 1
South Fayette	19	0.6	0	0.0	0.6	0.0 to 1
South Park	137	7.5	15	22.1	6.9	3.2 to 1
Steel Valley	102	7.0	81	16.7	2.2	7.8 to 1
Sto-Rox	862	64.7	639	93.4	34.4	2.7 to 1
Upper St. Clair	16	0.4	1	2.4	0.4	6.5 to 1
Urban Academy Charter	9	4.1	9	4.3	0.0	4.3 to 1
Urban Pathways	282	48.6	278	48.9	36.4	1.3 to 1
West Allegheny	16	0.5	1	1.2	0.5	2.6 to 1
West Jefferson Hills	64	2.2	2	3.2	2.2	1.5 to 1
West Mifflin Area	571	19.9	334	47.6	10.9	4.4 to 1
Wilkinsburg	507	67.1	488	68.3	46.3	1.5 to 1
Woodland Hills	1,573	41.1	1,375	55.2	14.9	3.7 to 1
Young Scholars WPA	18	6.4	16	21.3	1.0	22.2 to 1

Appendix B: Year-by-Year Suspension Rates

	2012-2013 Per 100 Rate	2013-2014 Per 100 Rate	2014-2015 Per 100 Rate	2015-2016 Per 100 Rate	Total Change Over Time
ALLEGHENY COUNTY	16.3	13.6	14.2	13.7	-2.6
PA STATE	9.6	9.0	7.6	9.7	+0.1
Allegheny Valley	4.4	4.7	4.1	4.4	0.0
Avonworth	4.1	2.4	1.2	1.3	-2.8
Baldwin-Whitehall	6.7	6.1	4.0	4.2	-2.5
Bethel Park	1.8	1.9	1.9	1.9	+0.1
Brentwood Borough	3.1	1.7	1.9	1.3	-1.8
Carlynton	4.3	2.3	2.1	3.3	-1.0
Chartiers Valley	5.4	5.3	7.7	10.2	+4.7
City Charter High School	31.8	42.3	21.6	41.3	+9.5
Clairton City	2.8	1.9	1.1	5.8	+3.0
Cornell	21.7	22.9	11.9	0.8	-20.9
Deer Lakes	3.6	2.1	1.8	3.2	-0.5
Duquesne City	9.9	5.2	4.9	31.0	+21.1
East Allegheny	35.2	25.1	18.9	27.8	-7.4
Elizabeth Forward	3.6	5.4	2.7	5.3	+1.7
Environmental Charter	6.9	9.1	3.8	3.8	-3.0
Fox Chapel Area	1.0	0.3	0.8	0.8	-0.3
Gateway	7.1	6.7	1.9	11.0	+3.9

Appendix B (continued)

	2012-2013 Per 100 Rate	2013-2014 Per 100 Rate	2014-2015 Per 100 Rate	2015-2016 Per 100 Rate	Total Change Over Time
Hampton Township	2.8	2.0	3.3	3.7	+1.0
Highlands	18.7	12.4	13.2	13.5	-5.2
Keystone Oaks	3.7	1.4	0.9	1.0	-2.7
Manchester Ac. Charter	23.3	20.8	8.7	18.7	-4.6
McKeesport Area	23.5	3.3	12.2	22.8	-0.7
Montour	8.0	8.6	7.2	3.2	-4.9
Moon Area	5.2	4.2	3.7	3.8	-1.4
Mt. Lebanon	0.5	0.8	1.5	0.7	+0.3
North Allegheny	1.3	0.7	1.0	0.7	-0.5
North Hills	1.2	2.1	1.7	1.3	+0.1
Northgate	19.4	14.3	10.2	18.9	-0.6
Penn Hills	47.1	41.4	25.7	10.4	-36.7
Penn Hills Entr. Charter	11.1	17.6	11.9	12.6	+1.5
Pine-Richland	0.6	0.6	1.0	1.6	+1.0
Pittsburgh	41.4	36.0	40.2	33.7	-7.7
Plum Borough	4.4	3.5	3.5	2.4	-2.0
Propel Charter Schools	15.4	15.9	30.3	43.3	+27.9
Quaker Valley	2.1	2.1	1.5	2.1	0.0
Riverview	2.1	2.2	2.7	0.5	-1.6
Shaler Area	9.0	7.4	2.4	2.4	-6.6
South Allegheny	5.3	5.2	3.2	3.7	-1.6
South Fayette	0.8	0.9	1.6	0.6	-0.2
South Park	3.2	4.4	2.6	7.5	+4.3
Steel Valley	6.3	7.4	5.4	7.0	+0.7
Sto-Rox	94.7	113.9	71.6	64.7	-30.0
Upper St. Clair	0.9	1.0	0.4	0.4	-0.5
Urban Academy Charter	0.0	0.0	3.2	4.1	+4.1
Urban Pathways Total Charters	49.8	50.1	54.6	48.6	-1.2
West Allegheny	0.8	0.9	0.5	0.5	-0.3
West Jefferson Hills	1.8	0.6	2.2	2.2	+0.5
West Mifflin Area	37.6	23.5	20.4	19.9	-17.7
Wilkinsburg	51.9	28.5	67.2	67.1	+15.1
Woodland Hills	60.5	51.2	39.2	41.1	-19.4
Young Scholars WPA Charter	2.2	4.8	6.0	6.4	+4.1

Appendix C: Black vs. Non-Black Suspension Ratio Trends

	2012-2013 Disparity Ratio	2015-2016 Disparity Ratio	Black Per 100 Change	Non-Black Per 100 Change	Change in Suspension Rate Difference
ALLEGHENY COUNTY	6.8	7.3	-6.4	-1.4	-5.0
PA STATE	5.2	5.5	-1.4	0.0	+1.5
Allegheny Valley	0.0	2.3	10.0	-0.1	+10.1
Avonworth	14.8	14.6	-26.4	-1.8	-24.6
Baldwin-Whitehall	6.9	4.3	-17.9	-1.3	-16.6
Bethel Park	4.5	3.8	-0.9	0.1	-1.0
Brentwood Borough	1.2	5.5	2.1	-2.0	+4.1
Carlynton	5.1	2.2	-8.0	0.1	-8.0
Chartiers Valley	2.3	2.1	9.1	4.6	+4.5
City Charter High School	2.5	1.5	4.6	14.9	-10.4
Clairton City	4.1	1.9	3.3	2.7	+0.5
Cornell	2.1	9.9	-36.2	-18.8	-17.3
Deer Lakes	7.8	1.8	-21.7	-0.3	-21.4
Duquesne City	2.3	0.7	15.4	35.0	-19.6
East Allegheny	4.0	4.5	-14.7	-5.5	-9.3
Elizabeth Forward	2.1	1.7	1.6	1.7	-0.1
Environmental Charter	9.8	4.1	-13.5	0.1	-13.5
Fox Chapel Area	4.6	4.0	-1.5	-0.2	-1.3
Gateway	4.9	3.9	6.6	2.6	+4.0
Hampton Township	3.4	9.7	24.0	0.7	+23.2
Highlands	1.7	4.0	13.2	-7.0	+20.1
Keystone Oaks	0.6	2.1	-0.2	-2.8	+2.6
Manchester Ac. Charter	2.6	1.2	-5.1	6.3	-11.4
McKeesport Area	3.1	2.3	-4.8	1.8	-6.6
Montour	3.4	5.9	-9.2	-4.5	-4.6
Moon Area	4.8	4.0	-7.2	-1.0	-6.2
Mt. Lebanon	3.0	1.8	-0.1	0.3	-0.3
North Allegheny	4.6	0.9	-4.8	-0.5	-4.3
North Hills	4.3	6.9	2.8	0.0	+2.8
Northgate	1.3	3.4	24.7	-4.5	+29.2
Penn Hills	3.4	3.4	-51.9	-15.5	-36.3
Penn Hills Entr. Charter	17.4	2.3	-2.7	6.5	-9.2
Pine-Richland	0.0	5.8	8.7	0.9	+7.8
Pittsburgh	2.6	3.0	-8.2	-5.7	-2.5
Plum Borough	4.2	4.5	-6.9	-1.7	-5.1
Propel Charter Schools	3.3	2.9	34.7	12.6	+22.1
Quaker Valley	4.5	7.0	3.5	-0.2	+3.6
Riverview	0.6	0.0	-1.4	-1.6	+0.3
Shaler Area	4.4	2.2	-32.3	-6.2	-26.1
South Allegheny	3.1	2.9	-5.2	-1.5	-3.7
South Fayette	1.7	0.0	-1.3	-0.1	-1.2
South Park	2.2	3.2	15.3	3.9	+11.4

Appendix C (continued)

	2012-2013 Disparity Ratio	2015-2016 Disparity Ratio	Black Per 100 Change	Non-Black Per 100 Change	Change in Suspension Rate Difference
Steel Valley	5.8	7.8	2.8	-0.2	+3.0
Sto-Rox	2.4	2.7	-40.4	-22.1	-18.3
Upper St. Clair	7.9	6.5	-4.4	-0.5	-3.9
Urban Academy Charter	0.0	4.3	4.3	0.0	+4.3
Urban Pathways Charters	4.5	1.3	-1.6	25.3	-26.8
West Allegheny	1.6	2.6	0.0	-0.3	+0.3
West Jefferson Hills	2.5	1.5	-1.1	0.5	-1.6
West Mifflin Area	4.1	4.4	-40.8	-10.4	-30.4
Wilksburg	0.6	1.5	18.6	-39.4	+57.9
Woodland Hills	4.7	3.7	-28.2	-2.7	-25.5
Young Scholars WPA Charter	3.1	22.2	16.7	-0.5	+17.2

Appendix D: Regression Results for the Effects of Suspensions on District-Wide Achievement

Regression results of suspensions on achievement outcomes rates across districts in 2015-2016.

	Graduation Rates		Reading Proficiency		Mathematics Proficiency	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
District Suspensions per 100 rate	-0.277*	0.113	-0.146	0.097	-0.009	0.128
District % Free and Reduced Lunch	-0.111*	0.051	-0.514***	0.058	-0.521***	0.076
District % Percent Black	-0.019	0.081	-0.006	0.066	-0.022	0.087

*p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

Note: Because this data set is both small and inclusive of the full population of districts, p-value statistics should be relaxed in interpretations. Findings such as these in a small but complete population are still indicative of important trends.

Appendix E: Methods

In sections one and two, several approaches were used in developing the empirical aspects of this report. The review of the school-to-prison pipeline and national trends in school discipline were compiled from a scan and synthesis of relevant literature and policy documents. While it was not our purpose here to present a comprehensive literature review, the findings we discuss are representative of the broader research, policy, and practice developments to the best of our understanding.

Our analysis of local school discipline data comes from Safe Schools Reports compiled by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. For this analysis, we used the most recently available data when retrieved by our team in March of 2017. These DOE reports represent districts' self-reported data on school discipline in their schools and districts, and also aggregated data at the county level. Using these data, we calculated several overall and disparity rates and indicators independently, including per 100 suspension rates across districts (both in the aggregate and in subgroups), and proportional differences in suspension rates between groups. Statistical relationships between suspension rates and achievement outcomes were conducted using multiple regression and the STATA 14 software. The accuracy of these findings is contingent on the accuracy of the reported data on the DOE website (<http://www.education.pa.gov/k-12/safe%20schools/pages/default.aspx#tab-1>). In many cases, reported data seemed counterintuitive, particularly in the case of suspensions

sorted by type (for example, in one case, a district reported no conduct suspensions, but an inordinate amount of violence suspensions), but also at times in terms of the race of the students suspended. For this reason, we only discuss suspension rates overall in this report, and not rates by subcategories of interest, such as conduct.

Our presentation of best practice recommendations and our Just Discipline and Climate Model stems from multiple sources: our review of the relevant research literature and policy reports regarding school discipline reform, ongoing conversations with school discipline reform practitioners around the country, and site visits to schools, youth programs, and district offices that have been working in this area for some time. These site visits were informal in structure, and they allowed us to see first-hand the work of effective school discipline reform from teachers, leaders, district administrators, and restorative justice practitioners. We would like to extend thanks to Theresa Clincy, Lisa Haynes, Cecilia Le, Esan Looper, Daniel Losen, Sam Pasaro, Sagnicthe Salazar, Curtiss Sarikey, Shawn Thomas, Anita Wadwha, and Jason Yamashiro for their insights into the practice and model building. Special thanks also to Qi Chen, Zachariah Huddleston, and Eric Kyere for contributions to the local data analysis presented in this review, and to Dave Coplan, Ervin Dyer, Rachel Haynik, Cheryl Kleiman, Dody Riggs, Jeff Shook, and Ashley Varatto for substantive and editorial feedback on previous drafts of this report.

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- ⁵¹ The percent of students suspended at least once can be very helpful for subgroup comparisons that focus on the average student experience. This measure, however, is a crude tool for assessing total suspension use, one of our main purposes here. Also, percent of students suspended once is not available in the Safe Schools Reports. It is collected by the Federal Office of Civil Rights, but the availability of those data typically lag 2-3 years behind the available Safe Schools reporting.
- ⁵² For a previous analysis using Safe Schools Reports in Allegheny County and a discussion of suspension effectiveness, see: Chute, E. (2013). School suspensions ineffective for changing student behavior. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 9/3/2013.
- ⁵³ The 2015-2016 was the last year Wilksburg had secondary grades prior to the merger with Pittsburgh Public Schools.
- ⁵⁴ Specialized districts that serve primarily students with serious behavioral or mental health needs are not included in this analysis.
- ⁵⁵ Losen et al., (2016).
- ⁵⁶ American Academy of Pediatrics (2003, p. 1207). See also Losen et al. (2016).
- ⁵⁷ Across multiple economic indicators, the economic gaps between Blacks and Whites in Greater Pittsburgh are larger than those nationally. For example, the median household income disparity between White and Black households in Allegheny County—\$53,900 compared to 28,000—is 27% larger than the gap is nationally. The poverty gap is 34% larger. (Davis, L.E., & Bangs, R. (2015). *Pittsburgh racial demographics 2015: Differences and disparities*. Pittsburgh: Center on Race and Social Problems, 2015).
- ⁵⁸ Whites, Asians, and Latinos in Allegheny County each had suspension rates that were below the state average for all students in 2015-16. Given the vast difference between Blacks and other major racial groups, Blacks were considered against non-Blacks in this analysis.
- ⁵⁹ In efforts to make meaningful comparisons, we have limited the analyses in the narrative to districts that had more than 10 Black suspensions in the 2015-2016 academic year, since it can be misleading to compare rates based on only a very small number of suspensions. For similar reasons, at times, we have also omitted majority Black districts from analyses where non-Black students were suspended fewer than 10 times in a year. Complete lists of disproportionality rates for all districts can be found in the Appendices.
- ⁶⁰ The disparity rate calculated here from suspensions per 100 is mathematically equivalent to the frequently used risk-ratio calculation as applied to total suspensions. For a comprehensive discussion of discipline disparity measures see Petrosino, A., Fronius, T., Goold, C.C., Losen, D.J., & Turner, H.M. (2017). *Analyzing student-level disciplinary data: A guide for districts*. Washington DC: Institute of Educational Sciences, US Department of Education.
- ⁶¹ Among these districts, the extreme 2015-2016 suspension disparity in Young Scholars of Western PA (22 to 1) does skew the result for this group. However, even when excluding the YSWPA, this group still averages the highest suspension rate disparity at 5.1 to 1.
- ⁶² Although analyzed as a single school network here, the Young Scholars Charter network does have other schools. Their McKeesport location was opened in 2015-2016 but did not have Safe Schools data available at the time of this analysis. Their other locations are outside of Allegheny County and thus not considered here.
- ⁶³ Irregularities in Safe School Reporting make trend data estimates difficult from points prior to 2012-2013. For example, in some cases, large districts reported inconceivably low suspension totals, and some districts did not report suspensions by race. Thus, 2012-2013 was chosen as the most reliable starting point.
- ⁶⁴ Only changes of 1 full unrounded student per 100 are recognized in the narrative.
- ⁶⁵ Schneider, S. (2017). Pittsburgh bans suspensions for students younger than 3rd grade for nonviolent offenses. *WESA National Public Radio*. Retrieved on May 10, 2018 from <http://wesa.fm/post/pittsburgh-public-bans-suspensions-students-younger-3rd-grade-nonviolent-offenses#stream/0>; Martines, J. (2018) Woodland Hills commission makes recommendations for avoiding future clashes through “equity”. *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, retrieved on May 10, 2018 from <http://triblive.com/news/education/classroom/13602623-74/woodland-hills-youth-commission-presents-recommendations>
- ⁶⁶ The Wilksburg statistics from 2015-2016 include their secondary school, which was disbanded the following year in 2016-2017.
- ⁶⁷ Because calculating disparity rate trends includes multiple interacting proportions, direct comparison of rate trends can be misleading. It is possible, for example, for a district to dramatically reduce rates for multiple subgroups and end up with a greater disparity ratio over time. For that reason, here we sought to compare individual districts and networks by absolute reductions in Black and White suspensions.
- ⁶⁸ Rates must be changed by at least 1 full suspension per 100 in relevant categories to be included in Tables 3-6.
- ⁶⁹ The Riverview School District also lowered rates modestly for both Black and non-Black students (-1.4 and -1.6 per 100 respectively), but their suspension rates are consistently so low across groups that any differences between groups is negligible.

- ⁷⁰ Another 3 charter networks also had similar inverted patterns but with only negligible increases in already very low absolute numbers of non-Black suspensions. Urban Pathways, Penn Hills Entrepreneurship Charter, and Manchester Academic Charter reduced their Black suspension rates by -1.6, -2.7, and -5.1 per 100, respectively, alongside non-Black increases, but rate-increase calculations are not sensible given that none of these districts had more than 5 non-Black suspensions in any year between 2012-2013 and 2015-2016.
- ⁷¹ To ensure only substantive changes are noted, only districts with more than 10 Black suspensions in 2015-2016 are shown in Tables 5 and 6.
- ⁷² Although longitudinal estimations are preferred, here they are not reliable because of: 1) changes to the state test during the period in question; and in more stable recent periods 2) minimal variation in test results over time in this complete but small sample.
- ⁷³ Rumberg & Losen (2016).
- ⁷⁴ Pasarow, S. (2015). Personal communication on February 6, 2015.
- ⁷⁵ Looper, E.O. (2015). Personal communication on February 5, 2015.
- ⁷⁶ Using exclusionary discipline as a response to truancy was outlawed in 2016 in Pennsylvania under Act 138, which prohibits schools from expelling, suspending, transferring, or reassigning children to disciplinary placements for truancy (see: Education Law Center (2013). *Pennsylvania's new truancy law*. Retrieved on 12/07/17 from http://www.aiu3.net/uploadedFiles/Teaching_and_Learning/IDEA_and_Training_Consultation/Behavior_Support/ELC%202016%20Truancy%20Fact%20Sheet%20Part%201.pdf)
- ⁷⁷ Education Rights Network, (2017).
- ⁷⁸ Chute, E. (2014)
- ⁷⁹ Saar et al. (2015).
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- ⁸² Morgan, E., Salomon, N., Plotkin, M., & Cohen, R. (2014). *The school discipline consensus report: Strategies from the field to keep students engaged in school and out of the juvenile justice system*, p. 31. New York: Council of State Governments Justice Center.
- ⁸³ Koon (2013)
- ⁸⁴ Carter et al. (2014); Koon (2013)
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- ⁹¹ The School Social Work Association of America recommends one full time social worker per every 250 students in schools (<https://sswaa.site-ym.com/?page=459>).
- ⁹² Selia, V. (2018). For school safety, start with social work. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 7/1/2018.
- ⁹³ For display purposes, appendices show figures rounded to the tenths place. Because trend calculations were taken from the full numbers in the raw data, in some cases very slight differences in trend calculations taken from the display data and the raw data are possible because of differences in the number of digits used.



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