

# Changes in Exclusionary and Nonexclusionary Discipline in Grades K–5 Following State Policy Reform in Oregon

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# Changes in Exclusionary and Nonexclusionary Discipline in Grades K–5 Following State Policy Reform in Oregon

Vicki Nishioka, Becca Merrill, and Havalala Hanson

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Racial equity is a high priority in Oregon, which along with many other states has enacted reforms in the past decade to improve racial equity in school discipline practices. One common approach has been to focus on reducing the use of exclusionary discipline, which removes students from classroom instruction. In 2015 the Oregon legislature limited the use of exclusionary discipline for students in grades K–5 to situations that pose a direct threat to the safety of other students and adults. The 2015 legislation built on 2013 policies that required schools to reduce the unnecessary use of exclusionary discipline and increase the use of nonexclusionary discipline.

This study was conducted in response to a request from Oregon education leaders for information on the association between the 2015 state policy reform and school discipline and how the association differed by student race/ethnicity. Using data from a voluntary sample of 401 schools that served grades K–5, the study found that the numbers of office discipline referrals that resulted in exclusionary discipline and in nonexclusionary discipline increased after the 2015 policy reform relative to pre-policy trends, especially for Black students. During the post-policy years Black students experienced the largest increase in exclusionary discipline and were twice as likely as students overall to experience exclusionary discipline. For most student racial/ethnic groups the 2015 policy reform was associated with a significant shift in the post-policy years from exclusionary to nonexclusionary discipline. However, this finding did not hold for Black students, for whom office discipline referrals became more likely to result in exclusionary discipline and less likely to result in nonexclusionary discipline after the 2015 policy reform. For White students and some other racial/ethnic student groups, the 2015 policy reform was also associated with a shift from exclusionary to nonexclusionary discipline for minor, disruptive, and aggressive behavioral infractions that were not considered a threat to safety. However, the reform was associated with a shift toward exclusionary discipline for office discipline referrals issued to Black students for disruptive infractions and to Hispanic students for aggression.

## Why this study?

In 2015 Oregon passed legislation on school discipline that restricted the use of suspensions for students in grades K–5 to incidents that were a direct threat to the safety of students or school employees (S. 553, Or. 2015). This built on a 2013 state policy that directed districts to shift school discipline practices in grades K–12 from a zero-tolerance approach that imposed predetermined disciplinary consequences on students, regardless of the severity of their behavior, to an approach that emphasized nonexclusionary discipline practices that reduce the loss of classroom time (H.R. 2192, Or. 2013). The 2013 policy also directed schools to eliminate racial/ethnic disparities in exclusionary discipline. (More information about Oregon school discipline policies is in appendix A. Key terms used in this report are in box 1.)

Oregon education leaders requested research on the association between the 2015 school discipline policy reform and changes in school discipline practices by student racial/ethnic group. This request is in line with the high priority placed on reducing discipline disparities between White students and students of color both in Oregon and across the country (Aud et al., 2010; Burke & Nishioka, 2014; Dinkes et al., 2007; Vincent et al., 2012).

For additional information, including background on the study, technical methods, and supporting analyses, access the report appendixes at <https://go.usa.gov/xAHaY>.

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## Box 1. Key terms

**Behavioral infraction.** Student behavior recorded as the reason that a student received an office discipline referral (see below) that resulted in exclusionary or nonexclusionary discipline issued by school administrators. This report organizes behavioral infractions into six categories:

- *Minor infractions* include brief or low-intensity behaviors that the school identifies as “less serious” than other categories of behavior (for example, tardiness, talking back, and engaging in nonserious but inappropriate physical contact).
- *Disruptive infractions* include defiance, disrespect, insubordination, lying, cheating, attendance violations, and breaking school rules.
- *Aggression infractions* include verbal aggression, abusive language or profanity, fighting, physical aggression, harassment, and bullying.
- *School safety offenses* include weapons possession or use, false alarms, bomb threats, arson, and displays of gang affiliation.
- *Property infractions* include vandalism, theft, and forgery.
- *Other infractions* include infractions that are not covered in the other listed categories, such as not bringing materials needed for class or hiding from adults.
- *Drug/alcohol/tobacco infractions* include possession, use, or distribution of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco products.<sup>1</sup>

**Discipline action.** Consequences that school administrators assign to a student who has received an office discipline referral.

**Exclusionary discipline action.** Office discipline referrals that result in discipline action that removes a student from regular classroom instruction. Forms of exclusionary discipline include expulsion, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and removal to an alternative placement (for example, removing students from their neighborhood school and placing them in a separate educational setting).

**Nonexclusionary discipline action.** Office discipline referral that results in discipline actions that do not remove a student from regular classroom instruction. Forms of nonexclusionary discipline include teacher conferences with students, individualized instruction, parent/guardian contact, detention, Saturday school, loss of privileges, time in school office, community service, and restitution (repayment or replacement of damaged or stolen property).

**Number of discipline actions per 100 students.** Calculated by dividing the total annual number of office discipline referrals resulting in exclusionary or nonexclusionary discipline experienced by all students or students in a particular racial/ethnic group across all sample schools by the total annual number of enrolled students in the same group (all students or racial/ethnic group) across all sample schools and multiplying by 100.

**Office discipline referral.** Referral of a student to the school office for disciplinary reasons. For each office discipline referral the Schoolwide Information System records date and time of the referral, behavioral infraction, location, discipline action, and circumstances of the discipline incident.

**Other factors.** Pre-policy trends, student characteristics, and school characteristics. The pre-policy trend extends the trend in the annual number of discipline actions per 100 students from before the 2015 policy reform (2011/12–2014/15) into the post-policy period (2015/16–2017/18) without changing the slope. Student characteristics include grade level, eligibility for the national school lunch program, race/ethnicity, gender, special education status, and a multireferral category (up to one office discipline referral, two to five office discipline referrals, or six or more office discipline referrals). School characteristics include student enrollment, Title I status,<sup>2</sup> percentage of students eligible for the national school lunch program, percentage of White students, and school locale (city, suburb, town, or rural).<sup>3</sup>

**Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.** A systems- and evidence-based approach to organizing schoolwide behavioral interventions and school discipline approaches (see <https://www.pbis.org/topics/school-wide>).

**Schoolwide Information System.** A school discipline data management system that uses the same data variables and definitions for office discipline referrals across study years. The study data variables included student characteristics, school characteristics, category of behavioral infractions, and type of exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline actions assigned by school administrators.

## Notes

1. The definitions for behavioral infractions are based on the Schoolwide Information System Discipline Incidents Collection Manual (May et al., 2006).

2. Under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act schools with large concentrations of low-income students receive supplemental funds to assist in meeting student education needs.

3. School locales are based on National Center for Education Statistics locale codes (Geverdt, 2015).

This study describes the office discipline referrals that resulted in exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline of students in grades K–5 who were enrolled in a voluntary sample of 401 Oregon public schools that met three criteria. The schools used the Schoolwide Information System (SWIS), a data management system that records the circumstances and resulting discipline actions for students who receive an office discipline referral. They implemented the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a systems-based approach to addressing school discipline voluntarily adopted by many schools across the United States.<sup>1</sup> And they agreed to the use of their office discipline referral data in the study as long as district, school, and student identities remained confidential.

Because not all Oregon schools use PBIS, the extent to which the study findings are generalizable to schools that were not in the study sample is unknown. However, the findings are consistent with other research, suggesting that trends in Oregon are similar to national trends. For example, a recent Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northwest study examining whether policy reforms in Oregon were associated with fewer school suspensions and expulsions found that the use of exclusionary discipline in grades K–5 declined in the short term after the 2015 policy reform but appeared to be trending upward in recent years (Nishioka et al., 2020). That study, like this one, also found associations between the 2015 policy reform and reductions in the use of exclusionary discipline for disruptive infractions (disorderly conduct, insubordination, obscene gestures, and violations of school rules). The disproportionately high rates of exclusionary discipline for Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students found in this study are also consistent with those found by other studies in Oregon and with national trends (Burke & Nishioka, 2014; Oregon Department of Education, 2019; Porowski et al., 2014; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). Finally, this study’s findings on patterns of office discipline referrals for minor, disruptive, and aggressive behaviors in grades K–5 are consistent with previous research (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Spaulding et al., 2010).

The study findings can help state policymakers identify racial disparities in disciplinary consequences for office discipline referrals. It builds on the recent REL Northwest study (Nishioka et al., 2020) by examining the association between the 2015 policy and shifts from exclusionary to nonexclusionary discipline for different racial/ethnic student groups. The current study’s focus on racial/ethnic differences and shifts in the use of exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline can support statewide efforts to improve equity in school discipline practices.

Shifting discipline practices from exclusionary discipline to nonexclusionary discipline across racial/ethnic groups was another goal of the 2015 policy reform. Examining the association between the 2015 policy reform and changes in the likelihood of office discipline referrals resulting in less exclusionary discipline, and therefore more nonexclusionary discipline, by student race/ethnicity provides another measure of progress toward the state policy goals. For example, office discipline referrals that became less likely to result in exclusionary discipline after the 2015 policy reform would suggest progress toward the policy’s desired outcomes, while referrals that became more likely to result in exclusionary discipline would suggest that the policy’s desired outcomes were not being met.

This study also examines whether an office discipline referral became more likely or less likely to result in exclusionary discipline or nonexclusionary discipline for the behavioral categories that result in the most referrals—minor infractions, disruptive infractions, and aggression. Understanding the association between the 2015 policy reform and differences in the use of exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline by student racial/ethnic group and type of behavioral infraction can help policymakers determine where additional research and support may be needed. This study also addresses a gap in school discipline research by examining the use of nonexclusionary discipline actions that do not remove students from classroom instruction; most studies on school discipline report findings on the use of exclusionary discipline only (Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2014). Analyzing both exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline provides a more complete picture for policymakers and practitioners of how Oregon elementary schools applied school discipline after the 2015 policy reform.

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1. In 2017 the PBIS Technical Assistance Center and its network supported 25,911 schools nationwide (Sugai, 2018).

## Research questions

The study looked at whether office discipline referrals that resulted in exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline changed in ways that were intended by the 2015 state policy reform. The analysis for each of the following research questions yielded findings for students overall and for each student racial/ethnic group in a voluntary sample of 401 Oregon schools that implemented PBIS and SWIS in at least one year over 2011/12–2017/18:

1. How did the numbers of exclusionary and of nonexclusionary discipline actions per 100 students differ before and after the 2015 policy reform?
2. Were office discipline referrals issued after the 2015 policy reform less likely to result in exclusionary discipline, and therefore more likely to result in nonexclusionary discipline, than referrals issued before the reform, after pre-policy trends, student characteristics, and school characteristics were adjusted for?
3. Were office discipline referrals for minor, disruptive, and aggressive behavioral infractions that were not a school safety concern that were issued after the 2015 policy reform less likely to result in exclusionary discipline, and therefore more likely to result in nonexclusionary discipline, than referrals issued before the reform, after pre-policy trends, student characteristics, and school characteristics were adjusted for?

The data sources, sample, and methods are summarized in box 2 and detailed in appendix B.

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### Box 2. Data sources, sample, and methods

**Data sources.** This study used incident-level data from the University of Oregon Schoolwide Information System (SWIS) data collection spanning seven years (2011/12–2017/18). To protect the privacy of study participants, unique identifiers were assigned to students and to their school. Each incident record represents an office discipline referral and includes the date of the referral; the category of behavioral infraction (minor, disruptive, aggressive, school safety, property-related, and other); and the type of discipline action taken. Students who received more than one office discipline referral in a year had multiple records in SWIS, but students who did not receive an office discipline referral were not included in SWIS records. The SWIS data used in the study also included information on student characteristics, including grade level, eligibility for the national school lunch program, race/ethnicity, gender, and special education status. At the school level the data included an indicator for Title I schools; the percentage of students eligible for the national school lunch program; the school locale (city, suburb, town, or rural); total school enrollment; student enrollment by racial/ethnic group; and student enrollment by gender.

**Sample.** The study analyzed data collected by the University of Oregon from a voluntary sample of 401 Oregon schools serving grades K–5 that implemented Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and that used SWIS to manage their office discipline referral data for at least one year during the study period. Across the seven years of the study, the number of schools ranged from 221 to 297, and student enrollment for each sample year ranged from a low of 90,999 in 2014 to a high of 124,622 in 2017. The study schools were located in city, suburban, town, and rural communities, and more than 70 percent were Title I schools. A sensitivity analysis comparing the findings for the analytic sample with a sample of schools that contributed SWIS data in all study years did not yield substantively different results (see tables B6 and B7 in appendix B).

**Method.** For research question 1 the study team conducted descriptive analyses to determine the annual numbers of office discipline referrals that resulted in exclusionary discipline and that resulted in nonexclusionary discipline per 100 students before and after the 2015 policy reform, overall for all students and by student race/ethnicity. The change in the number of referrals was calculated as the number of discipline actions per 100 students in 2017/18 minus the number in 2014/15 (the year before the 2015 policy reform). Based on the findings, the study team designated a change in the number of discipline actions per 100 students of 0–30 as small, a change of 31–60 as moderate, and a change of 61 or more as large.

For research question 2 the study team used a linear probability regression model to examine the association between the 2015 policy reform and differences in the likelihood that an office discipline referral resulted in an exclusionary discipline action (relative to a nonexclusionary discipline action). The regression model included indicators for each post-policy year (2015/16–2017/18); a continuous school year variable; and control variables for the office discipline referral behavioral category as well as for students' grade level, gender, race/ethnicity, national school lunch program status, special education status, and a multireferral

category (up to one office discipline referral, two to five office discipline referrals, or six or more office discipline referrals). The regression model also included school-level variables, including student enrollment, Title I status, percentage of students eligible for the national school lunch program, percentage of White students, and locale. The regression analysis was repeated for students in each racial/ethnic group, with controls for race/ethnicity removed from the model.

For research question 3 the study team used the same regression approach to estimate associations between the 2015 state policy reform and differences in the likelihood that office discipline referrals would result in an exclusionary discipline action (relative to a nonexclusionary discipline action) in each behavioral category for all students and for each student racial/ethnic group.

For research questions 2 and 3 the results are described in two ways that have the same meaning. Office discipline referrals issued after the 2015 policy reform are reported as becoming more or less likely to result in exclusionary discipline, and therefore less or more likely to result in nonexclusionary discipline, than before the reform, or they are reported as being associated with a shift from exclusionary to nonexclusionary discipline or a shift to exclusionary discipline from nonexclusionary discipline.

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## Findings

This section describes the study findings by research question for all students and by student racial/ethnic group. The results of the descriptive analyses of the annual number and trend in exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline actions per 100 students that resulted from office discipline referrals issued before and those issued after the 2015 policy reform are presented first (research question 1). The descriptive results illustrate longitudinal trends, but descriptive analyses cannot determine whether any changes were associated with the 2015 state policy reform. Other factors, such as pre-policy trends, student characteristics, and school characteristics might also have affected shifts in the number of exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline actions. To answer research questions 2 and 3 regression analyses were run that controlled for these factors. Findings are presented for regressions examining whether office discipline referrals became more or less likely to result in exclusionary discipline (research question 2) and whether office discipline referrals for minor, disruptive, and aggression behavioral categories (research question 3) became more or less likely to result in exclusionary discipline after pre-policy trends, student characteristics, and school characteristics were adjusted for. More detailed descriptive results and regression results are in appendix C.

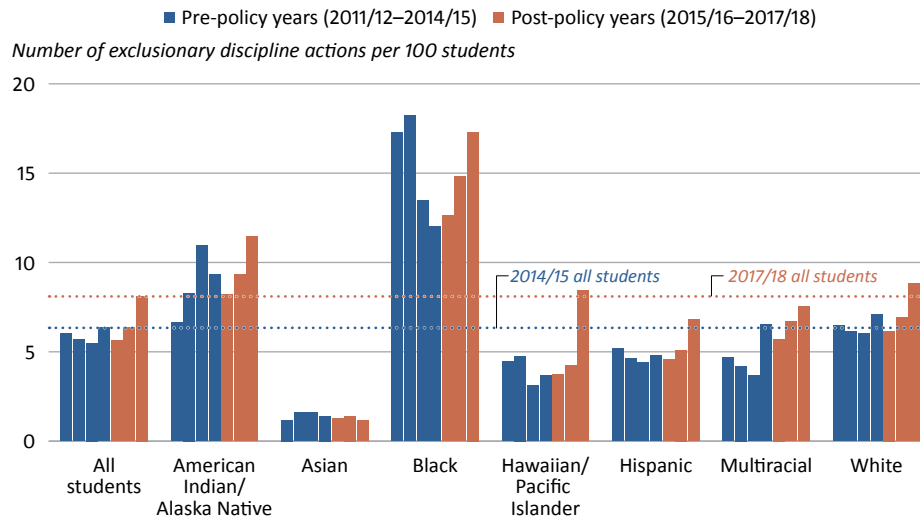
***For all students and for all student racial/ethnic groups, the numbers of exclusionary and of nonexclusionary discipline actions per 100 students were higher after the 2015 reform than before, and disproportionately high numbers of Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students were disciplined in all study years***

For all students the number of office discipline referrals that resulted in discipline actions increased from 89.2 per 100 students in 2014/15 right before the 2015 policy reform to 135.4 in 2017/18—a moderate increase of 46.2 discipline actions per 100 students. For all student racial/ethnic groups there was an upward trend in the numbers of exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline actions per 100 students after the 2015 policy reform relative to the trends before the reform (see table C1 in appendix C). These upward trends resulted in higher numbers of discipline actions after the 2015 policy reform than before the reform.

For Black students there was a large increase (92.8 discipline actions), with 180.8 discipline actions issued in 2014/15 and 273.6 discipline actions issued in 2017/18. The increase in discipline actions for American Indian/Alaska Native students was also large (74.4 discipline actions per 100 students), rising from 97.6 in 2014/15 to 172.0 in 2017/18. (See table C1 in appendix C for more detailed descriptive analysis results.)

***Racial/ethnic disproportionality in exclusionary discipline persisted for Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students after the 2015 policy reform.*** Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students received the highest numbers of exclusionary discipline actions per 100 students across all study years (figure 1). During the pre-policy reform years, the number of exclusionary discipline actions per 100 students ranged from 5.5 to 6.4 for all students, from 12.0 to 18.2 for Black students, and from 6.7 to 11.0 for American Indian/Alaska Native students.

**Figure 1. Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students in grades K–5 in the sample Oregon public schools received more exclusionary discipline actions per 100 students than did students overall both before and after the 2015 policy reform—and the numbers trended upward after the reform, 2011/12–2017/18**



Note:  $n = 784,512$  office discipline referrals from 401 public schools serving grades K–5 that implemented Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and used the Schoolwide Information System for at least one year. The number of schools providing data for the study ranged from 219 to 293 each year. The number of exclusionary discipline actions per 100 students was calculated by dividing the number of exclusionary discipline actions experienced by a student racial/ethnic group across all sample schools by the total number of enrolled students in the student racial/ethnic group across all sample schools and multiplying by 100. See table C1 in appendix C for detailed results.

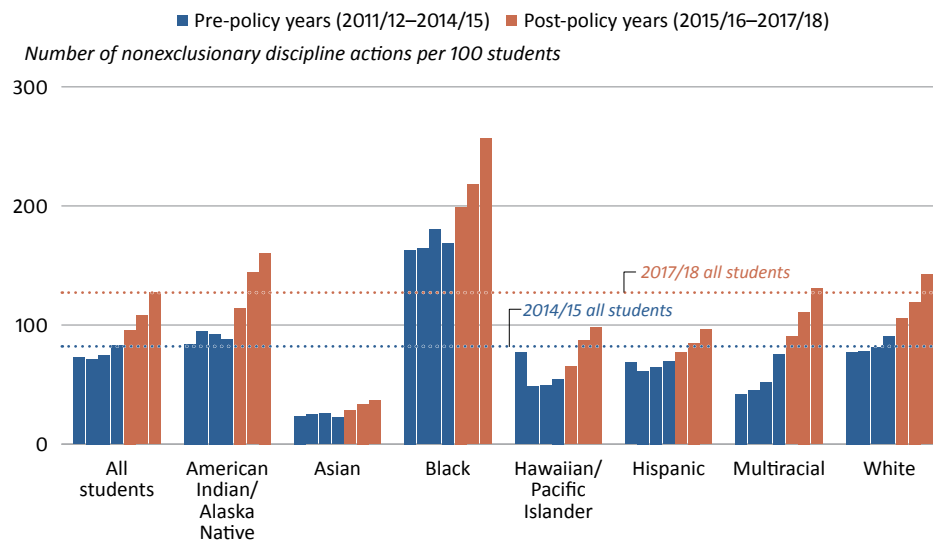
Source: Authors' analysis of University of Oregon Schoolwide Information System data for 2011/12–2017/18.

During the post-policy years, the numbers remained higher for Black students (from 12.6 to 17.3) and American Indian/Alaska Native students (from 8.2 to 11.5) than for all students (from 5.7 to 8.1; see table C1 in appendix C). Black students were 2.1 to 3.2 times as likely as students overall to receive exclusionary discipline in each pre-policy and post-policy year (see table C2). American Indian/Alaska Native students were 1.1 to 2.0 times as likely to receive exclusionary discipline as students overall from 2011/12 to 2017/18.

*The numbers of exclusionary discipline actions per 100 students trended upward after the 2015 policy reform relative to pre-policy trends for all students, but particularly for Black students.* For most student racial/ethnic groups, the number of exclusionary discipline actions per 100 students initially fell or stayed the same after the 2015 policy reform but then began to trend upward in the second or third year after the policy reform (see figure 1). However, for Black students the numbers rose right after the policy reform and continued to trend upward. The upward trends for most student racial/ethnic groups resulted in higher numbers of exclusionary discipline actions per 100 students in the third post-policy reform year than in the year before the 2015 policy reform. For most student groups the increase ranged from 1.0 to 2.2 exclusions per 100 students (see table C1 in appendix C). For Black students, however, the increase was 5.3 exclusions per 100 students between these same years.

*Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students received more nonexclusionary discipline actions per 100 students than students overall both before and after the 2015 policy reform.* The number of office discipline referrals that resulted in nonexclusionary discipline actions per 100 students was higher for Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students than for students overall both before and after the 2015 policy reform (figure 2). During the pre-policy reform years, the number of nonexclusionary discipline actions per 100 students ranged from 163.1 to 180.3 for Black students and from 84.1 to 95.1 for American Indian/Alaska Native students (see table C1 in appendix C). In contrast, the overall numbers for all students ranged from 71.5 to 82.8 during the pre-policy reform years. During the post-policy years the numbers of nonexclusionary discipline actions remained higher for Black students (199.2 to 256.3) and American Indian/Alaska Native students (114.4 to 160.5) than for students overall (95.8 to 127.2).

**Figure 2. Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students in grade K–5 in the sample Oregon public schools received more nonexclusionary discipline actions per 100 students than did students overall both before and after the 2015 policy reform, 2011/12–2017/18**



Note:  $n = 784,512$  office discipline referrals from 401 public schools serving grades K–5 that implemented Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and used the Schoolwide Information System for at least one year. The number of schools providing data for the study ranged from 219 to 293 each year. The number of nonexclusionary discipline actions per 100 students was calculated by dividing the number of nonexclusionary discipline actions experienced by a student racial/ethnic group across all sample schools by the total number of enrolled students in the racial/ethnic group across all sample schools and multiplying by 100. See table C1 in appendix C for detailed results.

Source: Authors' analysis of University of Oregon Schoolwide Information System data for 2011/12–2017/18.

*The numbers of nonexclusionary discipline actions per 100 students trended upward after the 2015 policy reform for all student racial/ethnic groups relative to pre-policy trends.* The numbers of nonexclusionary discipline actions per 100 students trended upward each year after the 2015 policy reform for all student racial/ethnic groups (see figure 2). The increases from the year right before the 2015 policy reform through 2017/18 ranged from 14.8 per 100 students for Asian students to 87.5 for Black students (see table C1 in appendix C). The numbers of nonexclusionary discipline actions had also been trending upward for most student racial/ethnic groups in the period before the policy reform, with the exception of Asian and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students, for whom numbers were trending downward.

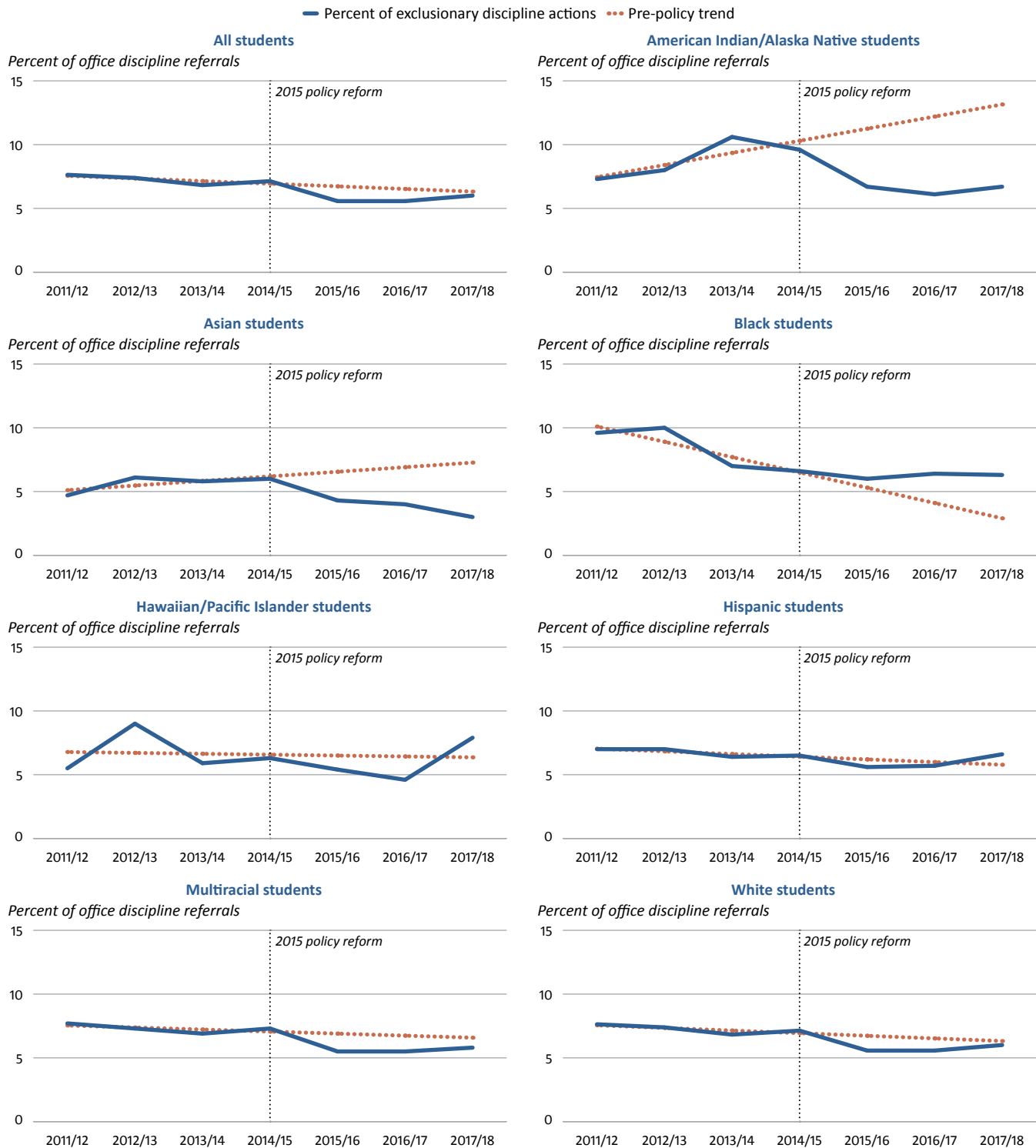
*For most student racial/ethnic groups, there was a short-term reduction right after the 2015 policy reform in the percentages of office discipline referrals that resulted in exclusionary discipline, but the percentages began to revert toward pre-policy trends in later years*

The descriptive results reported above illustrate longitudinal trends in office discipline referrals for exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline. However, determining whether shifts in discipline practice were associated with the 2015 policy reform requires analyses that control for other factors that could affect outcomes, including pre-policy trends, student characteristics, and school characteristics. This and the following sections report the findings for regression analyses that control for these factors.

For most student racial/ethnic groups, the percentage of total office discipline referrals that resulted in exclusionary discipline fell or stayed the same right after the 2015 policy reform relative to pre-policy trends but then trended upward in the second and third post-policy years (figure 3). For example, for students overall, office discipline referrals that resulted in exclusionary discipline fell in 2015/16 right after the policy reform, but then they began to trend upward in the second post-policy year (solid blue line), and in the third post-policy year they rose above the pre-policy trend line (orange dotted line showing the expected post-policy outcomes had trends prior



**Figure 3. For most racial/ethnic groups in the sample Oregon public schools, the percentage of office discipline referrals that resulted in exclusionary discipline fell in the short term for students in grades K–5 but reverted or began to revert toward pre-policy trends in later years, 2011/12–2017/18**



Note:  $n = 784,512$  office discipline referrals from 401 public schools serving grades K–5 that implemented Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and used the Schoolwide Information System for at least one year. The number of schools providing data for the study ranged from 219 to 293 each year. The percentage of total office discipline referrals that resulted in exclusionary discipline was calculated by dividing the number of exclusionary discipline actions experienced by a student racial/ethnic group across all sample schools by the total number of office discipline referrals received by the racial/ethnic group across all sample schools. The pre-policy trend extends the trend in the annual number of discipline actions per 100 students from before the 2015 policy reform (2011/12–2014/15) into the post-policy period (2015/16–2017/18) without changing the slope.

Source: Authors' analysis of University of Oregon Schoolwide Information System data for 2011/12–2017/18.

to the reform simply continued). However, this pattern did not hold true for Black students. For Black students there was a downward trend before the reform that then reversed and trended upward above the expected pre-policy trend in the post-policy years. (More detailed descriptive analysis results are in table C3 in appendix C.)

***The 2015 policy reform was associated with a shift from exclusionary to nonexclusionary discipline for most student racial/ethnic groups, but a shift in the opposite direction for Black students after other factors were controlled for***

Because factors other than the 2015 policy reform could have influenced any changes in the use of exclusionary discipline after the reform, including pre-policy trends, student characteristics, and school characteristics, regression analyses were used to examine whether the percentages of office discipline referrals resulting in exclusionary discipline were lower or higher than would be expected from the pre-policy trend after these other factors were controlled for.

In line with the goals of the 2015 policy reform, on average for all students and for most student racial/ethnic groups, office discipline referrals became less likely to result in exclusionary discipline, and therefore more likely to result in nonexclusionary discipline, during all three post-policy years after other factors were controlled for (table 1). However, for Black students office discipline referrals after the 2015 policy reform were more likely to result in exclusionary discipline during the third year after policy implementation, while for Hispanic students the reform was associated with no change in referrals resulting in exclusionary discipline in the third year. Findings for Asian and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students are not reported here because they are imprecise, likely because of the low numbers of referrals. (Detailed regression results for all student racial/ethnic groups, including Asian and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students, are in table C4 in appendix C.)

**Table 1. Associations between the 2015 policy reform and differences in the likelihood that office discipline referrals resulted in exclusionary discipline rather than nonexclusionary discipline in grades K–5 in the sample Oregon public schools, by race/ethnicity, 2015/16–2017/18 (percentage point difference)**

Student racial/ethnic group	One year post-policy (2015/16)	Two years post-policy (2016/17)	Three years post-policy (2017/18)
All students	-1.54***	-1.72***	-1.49***
American Indian/Alaska Native	-2.68*	-4.61**	-6.43***
Black	0.20	1.27	1.81*
Hispanic	-1.56***	-1.31***	-0.50
Multiracial	-1.55**	-2.28**	-2.29*
White	-1.71***	-2.03***	-1.96***

\* Significant at  $p = .05$ , \*\* significant at  $p = 0.01$ , \*\*\* significant at  $p = .001$ .

Note:  $n = 774,290$  office discipline referrals from 401 schools serving grades K–5 that implemented Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and used the Schoolwide Information System for at least one year. The number of schools providing data for the study ranged from 219 to 293 each year. Findings for Asian and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students are not reported here because they are imprecise, likely because of the low numbers of referrals. Percentage point difference reveals whether the likelihood that office discipline referrals resulted in exclusionary discipline rather than non-exclusionary discipline differed in the first, second, or third post-policy reform year from the likelihood in the pre-policy reform years (2011/12–2014/15). A positive percentage point difference indicates that office discipline referrals became more likely to result in (shifted toward) exclusionary discipline, and therefore less likely to result in nonexclusionary discipline, after the 2015 policy reform. A negative percentage point difference indicates that office discipline referrals became less likely to result in (shifted away from) exclusionary discipline, and therefore more likely to result in nonexclusionary discipline. Regression models were run separately for each student racial/ethnic group and included student-level controls for grade level; eligibility for the national school lunch program; race/ethnicity; gender; special education status; and a multireferral category (up to one office discipline referral, two to five office discipline referrals, or six or more office discipline referrals) and school-level controls for student enrollment, Title I status, percentage of students eligible for the national school lunch program, percentage of White students, and locale. See tables C3 and C4 in appendix C for detailed descriptive and regression results.

Source: Authors' analysis of University of Oregon Schoolwide Information System data for 2011/12–2017/18.

*With the exception of Black and Hispanic students, the 2015 policy reform was also associated with shifts from exclusionary to nonexclusionary discipline among office discipline referrals issued for minor, disruptive, and aggressive behavioral infractions after other factors were controlled for*

Another goal of Oregon's school discipline policy reform was to reduce exclusionary discipline for behaviors that are not considered a risk to personal safety (Drinkwater, 2016). For the sample, about 95 percent of office discipline referrals for exclusionary or nonexclusionary discipline were issued for minor, disruptive, and aggressive behavioral infractions during the years before and after the 2015 policy reform (see table C5 in appendix C).

*For student racial/ethnic groups other than Black and Hispanic students, the 2015 policy reform was associated with a significant shift from exclusionary discipline to nonexclusionary discipline for minor, disruptive, and aggressive behavioral infractions that were not a school safety concern, after other factors were controlled for.* For White students the shift occurred in all three post-policy years for minor and disruptive behavioral infractions and in the first two post-policy years for aggression (table 2). For American Indian/Alaska Native students the shift from exclusionary discipline for disruptive infractions occurred in the second post-policy year, while for multiracial students the shift from exclusionary discipline occurred in all three post-policy years for minor infractions and in the first two post-policy years for aggression.

*For Black and Hispanic students the 2015 policy reform was associated with a significant shift toward more exclusionary discipline for some of these behavior infractions after other factors were controlled for.* For Black students the 2015 policy reform was associated with a shift toward more exclusionary discipline and away from nonexclusionary discipline for disruptive behaviors in the second and third post-policy reform years, but there was no clear difference for minor infractions or aggression (see table 2). For Hispanic students the 2015 policy reform was associated with a shift toward more exclusionary discipline for aggression in the third post-policy year, while exclusionary discipline became less likely for minor or disruptive infractions in the first and second post-policy reform years. (See tables C6–C11 in appendix C for detailed descriptive and regression results for all racial/ethnic groups for minor, disruptive, and aggressive behavior.)

The 2015 policy reform was associated with some significant shifts in exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline for office discipline referrals issued for school safety, property, and other infractions (see tables C12–C17 in appendix C). For school safety infractions there were significant shifts from exclusionary to nonexclusionary discipline in the first and second post-policy years for Hispanic students. For property infractions there were shifts from exclusionary discipline to nonexclusionary discipline in the first and second post-policy years for all students and in the first post-policy year for White students. For other infractions there was a shift from exclusionary discipline to nonexclusionary discipline during the first post-policy year for students overall and for Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students. There were also shifts from exclusionary discipline to nonexclusionary discipline in all three post-policy years for White students. In contrast, there was a shift toward exclusionary discipline rather than nonexclusionary discipline for Asian students in the third post-policy year. The results for Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and Asian students should be interpreted with caution because of the low numbers of office discipline referrals for these student groups.

**Table 2. Associations between the 2015 policy reform and differences in likelihood that office discipline referrals resulted in exclusionary discipline rather than nonexclusionary discipline for minor, disruptive, and aggressive behavioral infractions in grades K–5 in the sample Oregon public schools, by race/ethnicity, one to three years post-policy reform, 2015/16–2017/18 (percentage point difference)**

Student racial/ ethnic group	Minor infraction			Disruptive infraction			Aggression		
	One year post-policy (2015/16)	Two years post-policy (2016/17)	Three years post-policy (2017/18)	One year post-policy (2015/16)	Two years post-policy (2016/17)	Three years post-policy (2017/18)	One year post-policy (2015/16)	Two years post-policy (2016/17)	Three years post-policy (2017/18)
All students	-0.87***	-0.92***	-0.61***	-2.70***	-2.38***	-1.86**	-1.50***	-1.47**	0.09
American Indian/ Alaska Native	-0.37	-0.51	-1.60	-4.34	-11.57*	-9.72	-4.62	-8.10	-6.78
Black	0.34	0.08	0.62	1.12	5.63**	5.22*	-1.02	0.28	3.42
Hispanic	-1.05***	-0.78***	-0.12	-2.55***	-2.28*	-0.07	-1.03	0.84	2.92*
Multiracial	-1.17***	-1.50***	-1.83***	-1.32	-2.52	-0.51	-4.04*	-6.17*	-5.75
White	-0.85***	-0.96***	-0.70***	-3.46***	-3.18***	-3.40***	-1.88***	-2.58***	-1.25

\* Significant at  $p = .05$ , \*\* significant at  $p = 0.01$ , \*\*\* significant at  $p = .001$ .

Note:  $n = 463,320$  office discipline referrals for minor infractions from 401 schools, 118,807 office discipline referrals for disruptive behaviors and 158,508 office discipline referrals for aggression. The number of schools providing data for the study ranged from 219 to 293 each year. Percentage point difference reveals whether the likelihood that office discipline referrals resulted in exclusionary discipline rather than nonexclusionary discipline differed in the first, second, or third post-policy year from the likelihood in the pre-policy reform years (2011/12–2014/15). A positive percentage point difference indicates that office discipline referrals became more likely to result in (shifted toward) exclusionary discipline, and therefore less likely to result in nonexclusionary discipline, after the 2015 policy reform. A negative percentage point difference indicates that office discipline referrals became less likely to result in (shifted away from) exclusionary discipline, and therefore more likely to result in nonexclusionary discipline. Regression models were run separately for each student racial/ethnic group and included student-level controls for grade level; eligibility for the national school lunch program; race/ethnicity; gender; special education status; and a multireferral category (up to one office discipline referral, two to five office discipline referrals, or six or more office discipline referrals) and school-level controls for student enrollment, Title I status, percentage of students eligible for the national school lunch program, percentage of White students, and locale. See tables C6–C11 in appendix C for detailed descriptive and regression results.

Source: Authors' analysis of University of Oregon Schoolwide Information System data for 2011/12–2017/18.

## Limitations

This study has some limitations that should be considered in interpreting the findings. First, the findings do not mean that the 2015 policy reform caused changes in exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline in the years after it was enacted. Proving a causal relationship between a policy shift and changes in school discipline requires a randomized controlled trial or other rigorous scientific experiment.

Second, the study controlled for a range of factors in the statistical analysis other than the 2015 policy reform that could have influenced any shifts from nonexclusionary to exclusionary discipline among office discipline referrals, but many other factors might also have influenced any shifts. Examples include restorative justice practices, professional development on classroom management, social and emotional learning, and trauma-informed instruction. They could also include adding resources to schools, such as behavioral or mental health consultations.

Third, the available data were from a voluntary sample of Oregon schools, so the extent to which the findings can be generalized to all Oregon schools serving grades K–5 is unknown. Additional investigation may be required to understand how applicable the findings are to improving school discipline in particular schools or districts.

Fourth, the sample had moderate to large differences in enrollment across study years for Asian, Hispanic, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students compared with other student racial/ethnic groups. These differences suggest caution in interpreting findings for these student racial/ethnic groups.

Finally, this study did not have direct observation data or descriptions of the behaviors to verify the consistency with which educators categorized the type and intensity of behaviors across schools or student racial/ethnic groups.

## Implications

This study's findings suggest additional lines of research and actions that state and local education agencies, policymakers, and researchers might consider for reducing exclusionary discipline and racial disparities in school discipline practices for grades K–5.

### *Conduct additional research to gain more in-depth understanding of root causes, barriers, and possible remedies for racial disparities in school discipline practices*

The increases in exclusionary discipline in the post-policy years suggest a need for additional research to examine the reasons for the increases and find the actions that might reduce office discipline referrals, especially those that result in exclusionary discipline. This might include research on factors associated with disproportionately high office disciplinary referrals for exclusionary discipline for Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students and with shifts toward more exclusionary discipline for some races and less exclusionary discipline for other races after the 2015 policy reform. Research into racial differences in such factors as how educators interpret student behavior, manage classroom behaviors, or build relationships with students might help explain why office discipline referrals for exclusionary discipline rose or remained unchanged for Black students and improved for other student racial/ethnic groups. Understanding how the quality of implementation of certain interventions, such as restorative practices, mentoring, and social and emotional learning, relates to discipline outcomes would also be valuable. In addition, collecting descriptions of classroom behaviors that lead to office discipline referrals and how school personnel respond to these behaviors could help schools identify and implement targeted educator training and student interventions to reduce office discipline referrals. This research could ultimately contribute to greater equity in how discipline is applied.

### *Identify and implement effective nonexclusionary discipline practices*

Policies that require schools to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline but that do not provide resources to support efforts to increase nonexclusionary discipline may be counterproductive. Resources could include helping educators strengthen evidence-based classroom management practices to reduce office discipline referrals for less serious infractions such as minor, disruptive, and aggressive behavioral infractions—the primary reasons students in the sample schools received exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline. For example, research suggests that using empathetic discipline approaches, implementing restorative practices, providing ongoing coaching to teachers, and addressing bias toward Black students and other student racial/ethnic groups can reduce exclusionary discipline and discipline disparities (Anyon et al., 2014; Gregory et al., 2014; Okonofu et al., 2016). In addition, Black students are more likely to receive harsher disciplinary actions than White students for similar infractions in elementary, middle, and high school (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Jarvis & Okonofua, 2019; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). These findings suggest that interventions that focus on changing attitudes and beliefs that contribute to bias in disciplinary decisions for Black students could increase equity in discipline practices (Jarvis & Okonofua, 2019).

### *Monitor progress toward state policy reforms using data on office discipline referrals for exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline disaggregated by race/ethnicity*

Because research has focused more on improving school discipline in secondary grades, schools will need support to adapt these interventions to grades K–5. Using data to monitor progress and inform actions to implement reform will be critical. For example, understanding whether a problem is statewide or isolated to a few districts or certain settings, specific student groups, or certain groups of educators could inform resource allocation and implementation planning (Nishioka et al., 2017). Information about current practices to determine how school or classroom expectations, routines, or staff members' attitudes disadvantage certain student groups could also help schools identify interventions to improve equity. Finally, longitudinal data should be used to track progress toward desired outcomes and to inform improvements in policy and practice.

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