

## Suspension Trends in the School District of Philadelphia (SDP)

### 2013-2014 to 2015-2016

This brief summarizes the findings of a study conducted by the Office of Research & Evaluation (ORE) which: (1) analyzed district-wide trends for the number, proportion, and duration of suspensions for three school years (2013-2014, 2014-2015 and 2015-2016); and (2) examined whether there is disproportionality (over- or under-representation of student groups) for type, infraction, and duration of suspensions. The full report is available upon request.

#### Study Overview

In Fall 2012, SDP introduced changes to its discipline policy that marked a departure from the previous zero-tolerance approach to code or rule violations. A previous study conducted by ORE examined suspension trends from 2010-2011 to 2012-2013. This follow-up study examined trends in suspension rates after the policy change (documented in the SDP *Code of Conduct*).

The following research questions were the primary focus of the study:

1. How has the number of suspensions changed since the policy change in 2012-2013?
  - a. What are the trends for raw numbers of type of suspension (out-of-school suspensions vs. in-school suspensions), reason (code violation), and the schools with the highest number of suspension incidents?
  - b. What are the trends for suspension rates across type, reason, and schools?
2. Do suspension trends indicate disproportionality of student suspensions according to student characteristics, type of suspension, or code violation?
3. Are there specific schools that differ substantially from District norms in their reported suspension practices?

#### Why is this study important to SDP?

- **Research has found that being suspended is related to higher risks of struggling academically, repeating a grade, and dropping out of school all together** (Civil Rights Project, 2000; Fabelo, et al., 2011; Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Raffaele Mendez, et al. 2003; Skiba et al., 2014).
- National, state, district, and school-level studies of suspension data have consistently shown that **Black students and students with disabilities are more likely to be suspended for the same behaviors compared to their peers** (Arcia, 2007; Fabelo et al., 2011; Gibson et al., 2014; Gregory et al., 2010; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Skiba et al., 2014; Sullivan et al., 2013; Sullivan et al., 2014).

#### What is Disproportionality?

Disproportionality – or disproportionate representation – is when a certain group of students is over- or under-represented. For example, if about half of all students are male, then male students should be receiving about half of all suspensions. If male students receive fewer or more than about half of suspensions, they are disproportionately represented in the number of suspensions.

#### Sample Snapshot

**Time Period:** 2012-2013 to 2015-2016 School Years  
**Schools :** 219  
**Students:**193,625

Students in the sample were:

	%
Asian	8
Black	53
Latino	20
Other	6
White	14
Female	48
Male	52
Special Education	13
ELL	11

- **Anchor Goal 1 from the District’s Action Plan 3.0 is that 100% of students will graduate ready for college and career.** To support all students, it is important to determine whether the negative impacts of suspension policies are disproportionately impacting historically marginalized and underserved student populations.

\*All references available in the full report.

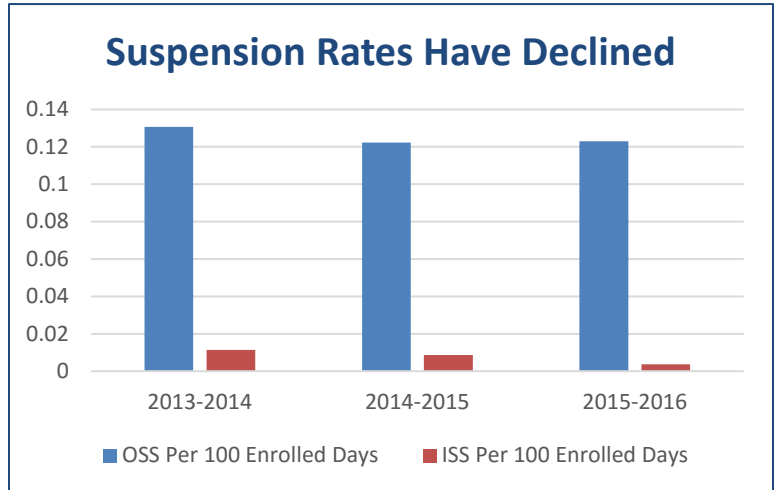
**Types of Disproportionality**

Disproportionality can manifest as more frequent suspensions, but also as harsher (OSS vs ISS), or longer suspensions.

## Findings – Three-Year Trends

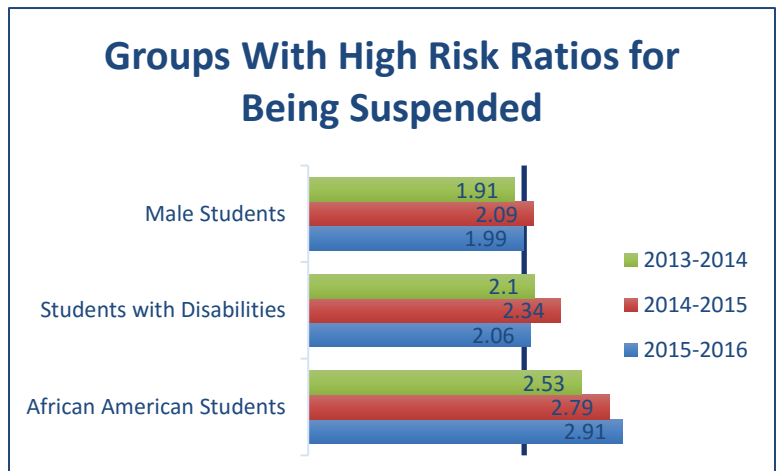
### Overall Suspensions

- The total number and the rate of suspensions (per students enrolled) decreased from 2013-2014 to 2015-2016.
- The proportion of out-of-school suspensions (OSS) versus in-school suspensions (ISS) increased. This appears to reflect a pervasive elimination of ISS across the District.
- Most schools that issued suspensions did not report using ISS at all, despite the stipulations in the *Code of Conduct* that in-school interventions be used for certain violations. It is not known if this means that schools are not using ISS, if they are under-reporting them, or if there is some combination of both.



### Disproportionality of Suspensions

A risk ratio of 2.00 (double the risk), is a common marker of disproportionality. Risk ratios show consistent disproportionality for SDP students that were male, African American, or had a disability. These groups were more likely to be suspended compared to their peers (i.e., females, non-African Americans, students without disabilities). Moreover, the risk for African Americans increased each year.



### Disproportionality of Duration of Suspensions

- Per the Code of Conduct, some infractions should only result in ISS (minor), some in OSS (major), and some in either ISS or OSS (moderate).
- Length of OSS for moderate infractions remained unchanged, but there was a decrease in the length of OSS for both minor and major infractions.
- Compared to male students, female students received longer suspensions for aggressive behaviors such as fighting and assault during 2013-2014 through 2015-2016.
- African American and Hispanic/Latino students were suspended longer for the same infractions compared to their White and Asian peers. However, the number of infractions where this disproportionality was apparent declined slightly during the three-year period.