

Data Essentials for Diagnosing Discipline Disparities

Discipline rates

The first step to identifying discipline disparities is to calculate rates by student groups based upon race/ethnicity, disability status, etc. Districts should monitor these rates at the district and school levels and compare them to other schools, districts, state averages and prior years.

Multiple rate types can be calculated using disaggregated student group data:

- Percent of enrolled students receiving one or more suspension/expulsion
- Number of exclusion incidents per 100 students enrolled
- Average number of days students are excluded by group

Behavior Types

Research on discipline disparities points to the more frequent use of suspension for [behavioral infractions](#) that are minor, subjective or vague, versus serious infractions related to weapons, drugs or serious violence. For this reason, it is useful to examine incident rates by type of behavioral infraction. Minor and subjective types may include disruption, noncompliance, disrespect, "multiple minors," and non-specified (other) behaviors.

Measuring disparities

There are a few primary methods for comparing rates between student groups.

Composite Indices: A composite index compares the percentage of students excluded to the percentage of students enrolled for a particular group. For example, if 10% of students who have been excluded are

African-American, but they comprise only 5% of all students enrolled, the composite index is 2.0, meaning that they are excluded at twice the rate of their enrollment.

Risk Ratios: Unlike a composite index, a risk ratio compares rates directly between two or more groups. The two main approaches are to compare one group to all other groups or to compare one group to a comparison group.

For example, comparing one group to all others: if the exclusion rate for Native American students is 12.5% and the average for all others is 7.3%, then the risk ratio is 1.72. ($12.5\% / 7.3\% = 1.72$)

A common method based upon race/ethnicity is to compare a group of students of color to white students. For example, if the exclusion rate for Native American students is 12.5% and the rate for white students is 5.6%, then the risk ratio is 2.21. *This means that Native students are 2.21 times more likely to be excluded than white students.*

These two approaches will be the same when comparing only two student groups, such as students with and without disabilities.

Risk ratios can be used based upon student, incident and average exclusion days, and they can be calculated for specific behavior types, as long as the measures used in the numerator and denominator are consistent.

The good news is that the [OSPI Discipline Dashboard](#) already calculates exclusion rates and risk ratios, and it can be accessed by authorized staff members in Washington schools and districts!

