



Council on Crime and Justice

# Minneapolis Public Schools Institutional Ethnography: Research Findings

COUNCIL ON CRIME AND JUSTICE

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council on Crime and Justice (Council) received funding from the Minneapolis Public School District to evaluate in school referrals to the behavior office, out-of-school behavioral referrals (suspension and administrative transfer), and school referrals to the juvenile court. The Council conducted an institutional ethnography with two Minneapolis Public Middle Schools. The purpose of the institutional ethnography was three fold. First, the ethnography will assist the District in determining why referrals commonly occur through statistical data and teacher and staff perceptions; second, the ethnography will better inform the schools and the District on how policies and procedures are implemented daily in schools; and third, the report will provide recommendations on referral policies and practices, which could lead to the development of alternatives to referrals.

The institutional ethnography consisted of four research methods: 1) qualitative interviews with District and school staff and teachers, 2) textual review of the District policies and procedures, 3) observations of school activities and the behavioral referral process, and 4) a quantitative review of student behavior files. The information was analyzed and key findings were identified. The following findings emerged:

- There is wide variability in assigning disciplinary actions for student behavior. This was corroborated by the qualitative interviews, quantitative data, and on-site observations. This variability seems to frustrate teachers and prove ineffective in preventing future behavioral issues in students.

- Certain procedural guidelines and roles/responsibilities outlined in the District policies are unclear or unknown to staff and teachers, especially in relation to the juvenile justice system.
- District policies address cultural competency repeatedly, yet the quantitative analysis of student behavior statistics shows there are still patterns of certain student groups who consistently receive more disciplinary action than others.
- An overall lack of resources, such as appropriately behavior trained staff and alternative programs seem to contribute to the narrow range of disciplinary options used to try to prevent and address misbehavior. This also contributes to frustration and repeated behavioral issues.

These findings are intended to guide intervention strategies with the goal of reducing the number of out-of-school suspensions as well as the number of juveniles referred to the juvenile justice system. This institutional ethnography benefits the Minneapolis Public Schools as it can directly guide efforts to improve school climate by developing alternatives to referrals that address underlying causes for misbehavior both at the individual and school/District level. Furthermore, the key findings can be used in conjunction with staff training and District wide policy changes regarding appropriate responses to those situations now resulting in unnecessary or inappropriate referrals to juvenile court.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Currently, research specifically focused on how to handle student behavior issues is limited. There is some information on the types of behaviors that result in disciplinary action, which students are more likely to be at the receiving end of such discipline, and how effective (or ineffective) certain disciplinary actions have been in curbing behavior. For contextual purposes, some historical background of discipline policies is given to gain an overall sense of the issue.

In the early 1990s a rise in juvenile crime rates led educators to adopt “zero tolerance” policies, a term borrowed from 1980’s federal drug policies. Zero tolerance policies mandate predetermined consequences for specific behaviors and severely punish students for violations in an attempt to set an example for other students. For instance, the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 enacted by Congress mandated the automatic expulsion of students who possessed firearms on school property. Since then, amendments have expanded the Act to include any instrument that could be used as a weapon. In addition, many state and local school districts have broadened their policies beyond the federal mandate of weapons (Advancement Project, 2005) to areas such as drugs and alcohol, fighting, threats, and swearing (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998). This led to more controversial disciplinary actions in cases involving possession of paperclips and nail clippers, minor fighting, and organic cough drops as ground for expulsion (Skiba, 2000).

However, research has demonstrated that there is no evidence that zero tolerance policies prevent or reduce violence, and can instead lead to inadequate alternative referrals and a denial of education for some students (Advancement Project, 2005).

Though there has been widespread public support for zero tolerance policies, the American Bar Association voted in 2001 to recommend ending them, claiming it was wrong to mandate automatic expulsion or court referral without considering the specifics of each student's case (Committee on School Health, 2003).

In terms of school referrals to the juvenile justice system, a report by the Advancement Project (2005) stated that increasing numbers of youth, especially minorities, often encounter the juvenile justice system due to zero tolerance policies. These practices result in what the report calls a "school to jailhouse track," where students do not receive the opportunity to change their misbehavior before finding themselves caught in the justice system.

Studies have shown little evidence that suspension is useful to prevent future student misbehavior (Morrison & Skiba, 2001). For example, a study showed that out of school suspension (OSS) often serves as a relief to teachers but does not address the student's issues that led to the behavior (Bock, Tapscott, and Savner, 1998). The Committee on School Health (2003) reported that suspension and expulsion may actually have more detrimental effects, such as academic deterioration, student alienation, delinquency, crime, and substance abuse. They also found that students who are suspended are often from a population that is the least likely to have supervision at home, which can have even more negative effects.

Research also shows a high level of variability between the student's action and an appropriately matched punishment or intervention. For instance, one study concluded in their analysis of middle school office referrals that no strong correlation was found between student misbehavior and a punishment of appropriate weight (Skiba, Peterson, &

Williams, 1997). This variability points to a lack of uniformity or consistency in school practice, which in turn leads to a lack of understanding what the most effective strategies to prevent misbehavior are.

Literature also demonstrates that behaviors that do receive disciplinary action are often not of a violent or serious nature. For example, one study found that disobedience and disrespect were the most frequent misbehaviors that resulted in an office referral, while more serious behaviors (including the possession or use of a weapon, stealing, destruction of property, and sexual harassment or assault) were relatively infrequent occurrences (Skiba, et. al., 1997). A similar study also found that OSS was mainly due to insubordination and other nonviolent offenses (Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002), as opposed to violent acts.

School discipline is often concentrated among certain groups of students. In particular, the disproportionate representation of African American students in the application of school discipline has been a documented and consistent finding for over 25 years. One study found a “differential pattern of treatment, originating at the classroom level, wherein African-American students are referred to the office for infractions that are more subjective in interpretation” (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002).

Additionally, another study found that African American students received a higher average number of referrals than other ethnic groups with the exception of Native American students (Skiba, et. al., 1997). Racial differences have also been found in rates of OSS. One study of a large, diverse school district found that African American students were more frequently suspended than any other racial group and were twice more likely to receive OSS than white students (Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002).

Minority populations are also disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system. In 2002 a disproportionate number of black juveniles were referred to juvenile court at a rate more than double than that of white juveniles (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). In addition to racial differences, other factors have shown to be correlated with increased disciplinary action, such as socioeconomic status, gender, disability (Skiba, et. al., 1997; Skiba, et. al., 2000), a history of abuse, and mental illness; yet schools rarely provide referrals to professional treatment, such as mental health, in order to improve factors that are modifiable (Committee on School Health, 2003).

### **Gaps in Existing Literature**

The current body of knowledge regarding school referrals to the juvenile justice system is minimal and an expansion of this area would be vital in developing practices that are effective in maintaining school safety, promoting school success, and diminishing racial disparity. Even so, information derived from research on disciplinary policies and procedures is useful for understanding general trends in practices and the variability in school/district policies, as well as the differential treatment afforded to certain groups of students. Due to these findings, District and school policies should be reviewed to determine if they are providing fair, consistent, and effective consequences for disciplinary cases. In addition, future research is needed to develop an understanding of juvenile justice system referrals in order to guide appropriate and adequate responses to discipline issues.

# **METHODOLOGY**

## **Research Questions**

The institutional ethnography sought to answer four primary research questions:

- 1) What are the current policies and procedures in place regarding discipline, specifically student referrals, at both the District and individual school level?
- 2) What are the strengths and weaknesses of these policies and procedures?
- 3) What are the characteristics of those juveniles being referred and
- 4) What are the outcomes of student referrals?

This study is important because it is an in-depth analysis of the behavioral process for two Minneapolis Public Schools. This analysis examines the behavioral process from several perspectives. In addition, this information will be used to assist the District in developing alternatives to referrals.

## **Selection of School Sites**

Two Minneapolis Public Schools were selected to participate in this study. As 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders are the most likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system, the Research Team only considered K-8 or middle schools. When examining these schools, the Research Team first looked at data from the Hennepin County Attorney's Office to determine which schools referred the most students during 2005. The Research Team consulted with the District and our Co-Sponsor, Northpoint Health and Wellness Center, to identify those schools with the most detailed student records. It is important to note that this involved on-site visits. After the two school sites were identified a representative from each school was selected in order to help coordinate data collection. To ensure confidentiality the two schools selected will not be named in this report.

A limitation to the evaluation is the fact that only two schools were selected. This decision was made due to financial constraints. Future studies with similar aim should attempt to include more schools for further analysis.

### **Data Collection**

To address these research questions four data collection techniques were employed: (1) Qualitative interviews with District and school faculty and staff, including teachers, principals and administration; (2) Observations of daily school activities and the behavioral referral process, as well as the general school climate; (3) Textual review of all documents pertaining to District referral policies and practices; (4) Retrospective quantitative review of school student behavioral files.

### **Qualitative Interviews**

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with three primary samples: (1) site administration such as principals, assistant principals, social workers, etc. (2) teachers, and (3) District staff, such as associate superintendents. These interviews provided feedback on the efficacy of school referrals. Interview questions were open-ended and specifically tailored to each person interviewed. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were read by three researchers and thematically analyzed.

### **Observations**

The Research Team examined the implementation of District policies through observations at each selected school. The Research Team observed the school climate, the referral process, and interactions between students and staff. Activities were observed both schools at different times of day on four occasions. The primary purpose of these observations was to view how the school functions day-to-day and assess how

policies are implemented. An additional purpose was to understand what resources were available to the school. Immediately proceeding each observation period, field notes were written outlining the events observed, which were eventually thematically analyzed and summarized. The observation worksheet can be found in Appendix A.

### **Textual Review**

To better understand school policies and how they are implemented, a textual review of school behavior and referral policies was conducted. District-wide policies regarding student behavior and disciplinary action were thoroughly read and thematically analyzed the policies. A summary of the policies is included in this report, as well as a brief analysis.

### **Quantitative Analysis**

Student demographic and behavior record information was statistically analyzed to learn disciplinary trends. The two schools were compared to one another to discern the frequency of misbehaviors, the type of disciplinary action taken, and what types of students were receiving discipline. Referrals from both schools were then analyzed based on student-level data and interaction-level data to learn basic descriptive statistics through statistical software R.

# QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW FINDINGS

As described above, qualitative interviews were conducted with District and school administration as well as with faculty and staff from both school sites. The following themes emerged.

## **School & Classroom Environment**

When faculty and staff from both schools were asked to describe the school climate and classroom environment, most respondents described a school environment that was positive and full of energy, using key words and phrases like, “very social,” “fluid,” “a family,” “mercurial,” “energetic,” “high energy,” “interactive,” “playful,” “warm,” “positive,” “fast-paced,” and “jolly.”

Other respondents focused on the more formal, organizational elements of the school and classroom environment, describing it as “structured,” “cooperative,” “respectful,” “teams, supporting each other, student to student,” “students feel safe,” “class size is manageable,” “students and staff get along very well,” and “focused on academics.”

Negative descriptions were more rare, and appeared in key phrases such as, “normal and abnormal,” “hysterical,” “too many kids that have special needs,” “students are for the most part hyper,” “too many kids in classes,” “a lot of students don’t trust the teachers.” One teacher also noted that it is “challenging to run a class.”

A few respondents compared the current school environment to the environment of past school years and remarked on the improvement. One respondent reported that “the climate is much better that it used to be.” Others agreed, describing it as “behaviors are less than they were in the past,” and “there’s such a better feeling of community in the

school this year, I think, than last year.” Others also noted that it “varies from day to day” and is “up and down.”

### **Strategies to Manage/Prevent Misbehavior**

Much misbehavior begins in the classroom setting, so teachers and staff described their strategies for managing and preventing these issues. Though most of their answers described assessing each student’s situation individually and responding accordingly, there were a few common strategies, such as using classroom incentives and rewards, contacting parents, and designing engaging curriculum. When these efforts were ineffective, other strategies extending outside the classroom were used, such as utilizing various school-wide methods to communicate expectations, mediations, and behavior referrals.

The overwhelming method to manage misbehavior was to get to know students with behavior issues personally and to use a strategy that is best fitted for them:

It’s about getting to know that student and building a rapport with them, and just walking over, you know, ‘hey, you ok today?’ Sometimes they just want to go stand out in the hall and have a minute to themselves, pull it together if they’re angry.

Other respondents had similar opinions: “basically being patient and working with them and coming up with some type of intervention plans to help them be successful” and, “I have individual conferences with students, talk to them, try to understand where it’s coming from with the behavior.”

Teachers also reported techniques for managing behavior within the classroom, such as increasing their physical proximity to students misbehaving, or implementing incentives such as point systems and rewards. Another common response was to contact the parents of the student having behavioral issues:

I feel like as a parent too, you know, I'd like to know what my kids are doing in school, even if it's a minor thing, you know I think it's important for parents to be aware of what's really going on with their kid at school...

I also make phone calls home, call parents, the parents are really involved with the kids I have, the parents really want to find out what's going on and so then I use that to my advantage.

Another strategy to manage and prevent behavior in the classroom was developing strong, engaging curriculum to keep students on task. As one respondent stated, "if your curriculum is very well planned where...they can all participate and be active in it, then that really eliminates a lot." Other similar statements were made: "...you engage them enough so that they can focus on their academics instead of acting out," and another person commented that:

Making sure that the lessons are challenging, making sure that the lessons are fun, making sure that there's a variety of things happening, making sure there's different strategies to meet students' needs.

Outside of the classroom, respondents found it important that expectations were clearly communicated to students. Both schools communicated expectations in all school assemblies, on PA announcements, in "Advisory Class," or in newsletters sent home to parents. While some respondents felt the expectations were communicated clearly, most felt that students in this age group had trouble understanding them. One stated:

Communication is pretty much key to everything and I mean they are middle school students, they're going to conveniently, selectively forget more times than you'd like them to about what you've talked to them about.

Another stated:

Some kids, though, look at [district policies] and say 'ok' and sign it and don't really go through what it means. And they may read them, but it doesn't mean they understand them a lot of the times.

Some staff members also mentioned the effectiveness of Student Support Team (SST) meetings, where a variety of staff meet to discuss behavioral issues of individual students. Sometimes “it may entail doing a very detailed research” and to “work with the teachers to do different interventions in the classroom.” Mediations were also mentioned by several respondents as a positive strategy to control behavior, which one respondent considered one of the most effective methods. If these efforts also failed to control misbehavior, teachers referred students to behavioral specialists in the main office.

### **Types of Disciplinary Action**

According to the interviews, most respondents identified various levels of disciplinary sanctions used to control student behavior after in-class behavioral management proved to be ineffective. These disciplinary actions, with increasing levels of severity, included behavior referrals out of the classroom (or “referrals”), detention, suspension, and administrative transfer (transferring a student to a different school).

The majority of respondents sent students to the behavior office. The referral seems to signal the responsibility of dealing with consequences being shifted away from the teacher:

They interview the student and they look at the referral, sometimes they’ll speak to us, but generally speaking the actual consequences of a student’s behavior are assigned by an administrative person.

A form is used to describe the incident for the behavior specialist, so that the teacher doesn’t have to spend any more time inside the classroom working to manage the misbehavior:

The referral says that you have to write what the student is doing as far as disrespecting the teacher or disrupting the class and not letting the teacher teach...and then at the bottom it usually says if the student agrees with the

statement or if the teacher has done anything to, you know, to talk to the kid before they wrote the referral.

Typically, behavioral specialists use various types of detention (lunch detention, Wednesday detention, Saturday school) as the most common types of action taken in regards to student discipline. Other respondents noted that different sanctions are more appropriate for different students, such as in the statement:

Well, you can give lunch detention, or you can give isolated lunch. You can have them clean up off the tables in the lunchroom. Can give them Saturday School, or just pull them out for that class period and let them stay with you and make them do the work down there with you...it has to be with the individual and the time. It's all different. It's just so different.

When behavior continues to not improve, the school often moves towards either suspending or transferring the student:

The administration moves for removal of the student from school and basically says we gave you all this opportunity and you still chose to become criminal. Now we'll find you a different school because you're not fitting in here.

Most respondents described suspensions and administrative transfers as a "last resort" (a phrase used numerous times) and occurring only after these other types of disciplinary action were taken. As one interviewee described it, "there are a multitude of steps in the months before a child is actually removed... as a school, we try to do everything we can before suspending a student." Another person reported that:

Administration has been very creative with trying lunch detentions in lieu of suspensions...they have them cleaning tables in the lunchroom, doing some other, you know just trying desperately not to suspend the kids.

## **Reasons for Referral to School Behavioral Specialists**

There was a high variability in behaviors that would result in a behavior referral, ranging from minor disruptions to physical fighting. However, there was consensus that one of the most commonly cited reasons for a referral was disrupting the class by talking or interrupting the teacher, and thereby wasting valuable time reserved for education. Other reasons respondents gave were verbal defiance, disrespect, harassment, throwing things, bullying, horseplay and swearing. As one respondent summarized, “Pretty much anything where the teacher has to divert their attention from the lesson...” could be a cause for a referral.

A couple of interviewees believed that teachers have different levels of expectations and/or levels of tolerance. What may be considered disruptive for one teacher may not be considered disruptive for another. Some felt that there were too many referrals and that some behaviors could be handled in the class. As illustrated by the respondents, “[some things referred] could have been dealt with in the classroom.” Another stated that “a lot of [teachers] have a short fuse...”

A number of respondents, though, stated that they do attempt to handle most behaviors in the classroom, especially if it is a student’s first behavioral disruption. Overall, it appears that the teachers have a great deal of discretion in referring students to the behavioral specialists which could potentially illustrate more about the teachers themselves than necessarily the actual behaviors in referral decisions.

## **Deciding School Referrals**

There did not seem to be a systematic way of determining disciplinary actions for a student who is referred to the school behavioral specialist. The policies and procedures also do not outline how certain behaviors should be dealt with. This causes inconsistencies between students on how a particular behavior is dealt with. Disciplinary actions are often determined by the frequency that a student is referred to the office. As one person commented:

If I haven't seen a student, hear or seen, often, I'm more lenient. Those I see quite frequently I seem to be a little harsh. Some students you give breaks, some students, you don't. Some students you work out deals with, some students you don't.

Others use a more systematic way to determine discipline:

You also look at pattern of behavior, you look at their suspension record, you look at their referrals and things, and that kinda determines somehow if you just want to give them a break or you want to give them one day or if you want to do some alternative things and work with them.

Another person reported, "you look at that file and you can see that history." One noted:

You really have to take time to investigate, gather your facts and things, and discern from there...have all your statistics and all your stuff together and show them their behavior file...you're constantly just trying to plan and use whatever interventions you hold relevant.

## **Effectiveness of referrals and suspensions**

There was some agreement among participants to the extent in which they felt suspensions and referrals were effective in changing behavior. Many respondents reported that they are effective for some students but not for others. Overall, though, many respondents felt that after a while too many suspensions can become ineffective:

Some of those kids go down [to the behavioral team], it's like their second home, [and] they'd prefer to be down there instead of in class...

One interviewee responding to the effectiveness of suspensions said:

You have some that really don't like it...and then you have some that, you know, it's kind of second nature...so I would say no [that it is not effective] in the fact that after a while it becomes so mundane that you know it's not working...

Another respondent made a similar statement:

...depends on the kid. Most of the kids think it's a vacation, but I do have a few kids who, that they take suspensions very seriously, and their parents do too...for the most part I would say I don't feel suspensions are very useful or helpful to the students...

Many teachers and staff felt that the effectiveness of a suspension lies with the individual student and their other life circumstances, such as parental involvement:

I think in terms of how suspensions and referrals work depends so much on the individual student. Some of them it means the worst, they don't even want to hear the word referral, much less suspension. And because I think there is accountability at home, the parents will not accept that from their kids. But when they know that there's nothing you know at risk, at stake, it doesn't mean anything.

Many staff and faculty feel that suspension can be effective, especially when used sparingly, as they become less effective when they are used too much. The effectiveness of suspension also clearly depends on the individual student. Some students will take the suspension seriously and change behaviors while others will not.

### **Referrals to Juvenile Justice System**

The most severe cases may eventually be referred to the juvenile justice system. Cases that were cited by the school police liaisons were taken to the county attorney's office and the county attorneys decided whether or not to formally charge the student. In this report that process is referred to as "court referrals." Two central themes emerged around this question: 1) teachers, administration and staff had little knowledge of the

court referral process; and 2) teachers and administration believed that most court referrals were due to truancy and not because of behavior.

For the most part, staff that we interviewed did not have significant knowledge of process to juvenile court as they had not been involved in that process. They were unaware of the types of infractions that got students referred to juvenile court. One teacher, when asked, stated, “I [have] not really had the experience to take it that far. And I don’t know when that necessarily takes place.” Another staff stated:

I don’t know if I can really speak to that, because once it gets to that level I don’t know what’s going on, I don’t know what they’re doing, what steps are going [on]. I just know what’s going on in my classroom.

Staff that did have some knowledge of court referrals felt that court referrals were largely due to truancy and not any criminal behavior. One staff commented:

[Referrals due to criminal behavior] that’s rare...the main thing that anybody, if you want to call it the justice system, that would be referred...would be for truancy. That would be the major thing.

Aside from trancies, a great deal of staff also believed that police involvement and court referrals were due to behavior that happened off school grounds, such as in the quote, “the only way they’d [police] get there is if they did something on the outside and that involved the police...so I don’t know anything about that.” Another teacher commented that, “we’ve had other issues, assault, and most of the stuff does not happen in the school...but we have to deal with it in school.”

Some, however, were aware of students who were referred to juvenile court because of disorderly conduct or assault cases. Those people mostly consisted of administration. From the interviews, it appears that the school administration has a minor role in determining what causes a student to be cited and referred to court. The school

police liaison, who serves as Minneapolis Park Police, has sole discretion on whether or not cite a student with a criminal act. Often times at both schools the police liaisons were brought in for consultation regarding an incident to determine if a criminal act did occur.

One liaison stated:

[The principal] will bring me in on a consult and say here's what going on, what do you think, and I'll give them my legal opinion saying, yeah this behavior rises to a criminal level and I'll deal with it and I deal with it in legal terms and they deal with it within the school terms.

Another staff person stated:

[The police liaison] is really good about knowing what will probably stick and what won't stick [in court] and there've been a couple of disorderly conduct charges that have been asked to be pushed...and they have talked us out of it. And in hindsight I'm glad that they did.

Often times the referral is due to some type of violent act, such as fighting or carrying a weapon to school. As noted by one staff person:

Usually things in court system are based on some violence...kids that make threats, people that create a culture in the classroom where you really don't believe you can keep some people safe...

Ultimately, though, the county attorney's office has the final say on whether or not to charge students. As one liaison stated:

I just send them on this blanket charge saying, I want this – I charged this kid with disorderly conduct, damage to property, and the county [attorney] decides whether to prosecute, divert, or decline, I don't have a say.

While one school worked closely with their police liaison they also cautioned against citing too many students for concern of overburdening the courts:

We don't want to unnecessarily burden the court systems with things that, you know, are trivial, like we do a lot of disorderly conduct tickets here; I think if the principal had their way, we'd do a lot more.

Another theme that emerged was that those who did have knowledge of the court referral process had little knowledge about what happened to a student once they were referred to the courts. It seems the school is not involved once the court is involved. One principal stated, “kids that are referred to the court system, I’m never involved with them anymore.” Some teachers and staff had mixed feelings about whether or not they even needed to know what happened to a student after they were referred:

It would be nice to know if the student was getting help, you know, know they are in good hands, but it doesn’t benefit me in any way so as a teacher I don’t suppose that I need to.

### **Tracking/Follow-up**

Another theme respondents discussed was the lack of tracking and follow-up both during a behavioral intervention and after the consequences. Respondents seemed to wish there was a more effective system in place, but also found it difficult to imagine having the time and resources available to do so. As one respondent described:

I think there could be more follow up with these kids, but there really isn’t because of time and then dealing with other kids or doing another job at the school.

When a student has a behavioral problem, it seems that information isn’t shared with all the teachers and staff involved. Some expressed frustration at not being made aware of a student’s behavioral issues and actions taken with them, such as in this teacher’s statement:

What I think is lacking is communication about, ‘ok what happens then.’ Like a lot of times we’ll just get an email that says, ‘please bring five days of homework for so and so because he was suspended’ or whatever. And we don’t know why...or I hear about it from the kids... ‘no, he got suspended.’

Another teacher shared this concern:

Lack of communication is a big weakness. I had a couple kids who ended up going to court for things that happened here and lack of communication between all the people who were supposed to be helping this kid has been a huge hindrance. We don't know what's going on as teachers and we have the kid in the classroom all day...there's a restraining order between two students and we find out about it four days later.

There also appeared to be some confusion on which staff members would be the key person to track and follow up on referrals, suspensions, and contact with the juvenile courts:

What I would like to know, and I don't know if our social worker actually keeps up with who actually has a PO here at this school, or what's actually taken place. I think it would be nice for us to know exactly who has outside intervention and the contact person in case we would need to bring them in to help them resolve some kind of issue or get them back on track for school.

In order to prevent future incidents, respondents felt that tracking and following up on behavioral interventions needs to be completed. One staff comment reflects this viewpoint:

So, I think that if we had more people that could actually, or somebody else that could follow up with looking at kid's files and seeing how many suspensions they've had, or how many times they had to intervene other than just suspending, or, you know, maybe refer them to a psychologist or something to get evaluated or something like that.

Another respondent expressed this opinion as well:

There's a lot of kids like that, who all of a sudden it's like, 'oh my god we didn't know this kid had so many referrals...and then all of a sudden they wanna do something about it, well it's been a year almost. And now it's kinda like, ok, why wasn't somebody watching him?

### **Support from Teachers, Parents, and School**

When asked if they felt supported by the teachers, parents, and school in their disciplinary decisions (either in their decision to refer a student to the behavioral aide or in their recommendation of appropriate discipline), the majority of respondents felt

supported by teachers and school staff and administration. However, less respondents felt supported in their decisions by the parents.

When asked how supportive the school was in behavior decisions, responses ranged from somewhat supported to very supported. The following quotes demonstrate those extremes:

Yeah I have no problem with that. There was recent confusion as to when a teacher calmed down and said, ‘why was a student not suspended?’, or ‘why didn’t you guys do that?’ It’s because they haven’t interviewed, or they don’t have all the information that we have. And basically we just say, we explain the situation and it’s like ‘oh, ok, I didn’t know that piece.’

And:

I get more support from the teachers than I do the administration ...because they are licensed administrators, you know, they have an obligation to try and keep suspensions down.

As mentioned above, staff felt less supported by parents in their disciplinary decisions.

One interviewee gave possible explanation for the lack of parental support: “Most of the parents...you can tell they reached their limit too” and another stated “I think we have some parents that are just overwhelmed by life.” One respondent said when they did not feel supported by parents, it was when:

...there is educational neglect at home, you know, where the parents absolutely don’t know how to raise a child and the kids pay a terrible price for that.

Another respondent stated:

I tend to hold parents accountable for some things that they don’t want to be held accountable for... [And] parents cannot deal with the realities of their students’ behavior...

When discussing how to handle the occasional parent upset about a disciplinary decision, one respondent said:

...if you come in with all your statistics and all your stuff together and show them their behavior file...[the parents] suddenly become more upset with their child than they are with the school.

Not all staff felt unsupported by the parents. Some, in fact, felt the opposite. For example, one respondent stated:

Most parents, I think I never have problems with parents. And they always know that I support their child, they do.

Another teacher said they felt very much supported and described a particular incident that required the parents coming in for mediation that resulted in a positive outcome.

Additionally there was one respondent that felt that parents were very involved in the discipline process as well as in other areas. Teachers and staff saw parental involvement and support as key to behavioral management. As one staff member shared, "I think [positive behavioral changes] has a lot to do with the kind of parental support we get."

Overall teachers and staff felt supported by the school and administration, but there were instances where they felt less than completely supported. Many respondents also did not feel support from parents (with some differing opinions). It also seemed the behavioral staff and administration felt more supported than teachers.

### **Administration and Teacher Frustration**

While many teachers remained optimistic, several teachers also expressed some level of frustration. They felt that the educational system, as well other systems, such as the justice system, the mental health system and the healthcare system, were failing the students. Services were not being provided due to resource cuts and often times it seemed sanctions used on students (lunch detention, suspensions, court referrals, etc.) were ineffective.

Teachers also felt they had limited options to help students with behavior problems. As one teacher stated, “we have no programs to deal with kids who have excessive referrals. We just don’t and I do feel our hands are tied.” Some commented that students cannot even get services they need until the courts step in: “It takes criminal intervention to force the child to get the help they need.” But others thought that even the justice system fails students. One summarized it by saying:

You know a child, student, commits a crime, is arrested, is re-arrested, is re-arrested. Finally, I say, okay he obviously has issues or she has issues, we’ll send them to IDT. Well, they go to IDT with the same behaviors and IDT goes, ‘whoa, this is a behavior issue, we can’t control this violent behavior. You’re expelled. The School District goes, ‘oh, guess he’s ours again.’ So they put him right back in the school he was/she was in the first place, because there’s no where else to put them. What was accomplished?

### **Lack of Resources**

In response to a variety of questions, many respondents brought up the issue of budget cuts and a lack of resources. These responses generally fell into the areas of: not having enough staff to manage the students, a lack of resources available to students outside the classroom to address their personal and academic needs, and over-extended staff due to budget constraints. According to respondents, the combination of these three issues negatively impacts the effectiveness of behavioral referrals.

According to a report by the Minneapolis Foundation (2005) about state-wide budget cuts, “a combined \$622 million in cuts affected educational services from pre-school to adult basic education” (p. 3). Accordingly, not having enough staff both in the classroom and in support services was mentioned repeatedly in the interviews. One respondent called the lack of staff a “huge problem” and another reported:

There is a lot going on and we’ve only got so many people that can handle it at a time. And even inside the classroom you’ve got one adult and 30 or 40 kids.

Another responded that:

When I first started here we had a fulltime behavior specialist, we had a fulltime psychologist, we had a fulltime chemical dependency person, we had two fulltime student advocates, we had much more hall staff and every team had their own EA, and we had teams back then that worked with kids in the classroom. Now it's the teacher alone with 32, 38, hopefully not more than 40 kids in a classroom.

Respondents also noted that students were not receiving adequate services outside the classroom, which in turn affected their academic performance and behavior. As one teacher described it:

Every year with budget cuts more and more of these resources get taken away, and we can't teach if a student's basic needs aren't getting met. There's nothing I can do.

Another stated:

You have budget cuts, you don't have the resources to really address every kid. And every kid has a need. And a lot of times the school is not in a position to address every kid's needs and those seem to be the ones who do fall by the wayside.

A third common theme was the response that current workloads were rising as staff and resources were cut. One respondent reported, "In the last six years I've absorbed 3.8 positions...So, those are the things that make life much more difficult." Another described the burden of administrative work:

We're working on documenting and we're working on stuff that – and we very, very rarely get the results that help the kid, we just get more tired.

Another staff member described a similar situation:

Look at the counselors at our schools. They're doing more clerical work than anything else. It used to be the counselor was there to talk to students, guide them, help them with other problems, and do the mediation process and things like that...they're not available for students to do that as much because they're doing most of the clerical work that could be done by somebody else if they had the resources, if they had the money to hire

someone else. They've been cutting funds more and more and we have fewer people to deal with those students.

The lack of resources can impact the schools' ability to manage behavioral issues.

As explained by staff members:

Before all the cuts, the budget cuts and things, we used to have an in school suspension program – good or bad, but at least we could try to keep the kids here. Well, there's just not staff to man that.

You can't handle everything that happens in there. And so a lot of stuff, it either just slides by or gets whipped through the system so quickly that it's not really a deterrent for the kid, or there's not time for the kid to process, to change the behavior or whatever.

Having sufficient resources for a school is important. Lack of resources negatively impacts a school's ability to function, as well as enrollment. According to the Minneapolis Public School's website (2007), a portion of District-wide budget cuts are due to decreasing enrollment in public schools – 23% in five years (Board of Education, 2007). As seen through the interviews and observations, without properly staffing and funding schools it is difficult to manage student behavior, and thus school climate.

# OBSERVATIONS

To further enhance understanding of how District and school policies and procedures translate into practice, researchers spent several days at the school sites to conduct observations in spring, 2007. Several locations within in the schools were observed, including the main office/behavior office, cafeteria, hallways during passing time, and at lunch detention. One limitation was that all the observations were conducted in the springtime, which may signal a more hectic environment than usual. After the observations notes were recorded which were thematically analyzed and summarized.

## **Behavior Specialist's Office**

The office environment varied from calm, civil, and effective to disorganized, loud, and unmanaged. Often, this seemed to be related to the staff's relationship or interaction with certain students. For instance, the observers witnessed a male student who was referred to the office for slapping a teacher's hand. The staff member dealing with the situation cut the student off and refused to let him speak, then suspended him for three days without examining the offense. However, in a different situation, two students who engaged in a fight had a calm dialogue with the behavioral staff about what happened, which resulted in an apology and one student receiving lunch detention.

Multiple observers reported a large number of students waiting to receive attention from behavioral staff with little or no supervision. For instance, one female student wandered the hallways and left and re-entered the behavior office multiple times while waiting. Other reports from the observers showed some students waiting 20-45 minutes. In addition, the observers were unable to determine what sort of order the students were in, noting that some waited much longer than others. At times, office staff

attempted to give waiting students work to do in order to keep them occupied and under control, but the observers reported this having little success.

The high volume of students (some reported seven to nine students waiting at a time) led to what observers described as a lack of privacy or confidentiality. For instance, one behavioral staff member read the referrals in front of the entire group of students, as well as giving the details of each student's punishment in front of their peers. One student received community service to be done in front of his classmates as punishment.

The observers were also able to witness the wide variety of reasons students were sent to the behavioral office. During the site visits, these included eating candy or drinking soda in class, writing rap lyrics in class, telling a teacher they wouldn't do any work, disinfecting ones' hands during class, bringing a bug (an ant) to class and refusing to get rid of it after four warnings, skipping class, singing, and being verbally disrespectful to a teacher. One observer recorded a student say, "I hope I get a referral so I can go home," and another recorded a staff member say in the presence of students, "I'm sick of stupid referrals from stupid students."

The observers also noted how quickly calm situations escalated into situations of frustration and shouting, by both staff and students. Some words used to describe the climate were "tense," "loud," and "impatient." One behavioral staff person appeared to use intimidation as their main technique to control students by repeatedly using swear words and, according to one observer, frequently alluding to violence as a way of keeping students in line. The observers did note that when this occurred, the staff seemed harsh, yet justified in their frustration. Other frustration seemed to stem from having to deal with the same students (many of the staff knew the students by name), and by having to

assign detentions because there was not sufficient staff to supervise more severe sanctions, such as in-school suspension.

A concern of some school staff and teachers was the absence of a District or school policy to mandate specific training for behavior office personnel. Some suggested mandatory conflict resolution or adolescent psychology training, or mandatory attendance at District and statewide educator training. In light of the researchers' observations, these suggestions could potentially lead to calming the otherwise hectic environment of the office and the distribution of effective, consistent consequences.

### **Cafeteria (mainstream lunch)**

All observers noted the loud and chaotic environment of the cafeteria, describing it as "lots of students, yelling, talking loudly." They noted that perhaps due to the high energy environment, teachers and staff were mostly passive in overall control and only intervened in the form of yelling when needed. One noted that the staff at lunch mostly surrendered to poor behavior and did little to reduce it. It was recorded among the observers that a lot of students got away with behaviors that would not be normally tolerated in the classroom.

Though not necessarily related to discipline, all of the observers noted the ways students separated themselves at lunch tables along gender, racial, ethnic and special interest groups/cliques, such as "Hmong girls," "African American boys," or "Skateboarders." However, one observer still felt the atmosphere was relaxed and wasn't entirely exclusive.

### **Lunch Detention**

The observers who witnessed lunch detention described a high volume of students and thus resulting in large amounts of time taken to control them enough to form a line. One noted that some students only had five minutes to eat their lunch due to this delay. Another observer felt it was difficult for the behavioral staff to manage lunch detention or take attendance to track which students were missing due to only having one staff person to manage many students.

### **Hallways/Passing time**

Overall, student behavior in the hallway seemed mostly orderly and less chaotic than the lunch period. Most observers noted the presence of principals, staff and teachers in the hall, but didn't seem to perceive a strong effect of this on student behavior. One observer felt the teacher presence in the hallway worked to "enforce their perception as passive educators," instead of taking the role of aggressive regulators of control, which seemed to be the role of behavioral staff.

# TEXTUAL REVIEW OF DISTRICT POLICIES

## District Policy 5200

The citywide discipline policies are clear in their goals in reducing behavioral issues, especially within certain student groups. However, some improvements could be made to focus more attention on students, better include parents/guardians in disciplinary guidelines, and to clarify or redefine some unclear policies.

Citywide Discipline Policy (Policy 5200) describes the goal of school discipline to “teach students to behave in ways that contribute to academic achievement and school success and to support a school environment where students and staff are responsible and respectful” (5200:I:A). Policy 5200:I:B states that the policy, though District-mandated, “assures consistency across all schools in the district.”

Policy 5200:II:C gives the District’s values and expectations that act as the foundation for disciplinary policies and procedures. These are: building relationships; developing effective teaching and curriculum; explicitly taught, high standards of behavior; balancing consistency with unique circumstances; utilizing research, data, and experience; relying on evidence-based strategies to understand and respond to student’s cultural and developmental needs; building cultural competence to eliminate institutional racism; and holding staff to high standards of professional behavior where they should be recognized as role models.

These are well articulated values that seem to be based on the experience of the District, especially in regards to cultural sensitivity. Addressing institutional racism at the very forefront of discipline policy in a frank manner is effective and admirable, especially in the way the policy directly acknowledges the diverse community the District serves

and strives to meet their needs by building cultural competence. However, it can be noted that institutional racism and cultural competency was not an issue most staff, administrators, or teachers mentioned while being interviewed. Although this is a pervasive element of the District policies, there wasn't sufficient attention paid to building cultural competency to qualify it as a theme of the interviews when they were analyzed, signifying a possible discrepancy between policy and practice.

### **Citywide Discipline Procedures: Policy 5200A**

This policy outlines the procedures that should be taken to address student discipline. The main framework of policy 5200A is to identify six key areas of responsibilities for five different groups: students, families, schools, teachers, principals and other school administration, and District administration. These six key areas of responsibility are: Accountability and Continuous Improvement, Relationship and Community Building, Defining and Teaching Expectations, Communication between Families and Schools, Interventions for Misbehavior, and Use of Data and Problem Solving.

One issue is the labeling of these policies: 5200A:V (Schools) is mislabeled on the District website's downloadable policies as 5200A:I, 5200A:VI (Teachers) is mislabeled as 5200A:I, and 5200A:VII (Principals and other school administrators) is mislabeled as 5200A:III. This causes confusion when trying to read through the entire document, as the numeric flow is wrong. For the rest of this report a corrected, sequential labeling system will be used to avoid any confusion.

Another questionable aspect of this section is the sheer amount of clear directions for some groups. Some groups have an abundance of clearly defined responsibilities, while

other groups do not. This is apparent when comparing the few, more vaguely defined responsibilities of students and families to the more practical, applicable and in-depth responsibilities of the District and school administrators. For example, District administration has a responsibility under “Use of Data and Problem Solving” to track student attendance and behavior in a systematic way (5200A:VIII:F:2). This policy outlines specific “benchmarks” to be used as progress indicators (e.g. “No more than 15% of students receive 2 to 5 out of class referrals per year”). This can be contrasted to the responsibility given to students in the same category of “Use of Data and Problem Solving” (5200A:III:F), which states that students’ only responsibility is to “share feedback on progress (grades, etc.) with family.” This may signal a need to involve students and families in the creation of their District-mandated responsibilities so that these groups can also identify applicable strategies to achieve academic and behavioral goals.

Section IX of Policy 5200A provides the “District-wide Rules and Guidelines for Interventions” and describes specific rules to be enforced at all schools, as well as directions for responding to behavioral concerns. For instance, 5200A:IX:F:9 mandates that an “Individual Behavior Intervention Plan” should be developed to address extreme and/or chronic behavior or when a 5-day suspension is given. This seems to be a key policy in ensuring the individual needs of a student are balanced with the safety and productivity of the class. To be effective, however, this would need to be done systematically and consistently between schools, especially as it is the school’s responsibility to enforce these regulations.

Part G of Section 5200A:IX gives a helpful list of interventions that may be used by teachers or administrators to address behavioral issues (e.g. “modify instruction” and “referral to community based services”). Though many of these may be commonly discussed within regular teacher and staff training, it is helpful to compile them within District policy as a reminder of the range of intervention strategies. By including this in District policy, this is also available to students, parents, and the community. This list could be expanded (for instance, this list does not include mediation, which is a service offered at many schools) and distributed to all levels of staff periodically.

### **Cultural Competence**

District policy states that “school and staff must build cultural competence” to “eliminate the institutional racism that presents barriers to success” (5200:II:C:7). This goal is repeated in many different sections of District policies. For instance, it is specifically stated, “with regard to discipline, staff are specifically expected to question the impact of their actions on African American male and Native American students and other groups that are over-represented among those students who are suspended.” (5200A:I:F). Under District policies for “Accountability and Continuous Improvement,” it is confirmed that schools must “review outcomes and modify plan, with particular attention to whether the school is reducing the disproportionate suspension of African American and Native American students” (District Policy 5200A:V:A:7)

Again, it appears the District is attempting to be explicit about the treatment of certain groups that have historically been the recipients of disproportionately higher levels of disciplinary action. However, the policies state that staff should “question the impact of their actions” on over-represented groups, but does not provide clear directions

for documenting this questioning process to ensure the information is being tracked in a systematic way to be discussed within schools. In addition, the thematic analysis of the interviews showed that this issue was not at the forefront of what administration, staff, and teachers discussed with the researchers. Though it is vital to the fair treatment of students for these goals to be explicit, it is equally important to ensure these policies can be translated into practice.

### **Suspensions**

District policy 5200B, first created in 1974 and last updated in 1994, defines general suspension procedures. The behaviors that warrant suspension are clear, concise, and well articulated: “MPS has identified seven (7) sets of misbehavior that will always result in suspension, except for students with disabilities who will be dealt with pursuant to regulation 5200C. **It is expected that whenever a student is suspended, other interventions will be used as well**” (5200A:IX:C, original emphasis). A chart provided by the district titled “Mandatory Suspensions” and “Guidelines for Other Offenses,” found at the very end in 5200A (page 15), is extremely helpful. It is clear, easily understood and can be used at any school in the district, as it differentiates sanctions between grades (K-5 and 6-12).

5200B also provides the procedures for suspension. The policy outlines six steps that must be taken when a student is suspended and mandates that a student must attend an informal administrative conference (unless the student poses an immediate and substantial danger to persons or property). If this conference cannot be held at the time of suspension, the student must be offered an opportunity to return to school at the earliest possible time for this conference (5200B:I:C:2). Students must be personally served a

written notice containing the grounds for suspensions, facts, testimony, a readmission plan, and a copy of the “Pupil Fair Dismissal Act” (5200B:I:C:3) and parents are to receive this same documentation by certified mail within 48 hours of the informal administrative conference.

If this conference is delayed, written notice is given to the student at a rescheduled time. The principal must then prepare a written readmission plan at the time of each suspension, which may include procedures for the student’s return to school or provisions for an alternative program (i.e. makeup work, homework, changes in assigned courses, changes in student’s time schedule, tutorial assistance, or administrative transfer) (5200:B:I:C:5). Students may not receive consecutive suspensions for the same conduct; however a principal may extend a suspension for up to five additional days if the student exhibits immediate and substantial danger. No suspension should exceed fifteen school days and an alternative program should be implemented when suspension exceeds five days (5200B:I:C:6).

The suspension procedures are relatively clear, but two issues are unclear: first, the definition of an “informal administrative conference” (as opposed to a “formal” conference) and what exactly the procedures are beyond providing the student with proper written notice. Second, there doesn’t appear to be a standardized protocol for notifying parents beyond sending the written documentation via certified mail within 48 hours of the student being suspended.

There is another section of this policy that may need redefinition: 5200:B:I:C:4, which states, “at the imposition of any term of suspension or at the end thereof, the principal must require the student’s attendance at an informal administrative conference

which shall be conducted prior to the termination of the term of the suspension.”

However, this regulation is referenced in 5200:B:I:B which states, “an attempt must be made, prior to suspension, to provide an alternative program, as defined in C.4 of this regulation.” However, C.4 does not provide any alternative programs, and is thus unclear to readers.

### **Tracking**

Tracking student disciplinary interventions is a key part of the District’s goals of being accountable and using data for continuous improvement. District Policy 5200A:V:E:4 states that it is the responsibility of the schools to “track the implementation of interventions to assure they are implemented as intended and to assess the degree of effectiveness” and to “implement a system for documenting interventions used by individual staff and the school as a whole and their impact.” (5200A:V:E:2)

Beyond tracking the number of behavioral interventions, the District also requires schools to “disaggregate data by gender, culture, grade, and other variables identified by the school to identify areas of need, including individual students who are struggling with behavior issues, classrooms and staff who need additional intervention or professional support, times and places where problems occur.” (5200A:V:F:3). 5200A:III:F:2 states that the data should be reviewed with staff to “engage them in identifying patterns” and to use the data to “inform practice.”

5200A:I:D also describes the central role of the school in data collection. This policy states that the District previously recorded suspension data, but that the responsibility for tracking now lies with the schools, specifically: “schools are now being required to

record and review data on all out of class behavior referrals in order to broaden their understanding of the issues and to identify and respond to problems earlier.”

These policies are clear about who is responsible for tracking student behavior data. However, it is not identified in 5200A:I:D or 5200A:III:F if schools should adopt their own system of tracking this data or if there is a standardized system used by all schools. It is also unclear if schools are held to 5200A:III:F:2, which states that data should be reviewed with staff, and if so, how often and in what manner this should occur.

When comparing these policies to practice, respondents did not describe a standardized system. Some explained it as a lack of communication, while others blamed it on a lack of time or staffing, often due to funding constraints. However, there was overall agreement that an effective procedure was not in place to track behavior, which to some seemed to contribute to repeated issues with the same students.

### **Courts**

District Policies for student interaction with the judicial system is defined in Policy 5610B: Department of Court Services. This policy determines that a referral to court services “may need to be considered when the student presents severe and continuous problems of non-attendance or incorrigibility which do not respond to the services of school personnel.” The policy also mandates that numerous considerations be taken when referring a student, such as the nature of the problem, the student’s history in regards to school adjustment, attendance, behavior, achievement, reaction to correction, and ability to use school services. Other considerations are the family’s “reaction to correction” and their feeling of responsibility and ability to help the student.

When the matter has been turned over to the juvenile court and a probation officer is assigned, the school provides space for the officer to interview the student “free from the observation of other children or individuals.” The policy also states that it is not necessary for a principal or school delegate to be present at the interview, unless they are needed to secure cooperation from the student or when vital information needs to be conveyed to the officer in the presence of the student.

Further, the policy states that “school records should be available to the court worker to insure more effective work with the student,” placing the responsibility of the school to organize, prepare, and interpret the records for the officer. Last, the District has defined the School Social Worker as the “key person” in working with the Division of Court Services. The principal is responsible for the building, so “all pertinent information will be shared with him/her.”

The policy emphasizes that the school must know which students are under supervision of a probation officer. This responsibility is defined as the officers, as in the statement, “the probation officer should contact the principal or school social worker prior to the start of the fall school term and during the school year, in order to discuss students under supervision.”

A positive aspect of this policy is in the way it protects student privacy and thus avoids gossip or social stigma that could profoundly affect middle school students in their school setting. This method also separates interaction with the probation officer from the classroom. The only questionable aspect of the policies falls under roles and responsibilities: the principal is to be notified, but is not required to be present during the interviews. The social worker is to provide records for the probation officer and be the

main contact person, however, it is up to the probation officer to initiate this contact by informing the school of the student's status with the court system. It is unclear what sort of system is in place for probation officers to notify the school and if this policy has been given to and agreed upon with the officers themselves.

This issue emerged in the qualitative interviews where it became clear that teachers and administration had little knowledge of the court referral process and which students were involved with the court system, although they viewed it as important information in helping students. Some respondents also said they openly did not know what staff members were in charge of obtaining and tracking this information. This signifies a large disconnect between the policies outline by the District and the practices within the schools.

# QUANITATIVE FINDINGS

## Introduction to the data

The analysis provided by the Council on Crime and Justice includes all infractions by students at two Minneapolis public middle schools during the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 academic years. For confidentiality, these schools will be referred to as School A and School B for the rest of this report. There are two ways the data can be examined: at the student-level and at the infraction-level. Each of these levels will require unique types of analysis given the structure of the data. That is, the student-level dataset contains information on each student, while the infraction-level dataset contains this student information plus data on each unique infraction. Thus, for the infraction-level data, multiple entries are possible for the same student. The two datasets contain information on 11,130 unique infractions among 951 students – which immediately shows evidence of repeat offending.

At each level, different questions are of interest. For the student-level data, the main question of interest will be what background and academic factors predict the total number of infractions a student has received. For the infraction-level data, the main question of interest will be how the characteristics of an infraction are associated with what action is taken in response to an infraction.

Throughout the analyses that follow, it is very important to keep in mind that the data only contain entries for students who have received at least one infraction. Thus, all results should be conditioned by the statement, “*For students who have received at least one infraction.*” Thus, no comparisons can be made to the student body at large. All

descriptive statistics and bivariate relationships were analyzed in the software program SPSS. All other analyses were done in the statistical program R.

### **Student-level Analysis – Descriptive Statistics**

Before examining the main question of interest, the distribution among the variables in the dataset, as well as simple bivariate relationships, are examined. Table 1 shows the number and percentage in each category for categorical variables and the mean and standard deviation for continuous variables. The dataset contains more males than females (57.2% vs. 42.8%). Further, most students speak English at home (84.1%), although 8.9 percent speak Spanish and 7.1 percent speak another language at home (the latter includes 15 different languages). Black students make up the majority of the dataset at 60.8 percent, followed by Whites (19.6%) and Hispanics (11.2%). School B contributed 69.2 percent of the students, while School A contributed the remaining 30.8 percent. The average GPA among the students with at least one infraction (taken in the first term) is 2.143.

The average number of infractions per student is about 11.7. This estimate, however, has a high standard deviation, which is reflected in its uneven distribution. As Figure 1 shows, many students are clustered in the low end of the distribution, which quickly tails off to the right. Although students receive a particular action for each infraction, whether the student ever received particular actions can be examined. Of students who have received at least one infraction, 48.4 percent have received an out-of-school suspension at least once, 29.9 percent have been removed from instruction at least once, and 10.2 percent have had a family conference at least once.

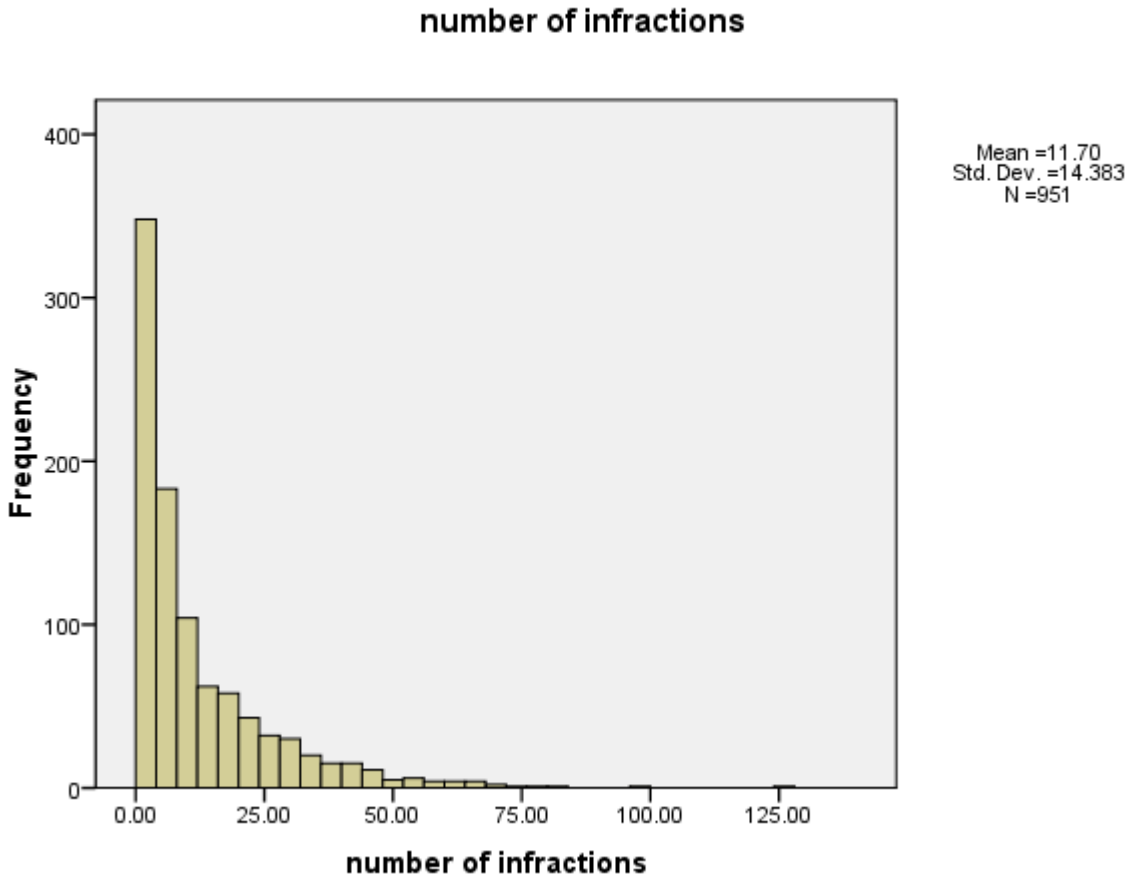
**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Student-Level Data**

<b>Categorical variables</b>		
	N	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	407	42.8
Male	544	57.2
<i>Language Spoken at Home</i>		
English	797	84.1
Spanish	84	8.9
Other	67	7.1
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
Black	576	60.8
Asian	44	4.6
Hispanic	106	11.2
Native American	36	3.8
White	186	19.6
<i>Middle School</i>		
School A	293	30.8
School B	658	69.2
<i>Ever received out-of-school suspension</i>		
No	491	51.6
Yes	460	48.4
<i>Ever received family conference</i>		
No	854	89.8
Yes	97	10.2
<i>Ever removed from instruction</i>		
No	667	70.1
Yes	284	29.9
<b>Continuous Variables</b>		
	Mean	St. Dev.
GPA	2.143	1.002
Number of infractions per student	11.699	14.383

**Student-level analysis – Bivariate relationships**

Next, the relationships between two variables are examined. The first three columns of Table 2 show the breakdown among background factors and school for whether a student has ever received an out-of-school suspension, family conference, or removal from instruction for at least one of their infractions.

**Figure 1: Number of Infractions per Student**



Among males and females, males (53.1%) are more likely than females (42.0%) to receive an out-of-school suspension. Chi-squared tests of association show that these two variables are indeed significantly associated. Specifically, a chi-squared test shows whether the expected number of students in each cross-classification of gender and out-of-school suspension is different from the observed numbers. Though males make up a slightly higher percent for those ever receiving a family conference and removal from instruction, there is no statistically significant association.

**Table 2: Tests of Association for Particular Infractions and Analysis of Variance for Number of Infractions per Student**

	Ever out-of-school suspension	Ever family conference	Ever removed from instruction	Average number of infractions per student
<i>Gender</i>				
Female	42.0%*	8.6%	28.7%	9.437 <sup>#</sup>
Male	53.1%*	11.4%	30.7%	13.392 <sup>#</sup>
<i>Ethnicity</i>				
Black	56.1%*	12.7%*	38.7%*	15.087 <sup># †</sup>
Asian	40.9%*	4.5%*	15.9%*	5.273 <sup>#</sup>
Hispanic	32.1%*	2.8%*	13.2%*	6.802 <sup>#</sup>
Native American	50.0%*	11.1%*	25.0%*	6.861 <sup>#</sup>
White	36.0%*	8.1%*	16.7%*	6.629 <sup>#</sup>
<i>Language at Home</i>				
English	51.7%*	11.8%*	32.6%*	12.838 <sup># §</sup>
Spanish	27.4%*	2.4%*	10.7%*	6.321 <sup>#</sup>
Other	37.3%*	1.5%*	22.4%*	5.373 <sup>#</sup>
<i>School</i>				
School A	50.9%	6.8%*	46.4%*	12.809
School B	47.3%	11.7%*	22.5%*	11.205

\*  $p < .05$  for chi-squared test of association

<sup>#</sup>  $p < .05$  for Analysis of Variance

<sup>†</sup> Post-hoc comparisons show the only significant difference is between the average of Black and all other ethnic categories

<sup>§</sup> Post-hoc comparisons show the only significant difference is between the average of English and all other languages

Chi-squared tests of association do show though that ethnicity and language spoken at home are significantly related to all three disciplinary actions. For each action, Black students have the highest percentage of receipt, with 56.1% of those with at least one infraction receiving out-of-school suspension at some point, 12.7% a family conference, and 38.7% removed from instruction. Native American students have also received each of these disciplinary actions more than the other three ethnic categories. Hispanics, on the other hand, are the lowest on each. For language spoken at home, English-speakers have received the three disciplinary actions more so than those who speak another language at home.

For the students at each school, there is no significant association with ever having received an out-of-school suspension, with about half of the students at each school who have received at least one infraction having been suspended at some point. For the other two actions, School B (11.7%) utilizes family conferences for individual students more often than School A (6.8%). For removal from instruction, however, School A has removed 46.4 percent of students who have received at least one infraction from instruction for one of their infractions, while for School B it is only 22.5 percent.

Next, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is used to determine if the average number of infractions per student (among those who have received at least one) is significantly different among these same variables. The average number of infractions per male student who received at least one infraction is about 13.4, while for female students it is about 9.4, a statistically significant difference. ANOVA also shows that the averages are not all the same among the five ethnic categories. When using post-hoc tests to examine which averages are different, the only significant differences exist between Black students and all other ethnic categories. That is, the averages among the other four ethnic categories are not significantly different, ranging from about 5 to 7 infractions per student. Black students who have received at least one infraction, by contrast, average about 15.1 infractions per student. Similarly, ANOVA shows that the averages among the three language-spoken-at-home categories are different, but the only significant difference is between English speakers and the other two categories. This difference is most likely due to the high number of Blacks in the English-speaking category. Finally, there is no statistically significant difference between the average number of infractions

per student who has received at least one at each school, with such students averaging 12.8 infractions at School A and 11.2 infractions at School B.

### **Predicting the Number of Infractions per Student**

Next, the three background factors, school, and GPA are used to predict the number infractions per student who have received at least one infraction. These data are essentially *count* data; that is, the only values infractions can take are non-negative integers (0, 1, 2, 3, ...). There are two classic ways to model count data: Poisson regression and negative binomial regression. The latter is used in cases where *overdispersion* exists; that is, the mean and variance of the response, here number of infractions, are different. Given that this is the case for these data, negative binomial regression is used. Thus, an overdispersion parameter is also estimated within the model in order to account for the response's differing mean and variance.

The first step is to determine the appropriate model. A likelihood-ratio test shows that a simple additive model with our five variables fits better than even the saturated model, or the model with all possible interaction effects ( $\chi^2 = 65.392$ ,  $df = 51$ ,  $p = 0.085$ ). Similar tests also show that the three background factors and GPA cannot be removed from the model ( $p < .05$ ). The simpler model without school, however, can be used ( $\chi^2 = 1.191$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.275$ ). That is, as we saw with the ANOVA results, there is no significant difference at each school in the number of infractions per student who has received at least one infraction. The final model is shown in Table 3. Theta is the overdispersion parameter. Given that it is significantly different from zero, the choice of a negative binomial regression over Poisson regression is justified. A negative binomial regression uses a logarithmic link function, which means that the numbers shown in

Table 3 reflect changes in the count on a logarithmic scale. Next, the results are discussed.

First, the effect of GPA is negative. A one unit increase in GPA is associated with a 0.45 decrease in the log count of infractions. For language spoken at home, there is no statistically significant difference between English speakers and Spanish speakers, but those who speak another language at home have an expected decrease in the log count of infractions of 0.54. Finally, with Black students as the baseline for comparison, the results show that, with the exception of Asian students, all other ethnic categories have a significantly lower log count.

To best understand how these log counts translate into the number of infractions, Table 4 shows the predicted number of infractions by gender, ethnicity, different GPAs, and combinations of these three variables. These numbers are found from the model in Table 3 by holding the other variables constant at their mean, while varying the variable of interest. The result is exponentiated in order to put it back on its original scale.

**Table 3: Negative Binomial Regression of the Number of Infractions per Student**

	Coefficient	(St. Error)
GPA	-0.452***	(0.033)
Male (vs. Female)	0.288***	(0.065)
<i>Language Spoken at Home</i>		
Spanish-speaking household (vs. English)	-0.290	(0.221)
Other-speaking household (vs. English)	-0.540**	(0.176)
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
Asian (vs. Black)	-0.368	(0.215)
Hispanic (vs. Black)	-0.501*	(0.197)
Native American (vs. Black)	-0.652***	(0.176)
White (vs. Black)	-0.572***	(0.085)
(Intercept)	3.403***	(0.087)
Theta	1.338	(0.069)
-2 Log-Likelihood	5769.67	

It is especially important here to remember that these predictions are for students who have at least one infraction. Thus, these numbers do not reflect the prediction for all students in these specific categories, but rather only those who have committed an infraction. The predictions show that, while holding all other variables constant at their mean, males have about 11.55 infractions, while females have 8.67. As for ethnicity, Blacks are predicted to have the highest count at 12.61, while those of other ethnicities range from about 6.5 to 8.7.

When looking at how gender and ethnicity play out together, Black males are predicted to have the highest number of infractions at 14.26, about 4 infractions greater than the next closest ethnic male category, Asians. Note that the Black female prediction of 10.69 is higher than the prediction for all non-Black male categories. Differences in GPA matter greatly, as the difference between the number of infractions for the lowest possible GPA of 0.0 (26.93) and the highest possible GPA of 4.0 (4.41) is about 22 infractions. Also note that the reduction in the number of infractions matters most at the lowest GPAs. For example, controlling all other variables at their averages, moving from a 0.0 GPA to a 1.0 GPA reduces the count by about 10, while moving from a 3.0 GPA to a 4.0 GPA only reduces the count by about 2.5. The difference GPA makes is illustrated one last time by predicting the number of infractions by male and ethnicity for those with a particular GPA. For a Black male with a 1.0 GPA, the expected count is 23.91, while for a White male with the same GPA, it is only 13.50.

**Table 4: Predicted Number of Infractions per Student for Certain Groups, Holding All Other Variables Constant at Their Mean**

	Predicted Number of Infractions
Male	11.55
Female	8.67
Black	12.61
Asian	8.72
Hispanic	7.64
Native American	6.56
White	7.12
Black female	10.69
Asian female	7.40
Hispanic female	6.48
Native American female	5.57
White female	6.04
Black male	14.26
Asian male	9.87
Hispanic male	8.64
Native American male	7.43
White male	8.05
GPA = 0.0	26.93
GPA = 1.0	17.13
GPA = 2.0	10.90
GPA = 3.0	6.94
GPA = 4.0	4.41
Black male with 3.5 GPA	7.72
Black male with 1.0 GPA	23.91
White male with 3.5 GPA	4.36
White male with 1.0 GPA	13.50
Hispanic male with 3.5 GPA	4.68
Hispanic male with 1.0 GPA	14.49

### **Infraction-level analysis – Descriptive statistics**

Table 5 shows the number and percentage of cases in each of the categories for the infraction-level variables. For infraction, location of infraction, and action taken, there were originally too many categories for meaningful analysis. Therefore, with the assistance of Council employees, the variables were reduced to smaller categories. The original distribution is available in Appendices A through C. Table 5 shows that the most common infraction by far is for disruptive, disorderly, or insubordinate behavior (72.2%).

The remaining infractions are spread among the other five categories. The location of the infraction is overwhelmingly in the classroom (78.2%), followed by infractions occurring somewhere else inside the building (19.5%). Only 0.2 percent of infractions occurred off campus (in further analyses, these are combined with the category “outside on school property” to make a generic “outside” category).

As for action taken, in-school suspension (31.5%) and the behavior-intervention room (24.9%) make up over half of actions taken. Out-of-school suspension is the next highest at 13.1 percent. School B contributes about two-thirds of the infractions, while School A contributes about a third. These numbers are very close to the percentage of individual students each school contributes (see Table 1).

**Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Infraction-Level Data**

	N	Percentage
<i>Infraction</i>		
Disruptive/disorderly/insubordination	8036	72.2
Attendance	1007	9.1
Physical	741	6.7
Verbal	904	8.1
Property	142	1.3
Other	295	2.7
<i>Location of infraction</i>		
Classroom	8548	78.2
Other inside building	2129	19.5
Outside on school property	230	2.1
Off campus	25	0.2
<i>Action taken</i>		
Behavior/intervention room	2773	24.9
In-school suspension	3501	31.5
Detention	1162	10.4
Family conference	161	1.4
Out-of-school suspension	1459	13.1
Removal from instruction	846	7.6
Other	1223	11.0
<i>Middle School</i>		
School A	3764	33.8
School B	7366	66.2

### **Infraction-level analysis – Bivariate relationships**

Table 6 gives a cross-classification of infraction type and the action taken. Note that there is a significant association among the two variables according to a chi-squared test of association. Each cell contains the number of infractions receiving that action type. The cell also contains the row percent, or the percentage of a particular action taken that is made up of a particular infraction type, and the column percent, or the percentage of each infraction type receiving each action. For example, there were 2,570 disruptive, disorderly, or insubordinate (DDI) behaviors that received the behavior-intervention room. Thus, of all the infractions sent to the behavior-intervention room, DDI behaviors make up 92.7 percent. Of all the DDI behaviors, 32.0 percent received the behavior-intervention room.

Thus, the behavior-intervention room is overwhelmingly used for DDI infractions. Similarly, 79.7 percent of in-school suspensions are for DDI infractions. Given the sheer number of DDI infractions, they make up the majority of all actions taken, except for out-of-school suspension. DDI behaviors make up only 39.1 percent of out-of-school suspensions. Unlike the other action types, physical infractions make up a third of out-of-school suspensions.

Again, the column percent gives the percentage of each action taken for a particular infraction type. So, of all the DDI behaviors, 32.0 percent received the behavior-intervention room, while 34.7 percent received in-school suspension. Few DDI infractions result in the other actions taken. Attendance infractions tend to result in either in-school suspension (35.6%), detention (29.4%), or some other action (19.8%). Physical infractions follow a much different pattern, with 64.9 percent resulting in out-of-school

**Table 6: Table of Infraction Type by Action Taken**

		Disruptive/ disorderly/ insubordination	Attendance	Physical	Verbal	Property	Other
Behavior/ intervention room	N	2570	91	13	62	11	26
	Row %	92.7	3.3	0.5	2.2	0.4	0.9
	Col %	32.0	9.0	1.8	6.9	7.7	8.9
In-school suspension	N	2789	358	73	188	14	79
	Row %	79.7	10.2	2.1	5.4	0.4	2.3
	Col %	34.7	35.6	9.9	20.8	9.9	27.1
Detention	N	667	296	55	121	8	15
	Row %	57.4	25.5	4.7	10.4	0.7	1.3
	Col %	8.3	29.4	7.4	13.4	5.6	5.1
Family Conference	N	105	17	5	20	5	9
	Row %	65.2	10.6	3.1	12.4	3.1	5.6
	Col %	1.3	1.7	0.7	2.2	3.5	3.1
Out-of-school suspension	N	569	16	481	248	78	62
	Row %	39.1	1.1	33.1	17.1	5.4	4.3
	Col %	7.1	1.6	64.9	27.5	54.9	21.2
Removal from instruction	N	583	30	59	131	17	26
	Row %	68.9	3.5	7.0	15.5	2.0	3.1
	Col %	7.3	3.0	8.0	14.5	12.0	8.9
Other	N	752	199	55	133	9	75
	Row %	61.5	16.3	4.5	10.9	0.7	6.1
	Col %	9.4	19.8	7.4	14.7	6.3	25.7

Note:  $p < .001$  for chi-squared test of association

suspension. Physical infractions are especially low in resulting in a family conference (0.7%). Property infractions similarly most often result in out-of-school suspension (54.9%). Verbal infractions are spread out among the actions taken, though nearly half receive either an out-of-school suspension (27.5%) or in-school suspension (20.8%). Though little can be said substantively about the mixed “other” category for each variable, “other” infractions do have the highest percentage of “other” actions taken (25.7%) relative to the other infraction types.

Next, both infraction type and action taken are cross-classified by location of infraction and school. Chi-squared tests for all the bivariate cross-classifications show

that each pair of variables is associated. Table 7 begins with infraction type. Again in part due to their large numbers, DDI behaviors make up most of the classroom (77.4%) and other inside (56.4%) infractions, although physical (16.9%) and verbal (12.5%) infractions also make up about a quarter of the latter. Outside the building infractions, on the other hand, are made up mostly of physical infractions (40.0%) and DDI behaviors (36.1%). As for the column percents, DDI (83.6), attendance (86.0%), verbal (66.3%), and other (60.9%) infractions occurred mostly in the classroom. By contrast, physical (48.8%) and property (58.2%) also frequently occurred elsewhere inside the building in addition to the classroom. At each school, DDI behaviors make up most of the infractions. The only difference appears to be in the higher percentage of attendance infractions at School B (11.6%) compared to School A (4.1%).

**Table 7: Infraction Type by Location of Infraction and Middle School**

		Disruptive/ disorderly/ insubordination	Attendance	Physical	Verbal	Property	Other
<i>Location***</i>							
Classroom	N	6612	857	274	589	53	159
	Row %	77.4	10.0	3.2	6.9	0.6	1.9
	Col %	83.6	86.0	37.3	66.3	37.6	60.9
Other Inside	N	1201	134	359	267	82	85
	Row %	56.4	6.3	16.9	12.5	3.9	4.0
	Col %	15.2	13.5	48.8	30.0	58.2	32.6
Outside Building	N	92	5	102	33	6	17
	Row %	36.1	2.0	40.0	12.9	2.4	6.7
	Col %	1.2	0.5	13.9	3.7	4.3	6.5
<i>Middle School***</i>							
School A	N	2904	154	328	266	72	36
	Row %	77.2	4.1	8.7	7.1	1.9	1.0
School B	N	5132	853	413	638	70	259
	Row %	69.7	11.6	5.6	8.7	1.0	3.5

\*\*\*  $p < .001$  for chi-squared tests of association

**Table 8: Action Taken by Location of Infraction and Middle School**

		Behavior/ intervention room	In-school suspension	Detention	Family Conference	Out-of school suspension	Removal from instruction	Other
<i>Location***</i>								
Classroom	N	2539	3140	980	145	333	364	1047
	Row %	29.7	36.7	11.5	1.7	3.9	4.3	12.2
	Col %	91.8	92.0	86.2	90.6	22.9	43.1	90.7
Other Inside	N	211	250	133	12	995	438	88
	Row %	9.9	11.8	6.3	0.6	46.8	20.6	4.1
	Col %	7.6	7.3	11.7	7.5	68.3	51.8	7.6
Outside Building	N	16	22	24	3	128	43	19
	Row %	6.3	8.6	9.4	1.2	50.2	16.9	7.5
	Col %	0.6	0.6	2.1	1.9	8.8	5.1	1.6
<i>Middle School***</i>								
School A	N	1486	322	522	54	598	568	212
	Row %	39.5	8.6	13.9	1.4	15.9	15.1	5.6
School B	N	1287	3179	640	107	861	278	1011
	Row %	17.5	43.2	8.7	1.5	11.7	3.8	13.7

\*\*\*  $p < .001$  for chi-squared tests of association

Table 8 also looks at location and school, but by action taken. Of the classroom actions taken, most are given either the behavior-intervention room (29.7%) or an in-school suspension (36.7%). For elsewhere inside the school, most are given either an out-of-school suspension (46.8%) or removed from instruction (20.6%). A similar pattern exists for those infractions outside the building. Of those infractions receiving the behavior-intervention room (91.8%), in-school suspension (92.0%), detention (86.2%), family conference (90.6%), or other action (90.7%), the great majority of them occurred in the classroom. Of those receiving out-of-school suspension (68.3%) or removal from instruction (51.8%), a sizeable number occurred elsewhere in the building. Each school also favors different actions. Particularly, School B most often used in-school suspension (43.2%), while School A most often used the behavior-intervention room (39.5%). The other noticeable difference is the much higher percent of removal from instruction at

School A (15.1%) compared to School B (3.8%) and School B's more frequent use of "other" actions (13.7% vs. 5.6%).

### **Conclusion/Summary of Quantitative Findings**

This analysis shows important patterns in the types of students having behavioral issues, notably in the higher levels of Black students and male students in the data set. It is also important to note the connection between low GPAs and high numbers of infractions, possibly illustrating the weakened focus on academics when a student is spending more time at the behavior office or dealing with discipline issues. The analysis also showed that the overwhelming majority of infractions occurred in the classroom, with the most common actions taken being suspension and referrals to the behavior office (both of which mandate the removal of the student from the academic setting).

Another important issue is the differences between the schools. For instance, School A contributed 69.2 percent of students in the data set. This finding could mean there are more behavioral issues at the school, or it could mean that School A has more strict standards for what constitutes a behavior that leads to disciplinary action. In other comparisons, School A uses family conferences less frequently than School B, but uses removal from instruction more frequently than School B. School A used the behavior-office more often, while School B used suspensions more often.

When comparing the statistical information to the qualitative data, it is also notable that only 10.2 percent of students ever had a family conference to address behavioral issues, despite the popularity of that response in the interviews. Also during the interview, the perception emerged that severe misbehaviors most often happen outside of the classroom or off school grounds – when in reality, only 0.2 percent of the

infractions in the dataset occurred off campus. However, there was agreement between the interviews and the data in regards to types of misbehavior being mostly in the category of disruptive, disorderly, or insubordinate (DDI), which accounted for most of the responses and 92.7 percent of the dataset, which shows a perception that is corroborated with statistical data.

This dataset only showed demographic information for students who have ever had contact with the school disciplinary system, so comparisons cannot be made to the students who avoid misbehavior. However, statistical information on infractions provides a solid base for understanding how policies, practices, and perceptions relate to (and differ from) the data.

# CONCLUSION

The research findings in this institutional ethnography revealed a number of disconnects between the qualitative data, textual review, and quantitative data; in other words, it showed some gaps in translating policy into practice. It became clear in the interviews that teachers, staff and administration are working hard with the resources they have available to address student behavioral issues, however, the findings in this report can benefit these efforts by providing research-based recommendations.

The strongest disconnects emerged in areas of: cultural competency, involving the families of students, connecting students to other resources, roles/responsibilities for contact with the juvenile justice system and how to determine which misbehaviors should constitute a referral, and along those lines, what action should be taken to address the misbehavior.

Cultural competency is a topic repeatedly in the District policies; it is clear that this is and has been an important issue for District administration. However, very few respondents viewed this as a problem in the schools, even when directly questioned about how they integrated cultural competency into their educational practice. Furthermore, the statistical data pointed to higher levels of certain student groups to be at the receiving end of discipline, showing that the schools are consistent with the trends of institutional racism found in previous literature on this issue.

It was important and useful to the respondents that students' families are involved with school behavior; however parental involvement in response to student discipline could use more detailed attention in the District policies. Respondents also noted how the degree of parental involvement seemed to influence the effectiveness of behavioral

interventions and discipline. However, when compared to the statistics on the use of family conferences, it appears this is not an intervention that is as commonly utilized as suspensions or referrals to the behavior office.

This issue leads to a frustration of many respondents that the school system was not equipped to handle behavior issues, especially when families are not involved. There was some belief that other systems may be a helpful intervention, though most felt these systems failed students as well. There is no easy solution to this issue, and any possible solutions need to be creative in dealing with a lack of resources and a lack of family support for some students.

Since the school setting is often the first point of contact juveniles have with misbehavior that can lead to involvement with the justice system, the school has a responsibility to ensure they are following District policies in addressing and assisting students who are making this initial contact with the courts. It was very unclear to the respondents in the interview who should be involved in this process, although it was made clear in the District policies.

The last finding that emerged in the research was in regards to the high variability in what constitutes a behavior referral (especially in the classroom), how this is handled in the behavioral office, and what actions are taken to discipline students. It was important to respondents to treat students individually and to customize interventions accordingly, however, there was also concern among respondents that behavioral staff did not receive enough training to address the multi-faceted needs of students in a consistent manner. Communications of expectations was also important to respondents, however, when mixed messages are sent in regards to what behaviors constitute a referral

and what action will be taken, students aren't left with a clear message to adjust their behavior to.

Overall, the findings in this ethnography point to the many layers and combined efforts it takes to help students focus on their education and refrain from misbehaviors that cause them to lose that focus. It is clear that resource and time constraints make addressing each student's situation difficult for teachers, staff and administration. However, by using the information compiled in this report, research-based recommendations can help this process become more consistent and simple.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop guidelines for assigning disciplinary actions based on infraction and student history to ensure consistency. For instance, a chart similar to the District's suspension chart could mandate which in-class misbehaviors constitute certain actions, according to level of behavior and the student's record.
- Maintain a centralized tracking system of behavioral referrals to comply fully with District policies, as well as to ensure students are not lost in the disciplinary system.
- Provide increased training in cultural competency and alternative methods to discipline students, especially in regards to high levels of Black and male students in disciplinary data.
- Educate staff on District Policy 5610 B for roles and responsibilities in assisting students who have contact with the juvenile justice system.
- Mandate training for behavioral staff in areas such as adolescent psychology, cultural competency, conflict resolution, etc.
- Regulate the behavior office: create a system for students waiting, disallow students from wandering the halls, and control the environment to be calm, professional, and orderly.
- Connect students with outside resources by partnering with other agencies, such as the counseling services offered with Northpoint Health and Wellness Center.

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## APPENDIX A: OBSERVATION WORKSHEET

<p><b>Our Audit Question:</b>  <i>How might the institutional policies and practices of the Minneapolis Public Schools increase referrals to the juvenile justice center?</i></p>	
<b>Observation:</b>	<b>Date and Time:</b>
<b>Audit Team Member:</b>	
<p><b>Confidentiality Cue:</b> This audit project examines institutional responses and process. It does not assess individual effectiveness or actions. You may have access to sensitive information and records in each agency that is participating in the Audit. Do not record any personal identifying information, such as names and addresses, in your notes. Do not remove any forms, files, or other records without specific permission. Do not share identifying information or details of the calls and cases you observe with your friends and family.</p>	
<b>Watch For:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What the worker actually does.</li> <li>• Conditions under which he/she works</li> <li>• How specific processes operate</li> <li>• How workers are organized to respond to cases.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Debriefing Notes</b> (continue on reverse)</p> <p>Please describe what you saw:</p> <p>Note actors:</p> <p>What is your reaction/interpretation of the events?</p> <p>What themes, if any, did you notice from your observation?</p> <p>What stood out or surprised you about your observation?</p> <p>Future: What do you want to know more about?          What questions do you now have and how could we find answers to them?</p> <p>Please list any additional persons to interview or events to observe:</p>	

*Adapted from materials developed by: Praxis International, 5402 North Shore Dr., Duluth, MN 55804  
 218-525-0487 [www.praxisinternational.org](http://www.praxisinternational.org)*

## APPENDIX B: DISAGGREGATED INFRACTIONS

	Frequency	Percent
Disruptive/Disorderly/Insubordination	8036	72.2
Attendance	1007	9.0
<i>Physical</i>		
Assault	104	.9
Fighting	596	5.4
Bullying	41	.4
<i>Verbal</i>		
Harassment	115	1.0
Verbal Abuse	709	6.4
Terroristic Threats	6	.1
Threat/Intimidation	62	.6
<i>Property</i>		
Vandalism/Property Related	85	.8
Theft	57	.5
<i>Other</i>		
Illegal Drugs	9	.1
Tobacco	12	.1
Weapon	10	.1
Computer	10	.1
Gang Act	8	.1
Controlled Substances (prescription)	3	.0
Extortion	1	.0
Other	254	2.3
<i>Missing</i>	5	.0
<i>Total</i>	11130	100.0

## APPENDIX C: DISAGGREGATED LOCATION OF INFRACTION

	Frequency	Percent
Classroom	8548	76.8
<i>Other Inside Building</i>		
Cafeteria	66	.6
Gym	116	1.0
Hallway	738	6.6
Restrooms	59	.5
Other Indoor	1150	10.3
<i>Outside Building</i>		
School Bus	80	.7
Parking Lot	7	.1
Other Outdoor	143	1.3
Off Campus	25	.2
<i>Missing</i>	198	1.8
<i>Total</i>	11130	98.2

## APPENDIX D: DISAGGREGATED ACTION TAKEN

	Frequency	Percent
Out-Of School Suspension	1459	13.1
Removal From Instruction	846	7.6
Family Conference	161	1.4
Detention	1162	10.4
<i>Behavior/Intervention Room</i>		
Behavior/Intervention Room - 1 day	30	.3
Behavior/Intervention Room - 1 hour	2626	23.6
Behavior/Intervention Room - 1/2 Day	117	1.1
<i>In-school Suspension</i>		
In-School Suspension	37	.3
Bus Suspension	16	.1
Cafeteria Suspension	3411	30.6
Saturday School	37	.3
<i>Other</i>		
Peer Mediation	190	1.7
Referral to Problem Solving Team	3	.0
Team Conference	10	.1
Other	1020	9.2
<i>Missing</i>	5	.0
<i>Total</i>	11130	100.0