new hampshire kids count

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Exclusionary Discipline Highest in New Hampshire's Urban Schools

Suspension and Expulsion Found to Disproportionately Affect Disadvantaged Students

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Summary

Exclusionary school discipline—that is, suspension and expulsion—disproportionately affects already disadvantaged students on both the national and state levels. In New Hampshire, students attending larger urban schools, male students, students of color, students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, students with disabilities, and homeless students are more likely to experience exclusionary school discipline, although racial disparities appear to stem largely from the greater racial diversity at the urban schools that use this type of discipline at higher rates with all students. Previous research indicates that exclusionary discipline and the resulting loss of classroom time is associated with poorer academic outcomes. Therefore, regardless of the precipitates of exclusionary discipline, it is worth exploring the extent to which exclusionary discipline is experienced among New Hampshire students.

Introduction

Exclusionary school discipline refers to any school disciplinary practice that isolates students from their classroom environments. In-school suspension (ISS), out-of-school suspension (OSS), and expulsion are all forms of exclusionary discipline. Nationally, in the 2009–2010 school year, approximately 7.4 percent of

KEY FINDINGS

Roughly 15 percent of New Hampshire's middle and high school student population attend urban schools, where the rate of in-school suspension is twice that of non-urban schools (14 percent compared with 7 percent), out-of-school suspension over three times higher (20 percent compared with 6 percent), and expulsion four times higher (.08 percent compared with .02 percent).

Male students, students of color, students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, students with disabilities, and homeless students are more likely to experience exclusionary school discipline.

Statewide, 3.5 percent of New Hampshire's middle and high school students are suspended out of school for a total of five days or more and/or expelled in a given year.

.02%

The rate of expulsion is remarkably low in New Hampshire at .02 percent for middle and high school students. Reported national averages are more than 100 times higher.

all public school students in kindergarten through grade 12 were suspended at least once, which translates to well over three million students.[1] Not all students have an equal likelihood of experiencing exclusionary discipline; it is administered to students of color,[2] students with disabilities,[3] homeless students,[4] students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (FRL),[5] [6] male students,[7] and students attending urban schools[8] at increasing and disproportionate rates.

This research brief follows up on a joint Carsey/NH Kids Count (formerly the NH Children's Alliance) publication from 2009.[9] The 2009 study focused on larger disciplinary trends in New Hampshire schools and contextualized them in the policies, laws, and procedures that may have resulted in increased use of exclusionary discipline. The present study reports on rates of exclusionary discipline from 2010 through 2014 by school and student characteristics to better understand how and to what extent exclusionary discipline has been applied across the state in recent years. It does not, however, investigate *why* exclusionary discipline is applied. It does not consider, for example, student behaviors that precipitate use of exclusionary discipline, school personnel beliefs and practices, or school climate. We cannot conjecture based on the available data why relationships between exclusionary discipline and student characteristics exist and persist. Instead, we identify and describe these relationships, raising important questions for future research designed to explain their root causes.

Box 1: Data and Definitions

Anonymized State-Assigned Student Identifier (SASID) data were obtained for this project from the New Hampshire Department of Education's PerformancePLUS/i4See Longitudinal Data System.[10] Below are definitions of the terms used in our analysis of this dataset.

Definition of Terms

Exclusionary Discipline: Any disciplinary practice that isolates students from their classroom environment; includes in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion.

Expulsion: Permanent denial of a student's attendance at school.[11]

FRL Eligibility: Eligibility for free and reduced-priced lunch, often used as a proxy measure of family income. Students are eligible for free lunch if their family's household income is up to 130 percent of the federal poverty threshold ($30,615 annually for a family of four in the 2013–14 school year), and for reduced-price lunch up to 185 percent ($43,568 annually).[12]

High Exclusionary Discipline: A student is considered to experience "high exclusionary discipline" if administered at least 5 days of OSS total and/or an expulsion in a given school year.

Homeless Student: A student who lacks fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.[13]

In-School Suspension (ISS): Temporary denial of a student's attendance in classes at school for a specific period of time.

Out-of-School Suspensions (OSS): Temporary denial of a student's attendance at school and on school grounds for a specific period of time.[14]

Student of Color: Any student who does not self-identify as white.[15]

Student with a Disability: A student with an identified disability and an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).[16]

Total ISS Time/100 Students: The number of days of ISS in a year per 100 students.

Total OSS Time/100 Students: The number of days of OSS in a year per 100 students.

Definition of Geographic Categories[17]

Urban: Territory inside an urbanized area (a densely settled core of census blocks with a population of 50,000 or more and adjacent densely settled surrounding areas) and inside a principal city (primary population and economic center of a metropolitan area).

Suburban: Territory inside an urbanized area and outside a principal city.

Town: Territory outside an urbanized area and inside an urban cluster (a densely settled core of census blocks with a population between 25,000 and 50,000 with adjacent densely settled surrounding areas).

Rural: Territory outside an urban cluster.

Background: Disparities on the State and National Levels

In the 1980s and 1990s, rates of exclusionary discipline began to increase as a result of the widespread implementation of so-called "zero tolerance" policies.[18] In general, zero tolerance policies mandate predetermined discipline for certain offenses, particularly offenses related to weapons, alcohol, or drugs.[19] Although these policies were intended to deter students from disruptive and dangerous behavior, research suggests they did not achieve the intended outcome.[20] Instead, a different trend emerged: the rates of exclusionary discipline skyrocketed[21] and schools shifted to more extreme discipline for lesser offenses.[22]

Researchers have found that students subjected to frequent exclusionary discipline are more likely to drop out of school, not graduate on time, and become involved with the juvenile justice system in what has been termed "the school to prison pipeline."

Other unintended consequences of zero tolerance policies arose as well. Researchers have found that students subjected to frequent exclusionary discipline are more likely to drop out of school, not graduate on time, and become involved with the juvenile justice system[23] in what has been termed "the school to prison pipeline."[24] With each successive suspension, the likelihood of dropping out of school rises.[25] [26] For example, in a study that followed Florida ninth graders from 2000 to 2008, the dropout rate of 16 percent for students with no suspensions contrasted considerably to that of 53 percent for four or more suspensions over the course of their high school career.[27] The numbers vary across states, districts, and schools, but the dramatic relationship between a high level of exclusionary discipline and the likelihood of school dropout and other poor academic outcomes such as lower reading achievement test scores[28] is documented in numerous studies.

Despite policies developed to define how and when exclusionary school discipline will be applied, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights has identified disparities in its use by race and disability on the national and state levels.[29] These disparities in the use of a disciplinary strategy that deprives students of classroom time may be a contributing factor in the growing achievement gap between white and minority, particularly black, students.[30] It is not unreasonable to assume that differences in student behavior account for disparities in discipline. However, many studies have found that, compared to white students, black students receive harsher punishments for the same offenses.[31] [32] [33] In particular, black students are more likely to receive OSS for their first "non-violent, non-criminal, non-drug offense" compared to white students.[34] [35] These non-violent, non-criminal, non-drug offenses are generally the most common as well as the most subjective, allowing for the widest discretion on the part of teachers and administrators, and racial disparities in disciplinary reaction are greatest for these offenses. For example, a study of Massachusetts schools found that black and Latino students were more likely to be disciplined and almost twice as likely to receive an OSS (rather than an ISS) for these subjective offenses. In contrast, no disparity was found in discipline for more severe and more objective offenses such as drug or weapon possession.[36]

Exclusionary discipline is most frequently used in large urban schools with high levels of student poverty, and these schools also tend to have much higher rates of racial disproportionality in school discipline, while small rural schools with low poverty rates use exclusionary discipline less often with less racial disproportionality.[37] Research suggests that it is more than just the size of larger urban schools driving their higher rates of exclusionary discipline.[38] [39] A common characteristic of urban schools is a large percentage of students with low socioeconomic status,[40] which is in turn related to many other student characteristics associated with increased risk of experiencing exclusionary discipline such as non-white, non-Asian racial/ethnic identification, mental health diagnosis,[41] low parental involvement,[42] and cultural misalignment between teachers and students.[43] [44] It has also been theorized that students with lower socioeconomic status are exposed to more violence in their communities and this impacts the way they cope with school stressors. However, more empirical research is needed to determine the relationship between school discipline and neighborhood violence. Lower counselor/student ratios[45] and poor school climate, which is characterized by features such as a high rate of absenteeism and inconsistent application of school rules,[46] are also associated with higher rates

of exclusionary discipline,[47] [48] and school administrators' beliefs regarding exclusionary discipline have been found to contribute substantially to variation in its use as well.[49]

A common argument in support of exclusionary school discipline is that it creates a better learning environment for other students. However, the research does not uphold this assertion.[50] Zero tolerance policies and subsequent high rates of exclusionary discipline have not been found to improve academic performance for the broader student population. Some research indicates the opposite—that even students uninvolved in exclusionary discipline themselves suffer from "collateral consequences" if they attend schools at which it is frequently administered.[51] For example, these uninvolved students have been shown to earn lower math and reading scores than uninvolved students in schools with lower or average rates of exclusionary discipline.[52]

Findings: Use of Exclusionary Discipline in New Hampshire Schools from 2010 to 2014

According to national reports, the average U.S. rates of students suspended out of school at least once were 2.6 percent for elementary schools and 10.1 percent for secondary schools in 2011–12. In that same year, the rates in New Hampshire were 1.1 percent and 9.0 percent for elementary and secondary schools, respectively.[53] New Hampshire's rate of expulsion was also found to be lower than the national average. In fact, remarkably so—at 0.01 percent for all students and 0.02 percent for middle and high school students, it was over 100 times lower than the reported national average of 2.7 percent.

Although New Hampshire reports rates of exclusionary discipline below national trends, we find that ISS and OSS are by no means rare in the state. Table 1 shows the total number of students who were administered ISS, OSS, and expulsion in 2013–2014 for each grade. These numbers show that the proportion of New Hampshire students experiencing exclusionary discipline increases substantially at each middle school grade level before reaching a relative plateau at the 11 to 12 percent range across the high school years. The types of discipline most frequently administered also differed across grade levels: ISS was most common in middle schools, and OSS was most common in high schools. Expulsion only occurred in grades 8 through 12, and very rarely. Due to the considerably lower rates of both types of suspensions and the lack of occurrence of expulsion in elementary schools, this report primarily focuses on middle and high schools. However, it is important to note that there were 1,390 students in grades 1 through 5 (approximately one in fifty) administered a suspension in the 2013–2014 school year alone.

Examining trends in exclusionary discipline across time, rates of ISS, OSS, and expulsions have remained very consistent between 2010 and 2014. The average rate of students experiencing ISS varied between 4.3 percent and 4.7 percent, and OSS and expulsion rates also varied little across years. The total days of ISS and OSS also showed consistency, with New Hampshire schools averaging about 14 days of ISS and 31 days of OSS for every 100 students. As these trends were very stable across years, all remaining analyses use the five years of data (2010 through 2014) pooled together.

TABLE 1. STUDENTS EXPERIENCING EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE IN NEW HAMPSHIRE SCHOOLS, 2013 TO 2014 SCHOOL YEAR

Grade	Enrollment	Number of Students Who Experienced				Percent experiencing any exclusionary discipline
		In-school suspension	Out-of-school suspension	Expulsion	Any exclusionary discipline	
1	13,470	63	109	0	151	1.1%
2	13,504	110	115	0	188	1.4%
3	13,545	128	148	0	238	1.8%
4	13,920	144	180	0	282	2.0%
5	13,921	347	349	0	531	3.8%
6	14,218	773	487	0	950	6.7%
7	14,331	1138	857	0	1451	10.1%
8	14,609	1448	1125	3	1877	12.8%
9	15,498	1117	1203	6	1853	12.0%
10	14,882	993	1178	3	1754	11.8%
11	13,962	901	998	3	1577	11.3%
12	14,293	876	1089	3	1634	11.4%

Source: New Hampshire Department of Education

Schools across New Hampshire turn to exclusionary discipline at considerably different rates, however, and in many schools, ISS and OSS are rather rare. For instance, half of the secondary schools in the state issue an ISS to fewer than 3.9 percent of their students, while roughly a quarter of schools issue no ISS. In contrast, secondary schools in the highest quartile of the state for their use of ISS issue it to more than 11.7 percent of students. The distribution of OSS rates is equally wide. Furthermore, students attending urban middle and high schools are roughly twice as likely to experience ISS and three times as likely to experience OSS compared with students at non-urban middle and high schools (Table 2). According to separate and unrelated data from the New Hampshire Department of Education, the most frequently cited reason for OSS in urban middle and high schools in the 2013–2014 school year was "violent offenses against property" (58 percent), while the more subjective "other" category accounted for the majority of ISS (73 percent).[54]

All of New Hampshire's urban schools are located in Hillsborough County, the most populous county in the state and home to the Manchester–Nashua urban corridor. Approximately half of public school students in Hillsborough County from kindergarten through grade 12 attend urban schools, translating to over 27,000 students or 14.3 percent of all public school students statewide. Urban middle and high schools are roughly twice as large as non-urban middle and high schools in New Hampshire. They are also considerably poorer and more diverse, with average enrollments of 43.4 percent students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and 29.1 percent students of color, compared to 25.2 percent and 6.4 percent, respectively, in the state's non-urban schools.

TABLE 2: EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE IN NEW HAMPSHIRE MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS ACROSS GEOGRAPHIC CATEGORIES, 2010 TO 2014.

	Percent of NH Schools	Percent of NH Students	Average Percent ISS	Average Percent OSS	Average Percent Expelled	Average Days of ISS/100 Students	Average Days of OSS/100 Students
Urban	8.1%	15.4%	13.7%	20.2%	0.08%	73.8	161.0
Suburban	22.9%	35.4%	6.6%	6.2%	0.01%	16.9	37.0
Town	25.9%	20.5%	5.9%	6.4%	0.02%	15.9	34.6
Rural	43.1%	28.7%	7.2%	5.8%	0.02%	17.7	24.9

Source: New Hampshire Department of Education

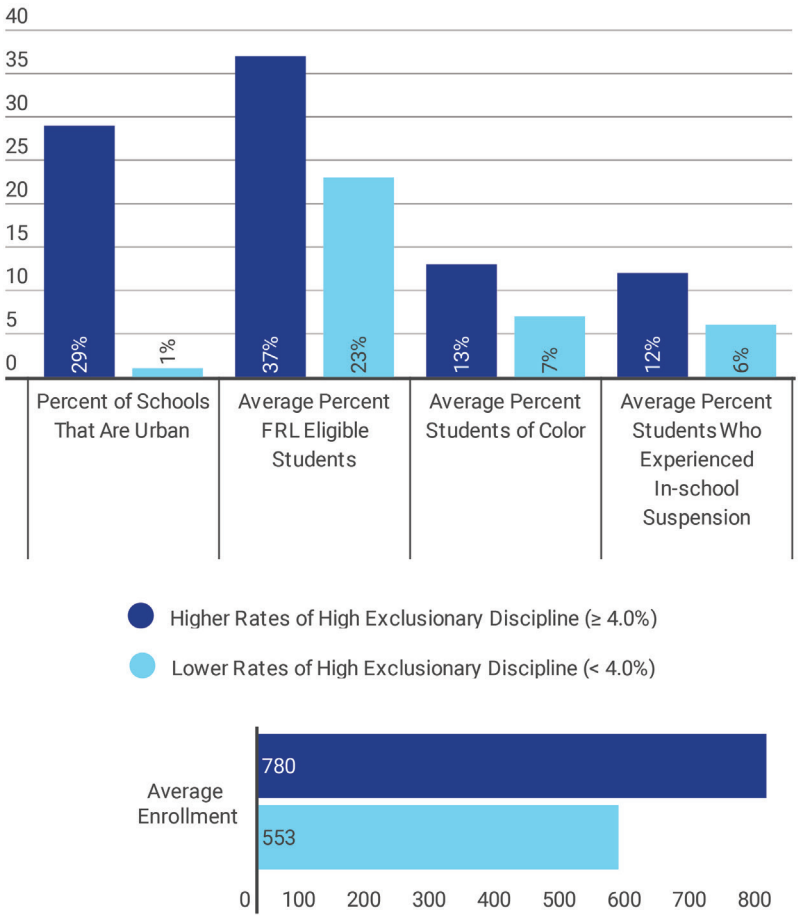
Rates of High Exclusionary Discipline

Of interest here is not only whether some schools are more frequently using exclusionary discipline, but also whether some schools are more frequently using *high levels* of exclusionary discipline, defined here as five or more days of OSS and/or expulsion.[55] In New Hampshire schools, high exclusionary discipline was experienced by 3.5 percent of all students from 2010 through 2014. It is important to re-emphasize that the loss of classroom time resulting from high levels of exclusionary discipline is associated with poor academic outcomes[56 57] as well as a greater likelihood of involvement in the juvenile justice system.[58]

Figure 1 presents the characteristics of schools that are, and are not, in the highest quartile of high exclusionary discipline. Schools with the higher rates of high exclusionary discipline are larger, much more likely to be urban, and serve more FRL eligible students and students of color than do the schools with lower rates. Perhaps more interestingly, the schools with the higher rates of high exclusionary discipline based on the use of OSS and expulsion also use ISS considerably more often, suggesting that OSS and expulsions are used in addition to—and not instead of—ISS.

Of those students who were administered an ISS between the 2010 and 2014 school years, 43.9 percent experienced a total of only one day of suspension in the respective year, and three-quarters experienced a total of three days or fewer (not pictured). Thus, most students administered an ISS experienced relatively few total days of suspension. Conversely, nearly 42 percent of students who were administered an OSS missed a total of a week of school (five days) or more, placing them in the category of high exclusionary discipline. Only 18.9 percent of students administered an ISS experienced as many total days of this form of suspension. However, the two groups are not unrelated —43.5 percent of students administered an ISS are administered both ISS and OSS rather than ISS alone over the course of the year.

FIGURE 1: SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLS WITH HIGHER AND LOWER RATES OF STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HIGH LEVELS OF EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE IN NEW HAMPSHIRE MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS, 2010 TO 2014



Source: New Hampshire Department of Education

Students at Higher Risk

Nationwide, schools are using exclusionary discipline more frequently with male students,[59] students of color,[60] lower income students,[61] and students with disabilities.[62] New Hampshire, as seen in Table 3, is no exception: male students, students of color, FRL eligible students, students with disabilities, and homeless students in New Hampshire's middle and high schools are all considerably more likely to be administered some form of suspension. Students with any of these characteristics are also approximately two to four times as likely to experience high exclusionary discipline.

In Table 4, viewing the relationship between student characteristics and the likelihood of experiencing exclusionary discipline in a different way, we report on the characteristics and circumstances that appear to put students at heightened risk of experiencing high exclusionary discipline.[63] For instance, if a student is at low risk—she is a white female without a disability from a higher-income family home, attending a non-urban school—the estimated likelihood that she will experience high exclusionary discipline is only 0.8 percent. In contrast, approximately one in three male students of color, with a disability, who are FRL eligible and attend urban schools will experience high exclusionary discipline; this statistic jumps to one in two if that student is also homeless. The estimated effect of attending an urban school on experiencing high exclusionary discipline is especially dramatic.

An important takeaway from Table 4 is that although students of color are administered exclusionary discipline at much higher rates than their white peers, we find this relationship to be largely an artifact of other circumstances that students of color of may experience.[64] Gender, FRL eligibility status, disability status, and homelessness status of a student all have a moderate effect on the likelihood of high exclusionary discipline. Attending an urban school presents a major risk.[65] It is important to note that student level factors included here as contributing to the risk of high exclusionary discipline do not refer to risky or negative behaviors in which students are engaging, but rather describe the student characteristics and circumstances associated with higher likelihood of experiencing exclusionary discipline. Furthermore, as highlighted in the introduction, it is not possible to determine from the available data if there are disparities in how exclusionary discipline is applied to different students for the same behaviors. Our findings demonstrate only that the students who share some of these characteristics and circumstances are significantly more likely to experience exclusionary discipline.

TABLE 3. EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE BY STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS, 2010 TO 2014

Characteristic			Percent ISS	Percent OSS	Percent High	Average Days of ISS	Average Days of OSS
Gender	Female	48.4%	4.5%	5.4%	2.1%	0.13	0.30
	Male	51.6%	9.3%	11.1%	4.8%	0.32	0.74
Race	White	89.9%	6.6%	7.5%	3.0%	0.20	0.45
	Students of Color	10.1%	10.4%	15.6%	7.9%	0.45	1.25
FRL Eligible	No	75.6%	4.8%	5.6%	2.1%	0.13	0.31
	Yes	24.4%	13.7%	16.6%	7.8%	0.52	1.21
Disability	No	84.3%	5.8%	7.0%	2.8%	0.18	0.42
	Yes	15.7%	13.3%	15.2%	7.2%	0.50	1.09

Source: New Hampshire Department of Education

TABLE 4: RISK OF EXPERIENCING HIGH EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE BY STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS AND CIRCUMSTANCES, NEW HAMPSHIRE MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS, 2010 TO 2014

Male?	Student of Color?	FRL Eligible?	Disability?	Attends an Urban School?	Homeless?	Percent Likelihood of Experiencing High Exclusionary Discipline
No	No	No	No	No	No	0.8%
Yes	No	No	No	No	No	1.8%
Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	2.1%
Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	5.4%
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	10.8%
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	34.9%
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	51.7%

Source: New Hampshire Department of Education

Discussion

School discipline has been in the national spotlight recently as the U.S. Department of Education and other government officials worked together to create a national conversation about decreasing the use of exclusionary discipline in schools. This national conversation included a summit at the White House to discuss strategies to "rethink school discipline."[66] Exclusionary school discipline practices, and in particular high levels of exclusionary discipline, are disproportionately affecting already disadvantaged students on both the national level and in the State of New Hampshire. In general, the students most severely impacted by the missed classroom time resulting from exclusionary discipline are those who are already at high risk of poor academic outcomes facing challenges such as poverty, homelessness, and disability status.

To reiterate, we were unable to explain with the available data if exclusionary discipline is being used disproportionately with some New Hampshire students versus others *engaging in the same prohibited behaviors*. It is clear, however, regardless of the cause, that certain groups of students do experience disproportionate levels of exclusionary discipline. The ultimate success of students sharing the characteristics associated with an elevated probability of experiencing high levels of exclusionary discipline may depend in part on how their schools respond to them.

Therefore, it is worth exploring how students at higher risk can be diverted from this trajectory. The stable patterns of exclusionary discipline between the years of 2010 and 2014 suggest that current trends at New Hampshire's schools will continue into future years without such reflection. Given the notably higher rates of use of exclusionary discipline in our state's urban school districts, for example, school policies and environments should be assessed for opportunities to reverse these trends and provide more students with consistent classroom time and instruction.

Given the notably higher rates of use of exclusionary discipline in our state's urban school districts, school policies and environments should be assessed for opportunities to reverse these trends and provide more students with consistent classroom time and instruction.

Ideally, alternative disciplinary techniques would help foster school bonding and school engagement, rather than sever the already tenuous connections at-risk students may have with teachers and administrators.[67] Alternatives to traditional disciplinary strategies such as restorative justice[68] and positive behavior interventions[69] have been shown to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline. Restorative justice emphasizes healing and enhancing the school community through inclusion, rather than excluding students for misbehavior. A longitudinal study of Denver public schools saw an almost 5 percent decrease over a four year period in the use of exclusionary discipline after implementing a restorative justice framework.[70] School wide positive behavior interventions, which include positive rewards for appropriate behavior, also demonstrate a reduction in exclusionary practices, though not as pronounced a difference as restorative justice.[71]

The findings presented in this brief raise many questions regarding why certain groups receive exclusionary discipline more than others. For example, why are boys twice as likely to experience these practices compared to girls? Why is poverty a significant predictor of exclusionary discipline? Why are rates of exclusionary discipline remarkably higher at urban schools? And what do these findings suggest about how students experience public education in New Hampshire, particularly students with multiple risk factors for exclusionary discipline and its associated outcomes? The answers to these questions are not simple, and will likely require more research.

Endnotes

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64. In other words, controlling for other covariates in the aforementioned regression analysis, we find that race is not a meaningful predictor of whether or not a student experiences high exclusionary discipline.

65. The magnitude of risk factors is roughly gauged by the percent change in likelihood when the factor is added. For example, the percent likelihood of experiencing high exclusionary discipline doubles from 1.3 percent to 2.6 percent when "male" is added, but it only increases about .3 percent (from 2.6 percent to 2.9 percent) when "student of color" is added.

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