Educate Every Child

School Exclusion in the Commonwealth of Virginia
Legal Aid Justice Center’s JustChildren Program
September 14, 2012
Discipline is teaching.

- Today, according to Merriam-Webster online, *discipline* means “punishment.”
- But originally, the word *discipline* came from the Latin words *disciplina* and *discipulus*:
  - *Disciplina* means teaching, learning
  - *Discipulus* means pupil
- Therefore, discipline is teaching – teaching right from wrong, about self-control, how to follow the rules, and that others have rights and feelings.
I’ll cover . . .

- State of the Commonwealth: Who gets suspended, how much, and why?
- Four reasons why school exclusion hurts everyone.
- What works to reduce suspension and improve school climate.
- Signs of hope and progress.
State of the Commonwealth

- In 2010-11, more than 90,500 Virginia students were suspended or expelled, many of them more than once.
- These students would fill over 4,500 classrooms.
- If all suspended students had their own school division, it would be the 2nd largest school division in Virginia – about the same size as Richmond, Chesterfield, and Hanover Public Schools combined.
State of the Commonwealth

- In 2010-11, Virginia schools issued 159,117 suspensions or expulsions:
  - 708 expulsions
  - 5,761 long-term suspensions
  - 152,648 short-term suspensions
- This is a rate of 884 suspensions or expulsions per school day.
- Suspension rates vary: In 2006-7, Va. high schools suspended 2.9% to 58% of their student body at least once.
Who gets suspended?

- **Students of all ages.** In 2010-11, over 27,700 short-term suspensions were issued to elementary school students.

- **Students with disabilities.** In 2010-11:
  - Suspension risk for Virginia’s students with disabilities was 2.4 times higher than for non-disabled students.
  - All but 1 of Virginia’s 132 school divisions suspended students with disabilities more often than other students.

- **Students of color.**
  - In 2010-11, suspension risk for black students was almost 4 times the risk for white students.
  - In 2006-7, the average Va high school suspended 1 in 4 of its black students.
Who gets suspended?

Student Population: 76%

Suspensions and Expulsions: 43%

Black Students:
- Student Population: 24%
- Suspensions and Expulsions: 57%
Who gets suspended?

Black Male Students

- Student Population: 88%
- Suspensions and Expulsions: 60%

- 12% of Student Population
- 40% of Suspensions and Expulsions
What explains the discipline gap?

- **Ruled out:**
  - Poverty. Socioeconomic status is a significant predictor of a school’s *rate* of suspension, but not disparity.
  - Differential behavior. Race and ethnicity are significant predictors of disciplinary action, even when controlling for student misbehavior.
What explains the discipline gap?

- Possible Causes:
  - Resource inequities. Low-income students of color more likely to attend schools with lower quality resources and facilities, higher teacher turnover, and lower %-age of highly qualified teachers.
  - Differential selection and processing. Students of color are referred more often and receive more severe punishments for less serious behavior.
  - Poor school climate. 2011 study of 199 Virginia schools found that schools rated by students as having the lowest levels of support and academic expectations had the highest rates of suspension and the largest black-white suspension gap. (Cornell et al.)
Why were students sent to the office in 2009-10?

- Not for weapons. (1.04%)
- Not for drugs. (1.6%)
- Not for aggression against staff. (1.23%)
- Not for aggression against other students. (5.24%)
- The top 4 incidents reported by Va school divisions were defiance, classroom/campus disruption, obscene/inappropriate language or gestures, and disrespect. (44%)
Why are students suspended?

- In 2009-10, approx. 75% of all short-term suspensions were for minor acts of misconduct, such as:
  - Defiance/refuses request/disrespect/walking away
  - Classroom/campus disruption
  - Confrontation w/ no injury (not including fighting)
  - Electronic devices/cellular phones
  - “Other inappropriate behavior”

- In 2009-10, at least 1,544 students were suspended for more than 10 days for behavior that did not involve weapons, drugs, or injury or threat to another person.
More milk, not less!
More school, not less!
School exclusion hurts everyone.

- **Reason # 1:** Excluding students from school does not improve their behavior.

- Who says?
  - American Psychological Association
  - American Academy of Pediatrics
  - American Bar Association
  - Virginia Department of Education
School exclusion hurts everyone.

- **Reason # 2:** Today’s suspended and expelled youth are more likely to become tomorrow’s dropouts.

- **UVa Curry School of Education:** Virginia high schools that use suspension more frequently tend to have high dropout rates.

- **Dropouts are expensive.** Over the course of their lifetimes, each new high school dropout represents:
  - $111,586 in direct cost savings to the Commonwealth
  - $582,000 in total social and fiscal benefits
School exclusion hurts everyone.

- Reason # 3: Harsh penalties for minor misbehavior do not make communities safer.
- Failure to attend school is linked to delinquent behavior, including substance abuse, gang involvement, and daytime crime.
- 85% of youth committed to the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice were not regularly attending school at the time of their commitment.
But what about the good kids?

- **Reason # 4: Poor school climate leads to lower student achievement . . .**
  - Even after controlling for race and poverty, low use of suspension correlates with higher test scores, not lower.
  - **. . . and increased teacher turnover.**
    - Poor behavioral climate is second only to low compensation as a reason for teacher dissatisfaction.
    - Positive school climate promotes student achievement and motivation to learn, reduces disciplinary problems, and increases teacher retention.
So what do we do to maintain safe and orderly schools?

- Effective classroom management practices are linked with improved learning and behavior.
- Effective Schoolwide Discipline (PBIS) 2007 to 2011:
  - ODR by 51% for SWD and 29% for non-SWD
  - ISS by 65% for SWD and 45% for non-SWD
  - OSS by 86% for SWD and 75% for non-SWD
  - Saved 9.2 hours of administrative time per week
  - Saved 4.6 hours of instructional time per week
- But only 12% of Virginia’s 1,838 schools are using ESD.
In addition to PBIS,

- There are a variety of evidence-based responses to misbehavior:
  - Restorative Justice
  - Peer mediation
  - Individual counseling
  - Threat Assessment
  - And . . .
More school, not less!
More school, not less!

- Consequences that minimize loss of instruction and unsupervised time at home:
  - After-school detention
  - Saturday school
  - In-school suspension
  - Alternative programs (last resort!)
- But these things cost money!
# Cost of Out-of-School Suspension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Cost (per year except where indicated)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time processing disciplinary referrals</td>
<td>$13,200 to $17,300 per school saved by implementing ESD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased chance of referral to special education</td>
<td>$16,663 per special education student*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased chance of repeating grades</td>
<td>$10,793 per pupil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased chance of dropping out</td>
<td>$582,000 per dropout in lifetime social and fiscal costs</td>
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*2000 data adjusted for inflation using U.S. Dep’t of Labor CPI Inflation Calculator
Signs of Hope and Progress

- Suspension rates in Virginia are on a downward slope.
- Some schools are proving that it is possible to reduce suspension rates while maintaining high student achievement.
  - 14 of 19 ESD schools with high suspension rates (>200 suspensions per 1,000 students) experienced reductions in suspension rates since 2006.
  - Ex. John Yeates Middle School (Suffolk): Reduced its suspension rate by 84% from 2006 to 2010, while increasing SOL pass rates.
- School leaders are recognizing the relationship between meeting students’ social and emotional needs and increasing student achievement and success.
AFT President Randi Weingarten:

- “We cannot turn our backs on millions of children . . . Our failure to collectively address the issue of out-of-school suspensions and the lack of high-quality alternative placements hurts not just the kids who are suspended; it directly impacts all our communities.”

- “Children cannot learn if they are not in the classroom. Nor can they or their peers learn, or teachers teach, in a school environment that is not safe, stable, and engaging . . . And school districts continue to eliminate school counselors, mentors, and other services that are crucial to helping students succeed inside and outside the classroom.”
In summary . . .

- Too many students are suspended for minor misbehavior.
- School exclusion hurts everyone.
- Virginia should replace school exclusion with more effective alternatives.

*Discipline is teaching.*
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