

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE REFORM AND DISORDER

EVIDENCE FROM NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 2012–16

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About the Author



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Executive Summary

Across the U.S., there has been a dramatic shift in school discipline policy over the past five years, spurred by the release of national statistics that revealed stark racial differences in school suspension rates. Advocates of discipline “reform” have argued that these differences are largely an artifact of unhealthy teacher biases, and they have pushed for policies to reduce the use of “exclusionary discipline” (i.e., suspensions) and to increase the use of “restorative justice” (i.e., nonpunitive dialogue—typically involving students and teachers to resolve disagreements; ideally, this dialogue would address the root causes of disruptive student behavior).

Twenty-seven states have revised their laws to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline, and more than 50 of America’s largest school districts, serving more than 6.35 million students, have implemented discipline reforms. In January 2014, the U.S. Department of Education issued a “Dear Colleague” letter, advising districts that if their school discipline policy “is neutral on its face—meaning that the policy itself does not mention race—and is administered in an evenhanded manner but has a *disparate impact*, i.e., a disproportionate and unjustified *effect* on students of a particular race,”¹ they could become the subject of a federal civil rights investigation for unlawful discrimination.

From 2011–12 to 2013–14, the number of suspensions nationwide fell by nearly 20%. Though more recent data are not available, the subsequent adoption of additional state and district reforms, along with the national pressure stemming from the “Dear Colleague” letter, has likely sustained or accelerated this trend.

Advocates of discipline reform often say that they are concerned that a suspension may have negative effects on the student being disciplined. They are largely unconcerned about the potential of discipline reform to increase classroom disruption and schoolhouse disorder—and the harmful consequences of that disorder for well-behaved and engaged students. When a reform designed to lower suspension rates achieves its intended effect, it is taken as a mark of success. However, as United Federation of Teachers president Michael Mulgrew has pointed out, “Success should not be measured by the number of suspensions, but by the number of schools with an improved school climate.”²

While school climate is impossible to measure in most districts, it can be measured in New York City. For the past 10 years, New York City has administered the NYC School Survey to students and teachers. Over the last five years, two major discipline reforms have also taken effect: one at the beginning of the 2012–13 school year, under former mayor Michael Bloomberg; and one in the middle of the 2014–15 school year, under current mayor Bill de Blasio. This report analyzes data covering the five-year period of 2011–12 to 2015–16, which includes the years that the two reforms were enacted as well as “bookend” comparison years: for Bloomberg’s reform (2012–13), the bookend years are 2011–12 and 2013–14; for de Blasio’s reform (2014–15), the bookend years are 2013–14 and 2015–16.

After one full school year of implementation, both reforms were associated with approximately 16,000 fewer suspensions. And for the entire five-year period, suspensions fell by nearly half, from 69,643 in 2011–12 to 37,647 in 2015–16.

How did conditions in New York City schools change during this period? Unfortunately, the de Blasio administration removed the vast majority of school-order-related questions on the NYC School Survey, limiting our ability to judge changes in school climate. But the answers to the five questions that were asked consistently reveal a troubling pattern. According to teachers and students, school climate remained broadly unchanged from the year preceding Bloomberg’s reform to the year following it (i.e., from 2011–12 to 2013–14) and then deteriorated dramatically when de Blasio’s reform was implemented (i.e., from 2013–14 to 2015–16).

The latter period saw:

- ✓ **Fewer suspensions:** In 2015–16, 15,857 fewer suspensions were issued than in 2013–14.

- ✓ **Less order and discipline:** In 2015–16, a higher percentage of teachers—across 636 schools serving 376,716 students—reported that order and discipline were not maintained in their school, compared with two years earlier (2013–14).

- ✓ **Less mutual respect:** In 2015–16, more than half of nonelementary schools (521 of 1,002)—serving 282,761 students—saw a higher percentage of students report that their peers did not respect one another than in 2013–14 (in 214 schools, reported mutual respect among students improved).

- ✓ **More violence:** In 2015–16, in 443 nonelementary schools serving 268,591 students, a higher percentage of students reported frequent physical fighting than in 2013–14 (in 144 schools, a lower percentage reported frequent physical fighting).

- ✓ **More drug/alcohol use or gang activity:** In 2015–16, more than three times as many nonelementary schools as in 2013–14 saw a higher percentage of students report frequent drug use or gang activity as saw a lower percentage report them.

- ✓ **A significant differential racial impact:** Nonelementary schools where more than 90% of students were minorities experienced the worst climate shifts under the de Blasio reform, compared with schools serving a lower percentage of minority students and compared with 90+% minority schools under the Bloomberg reform. According to students at 90+% minority schools:
 - ✓ **Mutual Respect:** Under Bloomberg's reform, 36% of schools improved and 30% deteriorated. Under de Blasio's reform, 19% improved and 58% deteriorated.

 - ✓ **Violence:** Under Bloomberg's reform, 30% of schools improved and 28% deteriorated. Under de Blasio's reform, 14% of schools improved and 50% deteriorated.

 - ✓ **Drug/Alcohol Use:** Under Bloomberg's reform, 15% of schools improved and 17% deteriorated. Under de Blasio's reform, 7% of schools improved and 37% deteriorated.

 - ✓ **Gang Activity:** Under Bloomberg's reform, 20% of schools improved and 21% deteriorated. Under de Blasio's reform, 11% of schools improved and 39% deteriorated.

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE REFORM AND DISORDER

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Introduction: The Case for Reducing School Suspensions

In recent years, school districts across the U.S. have dramatically changed their approach to discipline in the wake of national data that revealed striking racial differences in suspensions. According to the U.S. Department of Education (ED), black students in the 2011–12 school year were three times as likely to be suspended and expelled as white students.³

The racial difference has alarmed civil rights groups and education reformers, who believe that it is less the product of student behavior than of adult bias. According to former ED secretary Arne Duncan, the “huge disparity is not caused by differences in children, it’s caused by differences in training, professional development, and discipline policies. It is adult behavior that needs to change.”⁴ A large share of suspensions is given for nonviolent disruptive behavioral offenses, which discipline-reform advocates contend are subjective and subject to implicit racial bias.⁵ Before California changed its state law to limit the use of suspensions for nonviolent offenses, 40% of suspensions were issued for willful defiance.⁶ According to Duncan, “The undeniable truth is that the everyday educational experience for many students of color violates the principle of equity at the heart of the American promise.”⁷

The “School-to-Prison Pipeline”

Discipline-reform advocates also claim that these suspensions undermine the future of the students. Civil rights groups, academics, and high-profile national organizations have sounded an alarm over the “school-to-prison pipeline,” which the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) defines as “a disturbing national trend wherein children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems.”⁸ A child who has been suspended is more likely than his peers to fall behind in school, drop out of school, and be incarcerated as an adult.⁹ Teacher bias, in other words, leads to racial disparities in incarceration and other negative life outcomes.

The issue has attracted growing research interest. Since 2011, the term “school-to-prison pipeline” has appeared in 3,980 academic articles and in the title of 18 books.¹⁰ Some of the most notable work has come out of the Equity Project at Indiana University and the Civil Rights Project at UCLA. Indiana University’s Russell Skiba published a study suggesting that racial minorities tend to be punished more severely than their peers for the same offenses.¹¹ In a 2014 literature review, Skiba and coauthor Natasha Williams conclude that “there is simply no good evidence that racial differences in discipline are due to differences in rates or types of misbehavior by students of different races.”¹²

In a 2013 report published by UCLA’s Civil Rights Project, Robert Balfanz finds that students who had been suspended were twice as likely to drop out of high school as students who had never been suspended.¹³ In 2016, UCLA’s Daniel Losen published a report arguing that suspensions

issued in the 10th grade led to an additional 67,000 dropouts. By calculating dropouts' lower lifetime earnings and higher reliance on public assistance, Losen claims that the social cost of 10th-grade suspensions doled out in a single year exceeds \$35 billion over the suspended students' lifetimes.¹⁴

In 2014, Arne Duncan declared: “The school-to-prison pipeline must be challenged every day”; and mainstream national organizations have formed task forces dedicated to doing so.¹⁵ That same year, with funding from several major national foundations and collaboration among hundreds of experts, the Council of State Governments produced the School Discipline Consensus Report to inform discipline-reform efforts in schools, districts, and states;¹⁶ and the American Bar Association launched the Joint Task Force on Reversing the School-to-Prison Pipeline, which issued a 2016 report recommending that schools decrease the number of suspensions and reduce disciplinary and academic racial disparities.¹⁷

Both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association have issued strong statements decrying the “school-to-prison pipeline,” which, the NEA asserts, is “a direct result of Institutional Racism and intolerance, and is both an education and social justice issue.”¹⁸ In 2016, the “school-to-prison pipeline” entered the national political dialogue, with the platform of the Democratic Party declaring: “We will end the school-to-prison pipeline by opposing discipline policies which disproportionately affect African Americans and Latinos, Native Americans and Alaska Natives, students with disabilities, and youth who identify as LGBT.”¹⁹

The platform endorses the approach favored by discipline reformers: “We will support the use of restorative justice practices that help students and staff resolve conflicts peacefully and respectfully while helping to improve the teaching and learning environment.”²⁰ Restorative justice practices vary, but a review of the academic literature by the WestEd Justice & Prevention Research Center notes that the programs generally range from “informal restorative dialogue techniques between teachers and students to formal restorative conferencing that involves students, staff, and often community members, including family.” In each case, the goal is to have the offender and victim discuss the situation and try to repair it.²¹

With restorative justice, the student who has misbehaved is encouraged to reflect on his actions, to take responsibility for them, and to resolve to be better behaved in the future. Rather than punish a student through exclusion, restorative justice aims to remedy

student behavior through a broader inclusive dialogue. Ideally, these practices will help teachers address the issues underlying a student's misbehavior, rather than merely maintain classroom order. WestEd notes that while research on restorative practices in schools is “still at the infancy stage,” numerous descriptive studies show positive effects on student behavior and school climate.

Believing that there is a clear and present harm in suspending students and that a better alternative is readily available, discipline-reform advocates see suspension reduction as a moral and civil rights imperative rather than a question of policy trade-offs. Haily Korman, a principal at the nonpartisan nonprofit Bellwether Education Partners, states flatly that “there is no such thing as ‘going too far’ when trying to keep kids in school.”²²

The Scope and Scale of Discipline Reform

Some school districts have adopted discipline reforms of their own volition; others have done so in response to pressure from the federal government. In January 2014, the ED's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) issued a “Dear Colleague” letter, warning school districts that they were engaging in “unlawful discrimination” based on race “if a [school discipline] policy is neutral on its face—meaning that the policy itself does not mention race—and is administered in an evenhanded manner but has a *disparate impact*, i.e., a disproportionate and unjustified effect on students of a particular race.”²³ OCR has opened federal civil rights investigations into several school districts for disparate suspension rates—most notably, Oakland Unified School District²⁴ and Oklahoma City Public Schools.²⁵ Both districts reached a settlement agreement to dramatically reduce their use of suspensions.

Over the past decade, school districts in 42 of America's 100 largest cities have revised their discipline codes to reduce the use of suspensions. Adding 11 other large districts that revised their codes from a list compiled by *Education Next* brings the tally to 53 districts serving 6,345,271 students—over 12% of American public school students (see **Appendix F**). The nature of these reforms has varied widely. For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District issued an outright ban on suspensions for willful defiance and saw its suspension rate plummet, from 8% to 0.55%.²⁶ In St. Paul, Minnesota, superintendent Valeria Silva aimed to equalize suspension rates across races and launched a diversity training initiative to increase “cultural competence” for school staff.²⁷ Chicago Public Schools eliminated automatic 10-day suspensions for certain offenses and required principals to seek district approval for suspensions lasting more than five days.²⁸

In addition, 27 states have revised their laws to encourage or require schools to limit exclusionary discipline practices and implement nonpunitive behavioral interventions.²⁹ The most sweeping, noted earlier, was California’s law that imposed stricter limits on the use of suspensions for nonviolent “willful defiance” offenses.³⁰ Illinois passed a law that prohibited districts from using “zero-tolerance” discipline policies and encouraged them to exhaust other options before issuing a suspension.³¹ In Georgia, students have a right to a disciplinary hearing before being suspended, and the state recently passed a law setting additional training requirements for hearing officers.³²

In 2016, the ED released updated national data for 2013–14, showing a nationwide drop in suspensions by about 20% from 2011–12. The drop was likely due to a series of district and state reforms, and it largely preceded the federal “Dear Colleague” guidance, which has influenced more districts adopting discipline reform in the past three school years.³³ Discipline-reform advocates have hailed this drop and these reforms as significant progress, though they note that racial disparities in suspension rates have persisted despite net reductions.³⁴

The Case Against Reducing Suspensions

Critics of discipline reform contend that disparities in suspension rates overwhelmingly result from differences in student behavior, rather than racial bias.³⁵ Hans Bader, a former OCR attorney and currently a senior attorney at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, argues that “higher black suspension rates reflect higher rates of misbehavior among blacks.”³⁶ To support his position, Bader points to a study in the *Journal of Criminal Justice* that found that “the racial gap in suspensions was completely accounted for by a measure of the prior problem behavior of the student.”³⁷

Michael Petrilli, president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, argues that “it cannot surprise us if minority students today misbehave at ‘disproportionate’ rates. African American and Latino children in America are much more likely to face challenges that put them ‘at risk’ for antisocial behavior,” such as living in poverty, residing in a dangerous neighborhood, growing up in a single-parent family, and having a parent in jail.³⁸ Critics are also skeptical of the fundamental premise of the “school-to-prison pipeline”: that suspensions cause students to drop out and commit crimes. Manhattan Institute senior fellow Heather Mac Donald argues

that “the much likelier” explanation for the correlation is that “students’ propensity to misbehave leads to all three results: suspensions, dropping out, and crime.”³⁹ Indeed, there is no rigorous causal analysis proving that suspensions have a negative effect on the student suspended.

Critics’ principal concern, though, is that district-wide suspension-reduction policies may cause an increase in disruptive behavior and thereby harm many students in an effort to save a few. Mac Donald explains: “Protecting well-behaved students’ ability to learn is a school’s highest obligation, and it is destroyed when teachers lose the option of removing chronically disruptive students from class.”⁴⁰ This concern strikes a chord with teachers, 85% of whom agreed that the “school experience of most suffers at the expense of a few chronic offenders,”⁴¹ and it is borne out in the academic literature.

The Negative Effects of Disruptive Peers

Scott Carrell of the University of California at Davis and Mark Hoekstra of the University of Pittsburgh found that disruptive students have statistically significant negative effects on the reading and math scores of students in their class. They also found that the presence of a disruptive student increases the probability that his classmates will commit a disciplinary infraction, with the largest behavioral effect observed in boys from low-income families. Thus, disruptive students can create a domino effect, increasing misbehavior and lowering academic achievement across the school.⁴²

A team led by Scott Imberman of Michigan State University used administrative data from the Louisiana Department of Education and the Houston Independent School District to assess how students who were evacuated from Louisiana in 2005 because of Hurricane Katrina affected their new peers in Houston.⁴³ They found that while the overall influx of students had little effect, exposure to disruptive students had a negative effect on the behavior and attendance of Houston students. They did not, however, find evidence that disruptive students worsened the academic performance of their peers.

These studies strongly support the proposition that disruptive students have negative effects on their peers, but they don’t necessarily indicate that reducing suspensions will increase disruptive behavior. However, Josh Kinsler of the University of Georgia modeled the effects of discipline reform using data from three large North Carolina school districts.⁴⁴ Kinsler’s model suggests that district efforts to minimize suspension gaps can have negative spillover effects on all students, and he concludes that a reform “that requires all schools to use the same suspension policies closes the

discipline gap but results in a significant widening of the achievement gap.” While certainly suggestive, Kinsler’s study is still a model, not a real-world description of the actual effects of discipline reform.

There are very few rigorous empirical evaluations of discipline reforms, largely because most of the reforms were implemented so recently. One exception: a 2015 study by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.⁴⁵ That study examined the effects of a reform that required principals to obtain central office approval for suspensions of longer than five days and eliminated mandatory 10-day suspensions for the most severe offenses. The researchers found that the reform had no effect on academic outcomes but had a negative effect on school climate. Teachers reported that school climate was more disruptive after the policy took effect; students reported having worse relationships with peers. The effect was greater in schools that previously had high rates of long suspensions. On the whole, the literature provides solid evidence supporting the intuition that disruptive students can harm their peers, but it offers less evidence on whether suspension-reduction reforms increase disruptive behavior.

Discipline Reform in Theory and Practice

As noted, discipline reformers are not advocating for suspension reduction in isolation but are urging schools to phase in restorative justice (RJ) practices at the same time. Advocates contend that practicing guided dialogue to encourage misbehaving students to accept responsibility for—and change—their behavior will significantly improve peer relations and classroom order. Numerous descriptive studies suggest significant benefits for schools that have adopted RJ models. However, these studies are “low in internal validity” (i.e., they are largely observational rather than rigorously empirical). The literature also suggests that a “deep shift to a restorative justice climate might take up to three to five years,” assuming that it is implemented faithfully and sustained financially.⁴⁶

Furthermore, in many schools, there is confusion about what RJ is and no consensus about the best way to implement it. RJ also requires staff time and buy-in, training, and resources that traditional sanctions such as suspensions do not impose on the school. With RJ, teachers are often required to perform duties traditionally outside their job description, such as attending RJ trainings, conducting RJ sessions during class time, and spending more time one-on-one talking with students.⁴⁷

In the absence of a significant infusion or reallocation of funding—and amid a concurrent effort to reduce school suspensions—it seems unreasonable to assume that most schools that attempt to implement restorative

justice will have the necessary time and resources to maximize RJ’s reputed potential.

One veteran teacher, writing in *Education Week*, is deeply skeptical that restorative justice interventions can be implemented faithfully at scale. He grants that “the concept of restorative justice has merit.” But he laments: “Alas, in a profession where ideologically motivated reforms abound, restorative justice in many districts has recklessly morphed into de facto ‘no student removal’ policies that are every bit as flawed as the inflexible zero-tolerance policies they were designed to replace.” He argues that after policymakers write discipline reforms, district administrators “oversee policy specifics based on their idealistic vision of how they wish schools could function.” The result is that “teachers—and only teachers—are left to raise the academic bar while education policymakers lower or, in some cases, virtually eliminate discipline standards.”⁴⁸

In theory, teachers’ unions are sympathetic to the goal of discipline reform: the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) have expressed concern about the school-to-prison pipeline and support for RJ approaches. But in practice, local leaders of teachers’ unions contend that they are not getting sufficient support to implement reforms properly.

Michael Mulgrew, president of New York City’s United Federation of Teachers (an affiliate of the AFT), declared that while he supports discipline reform, the district administrators too often adopt “policies without understanding how they will play out in schools” and ignore their “responsibility for turning policy into reality.” As a result, he said, “past promises for training and support have not arrived at many schools.”⁴⁹ Alex Caputo-Pearl, president of United Teachers Los Angeles (affiliated with both the AFT and NEA), says that he supports his district’s efforts to limit suspensions and implement restorative justice but that his teachers are “carrying the consequences of ... not enough staffing to make it work and a lot of frustration.”⁵⁰

Alarm Bells: Stories and Surveys from Across America

Whatever the theoretical merit of discipline reform, what truly matters is how the policies play out in schools. A (non-exhaustive) search for press accounts within the past three years in the 53 public

school districts studied in this paper yields many stories from teachers who believe that they are losing control of their classroom and school.

One Chicago teacher told the *Chicago Tribune* that her district's new discipline policy led to "a totally lawless few months" at her school.⁵¹ One Denver teacher told Chalkbeat that, under the new discipline policy, students had threatened to harm or kill teachers, "with no meaningful consequences."⁵² A teacher told the *Omaha World-Herald* that "[c]lasses are being disrupted, student learning is being decreased ... all across [Omaha Public Schools] in all grade levels."⁵³ After Oklahoma City Public Schools revised its discipline policies in response to federal pressure, one teacher told the *Oklahoman* that "[w]e were told that referrals would not require suspension unless there was blood." Another teacher in Oklahoma City reported: "Students are yelling, cursing, hitting and screaming at teachers and nothing is being done but teachers are being told to teach and ignore the behaviors.... These students know there is nothing a teacher can do. Good students are now suffering because of the abuse and issues plaguing these classrooms."⁵⁴

In Buffalo, a teacher who got kicked in the head by a student said: "We have fights here almost every day.... The kids walk around and say, 'We can't get suspended—we don't care what you say.'"⁵⁵ One teacher told the *Fresno Bee* that "[a] student can say 'f--- you' and we're told that's just his personality," while another teacher reported that when she called a school resource officer about a theft, she heard one student say to the suspected thief, "Don't worry, they won't do anything."⁵⁶ Testifying in front of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, a former Philadelphia teacher related that a student told him, "I'm going to torture you. I'm doing this because I can't be removed."⁵⁷ In St. Paul, Minnesota, Ramsey County attorney John Choi noted that the number of assaults against teachers doubled from 2014 to 2015⁵⁸ and called the situation a "public health crisis."⁵⁹

Several local union leaders have been outspoken. Rhondalyn Cornett, head of the Indianapolis Education Association, declared that "teachers don't feel safe."⁶⁰ Denise Rodriguez, president of the St. Paul Federation of Teachers, said, "Ask yourself this: Do students and staff deserve to come to work every day and not expect to be assaulted?"⁶¹ Carnell Washington, president of the Baton Rouge Federation of

FIGURE 1.

Teacher Surveys on Discipline Reforms

Madison, Wisconsin⁶⁵

- 13% of teachers agreed that discipline reform had a positive effect on student behavior.
- 14% of teachers agreed that when a student returned to the class after a restorative intervention, he was ready to reengage with learning.

Denver, Colorado⁶⁶

- 66% of teachers disagreed that the new discipline system was effective and that the system put all students first and allowed for a quality learning environment.
- 75% of teachers disagreed that the new discipline system improved student behavior.
- 60% of teachers said that discipline issues were not being properly documented.
- 60% of teachers reported that discipline issues affected their mental health.
- 30% of teachers expressed concern for their physical safety.

Santa Ana, California⁶⁷

- 65% of teachers said that the new system was not working at their school.
- 71% of teachers said that the district was going in the wrong direction.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma⁶⁸

- 60% of teachers said that the amount and frequency of offending behavior increased after the discipline reforms.

Baton Rouge, Louisiana⁶⁹

- 60% of teachers said that they have experienced an increase in violence or threats from students.
- 41% of teachers said that they don't feel safe at work.
- 33% of teachers said that they had been physically assaulted by a student.
- 61% of teachers have considered leaving their job because of discipline issues.

Indianapolis, Indiana⁷⁰

- 41% of teachers said that they didn't feel supported when dealing with student behavior problems.

Jackson, Mississippi⁷¹

- 67% of teachers said that their work environment felt out of control on a daily or weekly basis because of discipline issues.
- 60% of teachers said that they or a coworker have been physically or verbally assaulted at work.

- 46% of teachers have considered leaving their job because of discipline issues.

Tampa Bay, Florida⁷²

- 66% of teachers said that the new discipline policy did not make schools more orderly.
- 28% of teachers felt supported by their administration when they wrote a disciplinary referral.

Portland, Oregon⁷³

- 33% of teachers said that their school environment was unsafe.
- 66% of teachers said that their school either did not have a written discipline plan or that they were unaware of its existence.

Syracuse, New York⁷⁴

- 66% of teachers said that they were worried about safety at work.
- 57% of teachers said that they had been threatened at work.
- 36% of teachers said that they had been physically assaulted at work.
- 50% of teachers said that the district was committed to preventing workplace violence.

Teachers, said, “This is the worst I’ve seen the discipline in the classroom.”⁶²

Union presidents also say that their teachers believe that the reforms have encouraged administrators to prioritize lowering suspensions over maintaining an orderly school. Judy Kidd, president of the Charlotte Classroom Teachers Association, said, “It just appears that there are some administrators who would rather ignore the behavior to get their suspension numbers down.... In some schools there’s no structure and no expectation of behavior.”⁶³ Union leaders claim that the stress induced by these reforms is harming teacher morale; according to Kidd, “teachers are leaving; that’s the bottom line.” Bridget Donovan, president of the Omaha Education Association, said, “This is unsustainable. Teachers cannot, will not, keep working in these conditions.”⁶⁴

In addition, teachers’ unions have commissioned surveys in several cities where discipline reforms have been implemented; by and large, the results back up their concerns (Figure 1). Yet, as alarming as these stories and surveys may be, there may be less here than meets the eye. Critics may point to dozens of cases where discipline reform led to a less orderly school climate; but suspension-reduction advocates can also point to schools where the policies have improved school climate. As Figure 1 shows, teacher surveys can tell us that teachers think that there are significant discipline problems at their school. But without a reasonable baseline for comparison, we can’t gain much insight into whether discipline reform has exacerbated those problems.

What We Don’t Know

In a comprehensive 2016 review of the literature, Matthew Steinberg of the University of Pennsylvania and Johanna Lacoé of Mathematica Policy Research find that “the evidence is inconclusive” as to whether disparate rates of suspension “involve racial bias and discrimination.” They point out that the correlation between suspensions and negative long-term outcomes can’t tell us whether those students would have experienced those outcomes if they had not been suspended. Steinberg and Lacoé conclude that much more research is necessary to ascertain the spillover effects of discipline reform and “uncover how alternative approaches to suspensions affect school safety and student outcomes.”⁷⁵ In short, although both sides of the debate are convinced of their cases, the academic literature provides little conclusive evidence.

The result is that we are experiencing a significant shift in school-discipline practice affecting millions of students based on premises that lack a firm empirical foundation and whose effects we have little grounds to predict. Even more troubling: we are in a position to monitor those effects only in a small fraction of districts. School suspensions are no longer a reasonable proxy for disorder in districts that are trying to decrease suspension rates, and local press coverage is often limited to anecdotal accounts. Our most reliable and readily available window into school climate comes from surveys. However, only 20 of the 53 major districts that have implemented suspension reforms currently conduct surveys that ask students as well as teachers questions related to school order and then make school-level survey results publicly available (see Appendix F). It’s likely that the fraction of smaller districts with this capacity is even smaller.

Discipline Reform in New York City Public Schools

Fortunately, the largest school district in America, New York City Public Schools, has administered an annual school-climate survey and publicly reported school-level results for the past decade, while cutting suspensions in half during the last five years.

When New York City Public Schools were placed under mayoral control in 2002, then-mayor Michael Bloomberg launched an aggressive campaign to “ferret out and punish disruptive students in the public schools, particularly those in schools with high rates of criminal violence, and hold the principals more accountable for reducing disciplinary problems.”⁷⁶ As part of this campaign, Bloomberg created the Office of School Safety and Planning to develop procedures to manage disruptive students. School suspensions rose steadily under his administration, more than doubling over the course of a decade (Figure 2). But over the past five years, school suspensions dropped by nearly half, from 69,643 in 2011–12 to 37,647 in 2015–16. This drop came in the wake of two major reforms to the New York City Public Schools Discipline Code: one made by the Bloomberg administration in 2012–13; and one by the de Blasio administration in 2014–15.

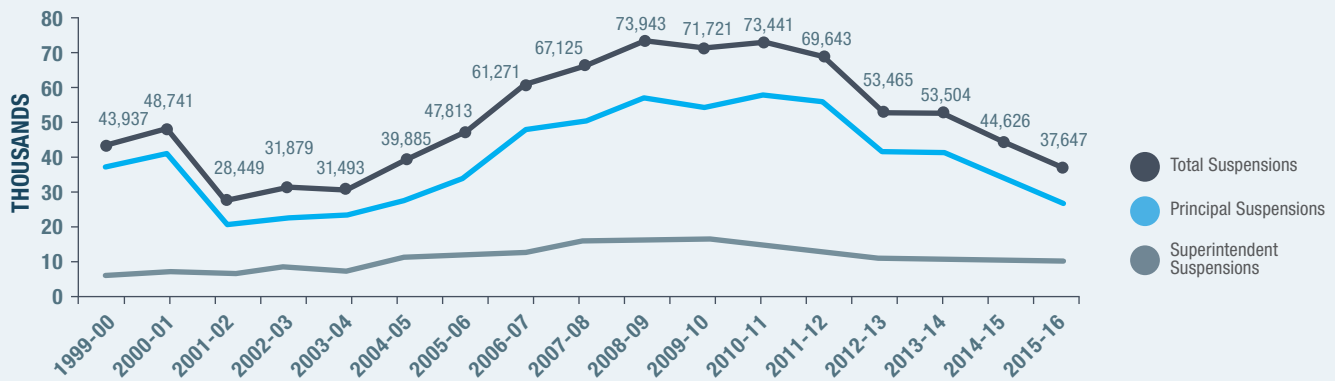
The Bloomberg Reforms

In September 2012, the Bloomberg administration made two significant changes to the discipline code.⁷⁷ The first was that students could no longer be suspended for first-time, low-level offenses categorized as “uncooperative/noncompliant” or “disorderly behav-



FIGURE 2.

Student Suspensions, 1999–2016



Source: "Student Safety Act Reporting on Suspensions: 2015–2016," New York Civil Liberties Union, 2016

ior." Examples of those behaviors included being late for school, speaking rudely to peers or adults, lying to school staff, or misusing the property of others. The second was that for students in kindergarten through third grade, the maximum suspension was reduced from 10 to five days for mid-level offenses categorized as "disruptive behavior," such as shoving a fellow student, using a racial slur, or engaging in inappropriate physical contact. The guidance also informed teachers that a "restorative approach can be used as both a prevention and intervention measure." The year those changes took effect, suspensions in New York City Public Schools dropped by 16,169. They remained constant during 2013–14, which was half overseen by Bloomberg and half by current mayor Bill de Blasio.

The de Blasio Reforms

During his mayoral campaign, de Blasio vowed to reform school discipline. In February 2015, in the middle of the first full school year under his administration, de Blasio announced a series of "long-awaited" reforms.⁷⁸ The most significant and controversial reform was the requirement that principals obtain written approval from the Office of Safety and Youth Development (OSYD) to suspend a student for "uncooperative/noncompliant" and "disorderly" behavior.⁷⁹ Principals also had to seek OSYD approval for suspensions of any student from kindergarten through third grade. The revised guidance urged teachers: "Every reasonable effort must be made to correct student behavior through guidance interventions and other school-based strategies such as restorative practices."⁸⁰ De Blasio also introduced a \$1.2 million initiative to train

staff from 100 NYC schools in restorative justice⁸¹ and the School Climate Leadership Team to evaluate and report on the progress of his discipline reforms and their impact on school climate.⁸²

The updated discipline code was officially adopted in April 2015. During 2014–15, the school year of partial adoption, suspensions fell by 8,878, from 53,504 to 44,626. During 2015–16, the school year in which the code was fully implemented, suspensions fell by another 6,979. In June 2016, de Blasio declared that the reforms "improved safety in schools while using school discipline methods that are fairer and more effective," and he announced two additional reforms. The first was a widely publicized mandate to "end suspensions in kindergarten through second grade, replacing them with appropriate positive disciplinary interventions."⁸³ The second, which went broadly unnoticed by the press, required principals to provide documentation of restorative interventions prior to applying to the OSYD to suspend a student and to ensure that mitigating factors would be taken into account in determining a disciplinary action.⁸⁴

The Controversy Around New York City's Discipline Reforms

The Bloomberg discipline reforms generated little lasting public debate; but de Blasio's generated significant press coverage and controversy. In February 2016, Families for Excellent Schools released a report, based on New York State's Violent and Disruptive Incident Report (VADIR) data, showing that school violence had risen by 23% during 2014–15, the first school

year of de Blasio’s reforms. The data from 2015–16 were even worse, as the number of incidents categorized as “serious” rose an additional 6% overall, and the instances of assault with serious injury rose 48% from the prior year.⁸⁵

Gregory Floyd, the union representative for New York City’s 5,000 school-safety officers, also expressed concerns over violence in the city’s schools. Floyd had initially endorsed de Blasio’s reforms, saying in February 2015 that he hoped that the “reforms will go a long way in easing tensions with young adults.”⁸⁶ Near the end of the first full year of implementation, in May 2016, Floyd flatly declared that “we have anarchy” in the city’s schools.⁸⁷

A few months later, Michael Mulgrew, whose union backed de Blasio’s mayoral campaign, penned an op-ed in the *New York Daily News* arguing that the decline in suspensions “was fueled by the school administrators’ fears they would face repercussions if they continued to remove disruptive children from classrooms.” Mulgrew also argued that the recently announced K–2 suspension ban would not help “children in crisis,” or “the thousands of other children who will lose instruction as a result of those disruptions.”⁸⁸ When the official 2015–16 suspension numbers were released and showed that suspensions had decreased by nearly 30% under de Blasio’s reforms, Mulgrew responded: “Success should not be measured by the number of suspensions, but by the number of schools with an improved school climate.”⁸⁹

The New York City School-Climate Survey

New York City’s School Survey provides the best—indeed, the only—way to measure school climate from one year to another.⁹⁰ The survey has been administered every spring for the past decade to teachers and students. For the past five years, student and teacher response rates have ranged from 81% to 83%.⁹¹ Their answers give us a snapshot of school climate; the changes in their answers to the same question from one year to the next give us a sense of how their school environment is changing.

Survey Questions

Unfortunately, the set of questions was dramatically changed by the de Blasio administration. Of the 27 school-order-related questions on the 2013–14 survey, only five remained on the 2015–16 survey in a comparable form. Seventeen questions were removed altogether (**Figure 3**), and five were substantively modified to the

point where we can’t rely on their comparability (see **Appendix E**). The de Blasio administration’s replacement questions may have usefully informed the School Climate Leadership Team’s work. But the changes severely limit their and our ability to understand how school climate changed as the de Blasio reforms were implemented.

Fortunately, five questions related to school order were asked with consistent wording throughout the five years in which Bloomberg’s and de Blasio’s reforms were implemented:

Student Questions

1. At my school, students get into physical fights.
2. Most students at this school treat each other with respect.
3. At my school, students drink alcohol, use illegal drugs, or abuse prescription drugs.⁹²
4. At my school, there is gang activity.

Teacher Questions

5. At my school, order and discipline are maintained.

FIGURE 3.

School Survey Questions Removed as Discipline Reforms Are Enacted

Teacher Questions Removed After 2013–14

- At my school, I can get the help I need to address student behavior issues.
- At my school, I am safe.
- At my school, crime and violence are a problem.
- At my school, students are often harassed or bullied.
- At my school, adults treat students with respect.
- At my school, most students treat adults with respect.
- At my school, students’ use of alcohol or illegal drugs or abuse of prescription drugs is a problem.
- At my school, there are conflicts based on differences (race, color, creed, ethnicity, national origin, citizenship/immigration status, religion, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, or weight).
- At my school, gang activity is a problem.
- At my school, there is a person or a program that helps students resolve conflicts.

Student Questions Removed After 2013–14

- Most adults at my school care about me.
- At my school I feel welcome.
- At my school there are clear consequences for breaking the rules.
- At my school there is a person or program that helps students resolve conflicts.
- At my school most adults treat all students with respect.
- Most students at my school treat adults with respect.
- Most students at my school respect students who get good grades.

These five questions can be used to assess changes in school climate in New York City Public Schools during the five-year span wherein suspensions fell by nearly half. One additional question of consequence was asked of students in 2011–12 and 2015–16 but not in 2013–14: “Discipline in my school is fair.”⁹³

Analyzing the School-Climature Surveys

This paper tracks the changes in school-level climate data from 2011–12 to 2015–16 and links those changes to school-level suspension rates.⁹⁴ It is a descriptive, not a causal, analysis of school climate and suspension rates, and the results should be interpreted accordingly.⁹⁵

I display the overall shift in school climate using a distribution-of-differences analysis. The data cover non-elementary schools for which there was school-climate data in 2011–12, 2013–14, and 2015–16. Elementary schools do not ask student-survey questions, so the elementary teacher responses are considered separately.

For each school, I looked at how school climate shifted according to each indicator from year to year by examining the percentage of negative responses to each question. Examples of negative responses included the percentage of students who answered “most” or “all” of the time when asked how often “kids at my school get into fights” and the percentage of teachers who answered “disagree” or “strongly disagree” when asked whether “order and discipline at my school are maintained.”

For the purpose of analysis, I stipulated that a change of 15+ percentage points in either direction represented a substantial shift, a 5-point to 14.99-point change represented a shift, and a change of less than 5 points represented no shift.

First, I examined the overall distribution of differences from before Bloomberg’s reform was implemented (2011–12) to the latest school year for which we have data (2015–16). Because those five years capture two policy interventions, I then split that period in half, focusing on two three-year windows: 2011–12 to 2013–14; and 2013–14 to 2015–16. In each of those three-year windows: Year 1 is prior to a discipline reform; Year 2 is when that reform is implemented; and Year 3 places us well into implementation. I then compared the two windows around each reform to assess relative shifts in school climate associated with each. All further analysis proceeds based on these two three-year time windows rather than on the full five-year period.

In addition to examining the distribution of differences among all schools, I examine the distribution of differences based on changes in suspension rate.

Using school-level suspension data provided by OSYD, I calculated the suspension rate for each school in each year by dividing the number of suspensions by the number of students enrolled.⁹⁶ Then I isolated schools that saw a suspension rate drop of 3+%. I limited the analysis to principal-issued suspensions lasting one to five days because that was the type of suspension most targeted by the policy intervention, and that saw a marked decrease.

In addition, I monitored and categorized the absolute level of negative responses. If 0% to 14.99% of students or teachers gave negative responses, I designated the school as in the “green” zone, or likely in good shape. I designated schools with negative responses by 15% to 29.99% of students or teachers as in the “yellow” zone. And I designated schools with negative responses by 30+% of students or teachers as in the “red” zone—after all, if more than 30% of teachers say that order is not maintained in their school, there is likely a significant problem. (For the student question on peer respect, I set the color categories at 0%–24.99%, 25%–49.99%, and 50+%.)

I presented the number of schools in each color zone in 2011–12, 2013–14, and 2015–16. This gives a sense, in absolute terms, of how many schools were in the different school-climate condition for those years. To understand how schools changed based on their initial climate during each discipline reform, I then broke down the distribution of differences based on how schools were color-coded in 2011–12 or 2013–14. I also separated schools by racial and socioeconomic composition, to see whether there were patterns based on the concentration of minority (i.e., nonwhite) students or students in poverty.

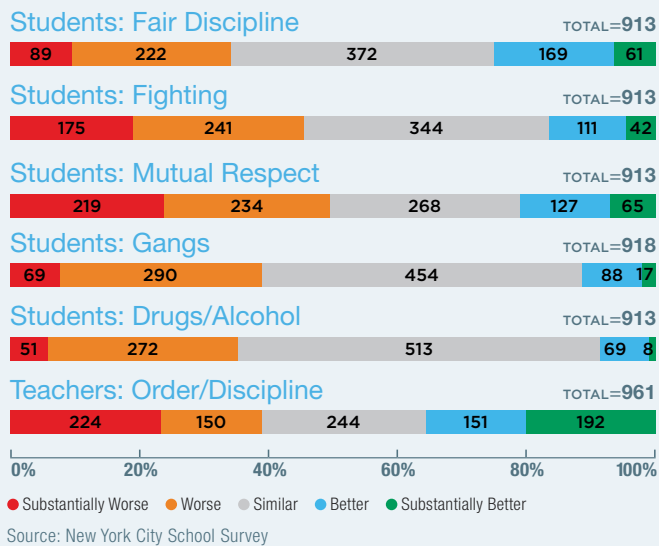
In **Appendix A**, I listed the “most improved” non-elementary schools—those that saw at least a 15-point improvement in both student-reported fighting and teacher-reported disorder from 2013–14 to 2015–16. In **Appendix B**, I listed the nonelementary schools with a “significant deterioration in climate,” which saw a 15-point deterioration in each. In **Appendix C**, I listed the “disorderly” nonelementary schools, which were in the red zone in both categories during 2015–16. And in **Appendix D**, I listed “disorderly” elementary schools that were in the red zone in teacher-reported disorder.

Changes in School Climate in New York City Schools: Nonelementary Schools

Figure 4 shows the percentage of nonelementary schools that have improved or deteriorated across each survey question from 2011–12 to 2015–16. In this figure and subsequent figures, “substantially worse” (red) indicates a 15+% increase in negative responses;

FIGURE 4.

Distribution of Differences, Nonelementary Schools, 2011–12 to 2015–16



“worse” (orange) indicates a 5%–14.99% increase in negative responses; “similar” (gray) indicates that the change in negative responses—either improving or deteriorating—is less than 5%; “better” (blue) indicates a 5%–14.99% decrease in negative responses; and “substantially better” (green) indicates a 15+% decrease in negative responses.

For example, on the question of mutual student respect, 49% of schools saw a deterioration (see the red and orange bars), 30% saw no change (gray bar), and 21% saw an improvement (blue and green bars). On the whole, Figure 4 indicates that, across most questions, school climate has deteriorated in approximately 40% of NYC’s nonelementary schools. (Notably, despite suspensions being cut by nearly half, students’ views on the fairness of school discipline remain largely unchanged.)

Figure 5 assesses the school-climate shifts associated with the Bloomberg and de Blasio reforms by dividing the data into two periods: “Period 1—Bloomberg reform” (2011–12 to 2013–14); and “Period 2—de Blasio reform” (2013–14 to 2015–16). In both periods, the respective reforms were implemented in the second school year (2012–13 for Bloomberg and 2014–15 for de Blasio) and were fully in effect by the start of the third school year (2013–14 and 2015–16, respectively). Period 1 ends and Period 2 begins with 2013–14 because that school year fell between discipline reforms and was overseen by both the Bloomberg and de Blasio administrations.

As Figure 5 shows, in Period 1, under Bloomberg’s reform, the distribution of differences was, on balance, similar: from 2011–12 to 2013–14, across most survey questions, conditions stayed roughly constant. More students reported frequent fighting, drug use, and gang activity at a slightly higher number of schools than where fewer students reported those issues. On mutual student respect, approximately a third of schools improved, a third of schools remained constant, and a third deteriorated. Finally, according to teachers, a third of schools improved, a third of schools remained constant, and a third deteriorated in Period 1.

In Period 2, under de Blasio’s reform, the story changes dramatically, with many more schools seeing a deterioration in school climate than an improvement. From 2013–14 to 2015–16, more than half of schools saw a deterioration in mutual respect, and only a fifth saw an improvement, according to students. On physical fighting, gang activity, and drug use, three times as many schools saw a deterioration as saw an improvement, according to students. According to teachers, the shift from Period 1 to Period 2 was negative, though more muted: 30% of schools improved and 38% deteriorated.

FIGURE 5.

Distribution of Differences

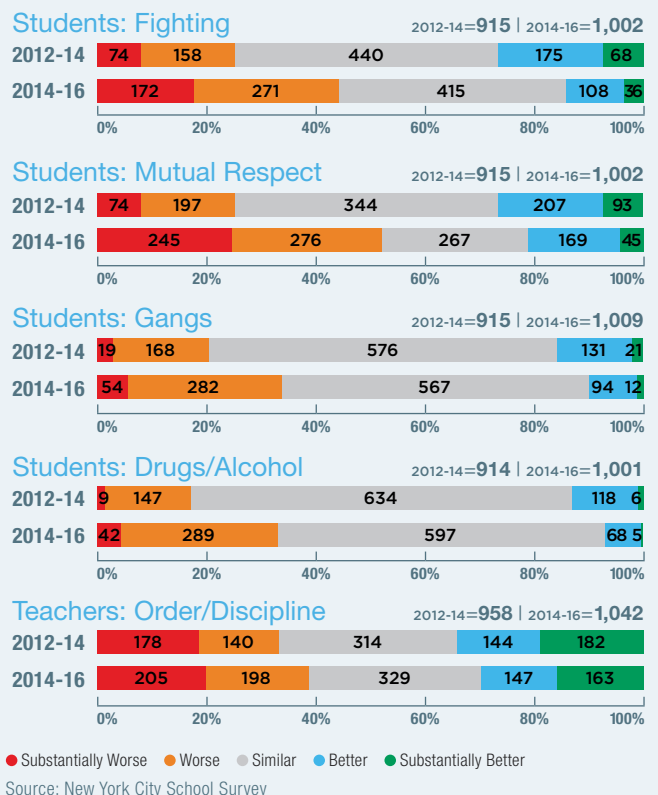


FIGURE 6.

Schools with Negative Responses to Survey Questions: 2011–12, 2013–14, and 2015–16

Students: Fighting						
Negative Responses	2011-2012		2013-2014		2015-2016	
	% of Students	# of Schools	% of Schools	# of Schools	% of Schools	# of Schools
0%–14.99%		380	41.8%	370	40.7%	298
15%–29.99%		282	30.9%	304	33.4%	271
30+%		248	27.3%	235	25.9%	340
TOTAL		909	100.0%	909	100.0%	909
Students: Mutual Respect						
0%–24.99%		157	17.3%	193	21.3%	177
25%–49.99%		501	55.1%	472	51.9%	334
50+%		251	27.6%	244	26.8%	398
TOTAL		909	100.0%	909	100.0%	909
Students: Gangs						
0%–14.99%		638	69.8%	623	68.2%	492
15%–29.99%		229	25.1%	243	26.6%	328
30+%		47	5.1%	48	5.2%	94
TOTAL		914	100.0%	914	100.0%	914
Students: Drugs/Alcohol						
0%–14.99%		717	79.0%	701	77.2%	584
15%–29.99%		184	20.2%	194	21.4%	279
30+%		7	0.8%	13	1.4%	45
TOTAL		908	100.0%	908	100.0%	908
Teachers: Order/Discipline						
0%–14.99%		436	45.6%	450	47.0%	438
15%–29.99%		225	23.5%	227	23.7%	211
30+%		296	30.9%	280	29.3%	308
TOTAL		957	100.0%	957	100.0%	957

Source: NYC School Survey

The difference between teacher perception and student perception is noteworthy. In general, there is a relatively strong correlation, r , between student perception of physical fighting and teacher perception of order: $r = .58$ in 2015–16. Shifts in student and teacher perception also generally tend to track each other. From 2011–12 to 2013–14, student and teacher responses shifted in opposite directions only 16% of the time. But from 2013–14 to 2015–16, the overlap between teacher and student responses varied significantly, based on the direction of the shift in teacher perception. When teachers signaled a negative shift in order, students gave a conflicting response only 10% of the time; yet when teachers signaled a positive shift in order, students gave a conflicting response 34% of the time. This differential reinforces the impression that the negative shift from 2014–16 is substantial and calls into question how much of the apparent positive shift in teacher perception is noise rather than signal.

Figure 6 slices the numbers differently, but the result is similar. It shows how many schools had students or teachers who responded negatively to the survey questions (e.g., percentage of students who reported that physical fights occur “most” or “all” of the time) with responses grouped into “green,” “yellow,” and “red” zones of 0%–14.99%, 15%–29.99%, and 30+%, respectively. Once again, we see school climate hold steady, if not modestly improve, from 2011–12 to 2013–14, but then deteriorate from 2013–14 to 2015–16.

In 2015–16, for example, there were 154 more schools than in 2013–14 where more than half of students said that students did not respect one another (387 vs. 243); there were 46 more schools where 30+% of students reported frequent gang activity; there were 32 more schools where 30+% of students reported frequent drug/alcohol use; there were 105 more schools where 30+% of students reported frequent physical fights; and there were 28 more schools where 30+% of teachers said that order and discipline were not maintained.

Figure 7 offers a deeper dive into the data presented in Figure 5. For both Period 1, under Bloomberg, and Period 2, under de Blasio, it shows whether schools improved or deteriorated—as determined by their students’ and teachers’ responses to the survey questions—depending on whether the schools had a similar suspension rate (the “neutral” row) or had a suspension rate more than 3% lower (the “drop” row). (Schools that redacted suspension values at the first year of each respective period are omitted.)

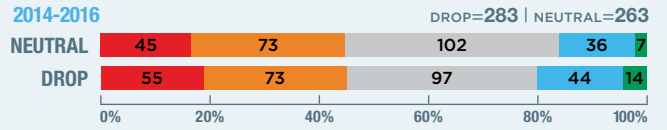
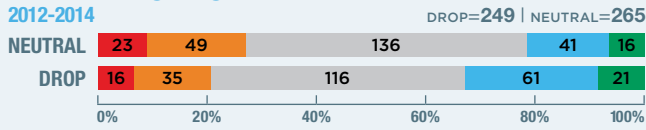
Figure 7 indicates that, from 2011–12 to 2013–14, schools that saw a neutral suspension rate tended to see a neutral distribution of differences: approximately as many schools saw a deterioration as an improvement across most questions. Meanwhile, schools that saw a drop in suspension rates saw a favorable distribution of differences: more schools saw an improvement as a deterioration across most questions; this favorable distribution was most noticeable when it came to teacher perceptions of order and discipline, where more than twice as many schools improved as deteriorated.

In Period 2, the story changes once again. From 2013–14 to 2015–16, among schools that saw a drop in suspension rates, roughly twice as many, overall, saw

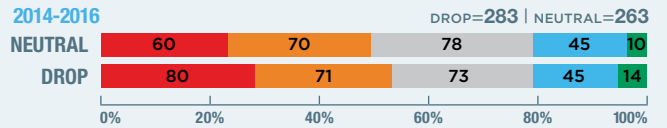
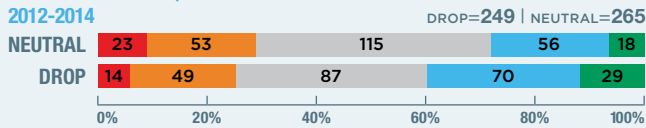
FIGURE 7.

Distribution of Differences in Relation to Suspensions, Schools, Period 1 vs. Period 2

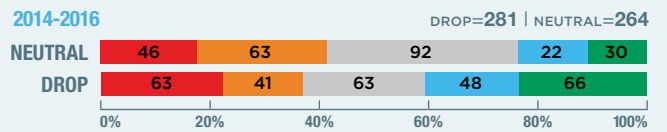
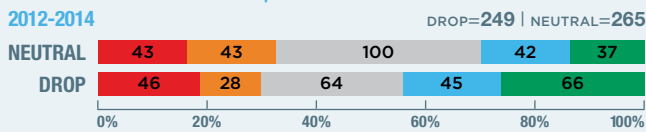
Students: Fighting



Students: Respect



Teachers: Order/Discipline



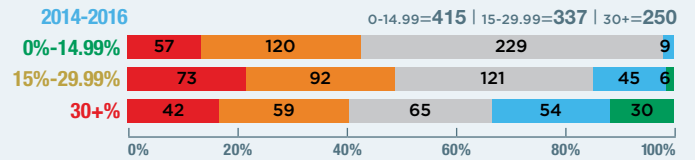
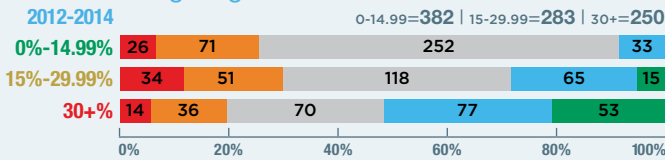
Source: NYC School Survey and Office of Safety and Youth Development

● Substantially Worse ● Worse ● Similar ● Better ● Substantially Better

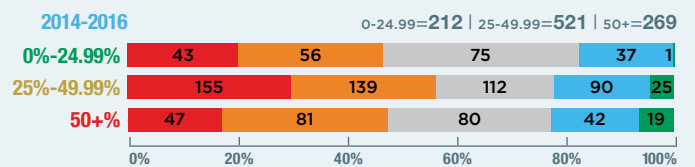
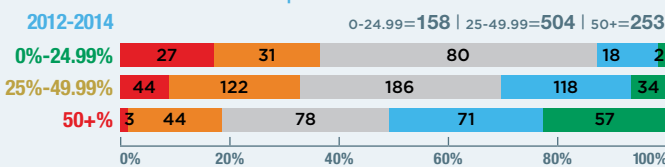
FIGURE 8.

Distribution of Differences by Starting Point, Schools, Period 1 vs. Period 2*

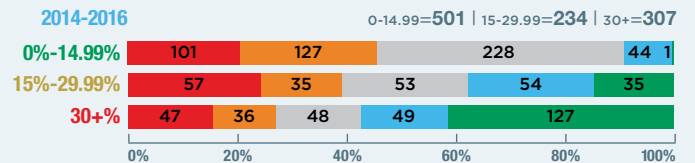
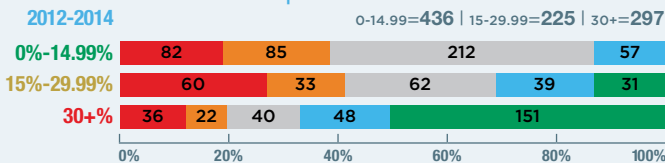
Students: Fighting



Students: Mutual Respect



Teachers: Order/Discipline



*I display only the questions regarding student respect, student fighting, and teacher order because those categories saw the largest overall shifts; as such, they offer reader insight into the shifts in school climate associated with the discipline reforms.

Source: NYC School Survey

● Substantially Worse ● Worse ● Similar ● Better ● Substantially Better

a deterioration as an improvement, according to students, on student mutual respect and physical fights. However, according to teachers, order and discipline improved at slightly more schools than it deteriorated.

Critics of discipline reform might have expected that schools where suspensions were reduced would, on balance, deteriorate more than schools where suspensions stayed roughly similar. But, as Figure 7 shows, this was not the case: in both Period 1 and Period 2, the distribution of differences between schools with neutral suspension rates and those with declining suspension rates was similar for all questions. The significant shift between the two periods and the lack of a significant differential between schools that saw neutral and lower suspension rates suggests that the *number of suspensions* may matter less for school climate than the dynamics fostered by a *new set of disciplinary rules*. (In other words, the mere *possibility* that disruptive students may not be suspended may contribute to a general increase in disorderly behavior.)

Figure 8 shows how schools changed over Period 1 and Period 2 *in relation to their school climate at the start of each period*. The rows are again divided into three ranges, which indicate the percentage of students or teachers who responded negatively to the question (i.e., the relevant issue was a problem at the school). For instance, in Period 1, under Bloomberg, we see that, according to students, the bad “red-zone” schools (bottom rows) became, on balance, better. Thus, looking at the bottom row for the entry, Students: Fighting, we see that half of the schools that began Period 1 in the “red-zone” improved by the end of Period 1, and less than 20% got worse. On the other hand, the good “green-zone” schools (top rows) became, on balance, worse. The middling “yellow-zone” schools (middle rows) saw a fairly even distribution of deterioration and improvement.

On the whole, in all three questions in Period 1, the results are neutral (there were no big shifts either way) and offer little to remark upon. Across each question, more bad schools improved than deteriorated, more good schools deteriorated than improved, and about as many middling schools deteriorated as improved. However, Period 2 saw a much more dramatic—and negative—change.

On the question of student fighting, the change from Period 1 to Period 2 was most striking in bad schools. In Period 1, 50% of bad schools improved and slightly more than 20% deteriorated. Yet in Period 2, 33% of bad schools improved and about 40% deteriorated. As for student mutual respect, the change from Period 1 to Period 2 is also most striking in the bad schools. In Period 1, about 50% of bad schools improved, while a little less than 20%

deteriorated. That distribution flipped in Period 2: slightly more than 20% improved and slightly less than 50% deteriorated. In other words, according to students, in nearly 50% of bad schools, conditions got worse.

On the question of teachers’ perceptions about order and discipline, there was a less discernible pattern. Across bad, middling, and good schools, a slightly lower percentage of schools improved in Period 2, compared with Period 1. In good and bad schools, a slightly higher percentage of schools deteriorated in Period 2 than in Period 1; in middling schools, a slightly lower percentage of schools deteriorated.

Changes in School Climate in New York City Schools: Elementary Schools

Because suspension rates at elementary schools were generally low, I focused exclusively on how school climate changed in relation to the start of Period 1. **Figure 9** shows that the pattern of changes in teacher-reported order and discipline in elementary schools is similar to the pattern of changes in nonelementary schools demonstrated in Figure 8.

Among bad schools, the distribution of differences is largely positive across both periods: in Period 1, more than 60% improved; in Period 2, nearly 50% improved. Among middling schools, the distribution of differences went from somewhat positive (around 40% improved and 30% deteriorated) to more neutral (about 34% improved and 33% deteriorated). Among the best schools, the distribution became more negative (about 9% improved and 39% deteriorated).

Discipline Reform’s Disparate Impact—Race and Socioeconomic Status

The disparate rate of student suspensions by race is the primary rationale for discipline reform. Examining the distribution of differences of schools as classified by their racial composition can reveal whether the negative shifts in school climate associated with discipline reform have a racially disparate impact.

Figure 10, which shows the distribution of differences for schools according to their percentage of students who are nonwhite, indicates that discipline reform does indeed have a racially disparate impact. According to students, schools that serve 90+% minority students saw the most significant deterioration in school climate under the de Blasio discipline reform—compared with schools serving a lower percentage of minority students *and* compared with 90+% minority schools under the Bloomberg reform.

FIGURE 9.

Distribution of Differences by Starting Point, Elementary Schools, Period 1 vs. Period 2

Teachers: Order/Discipline

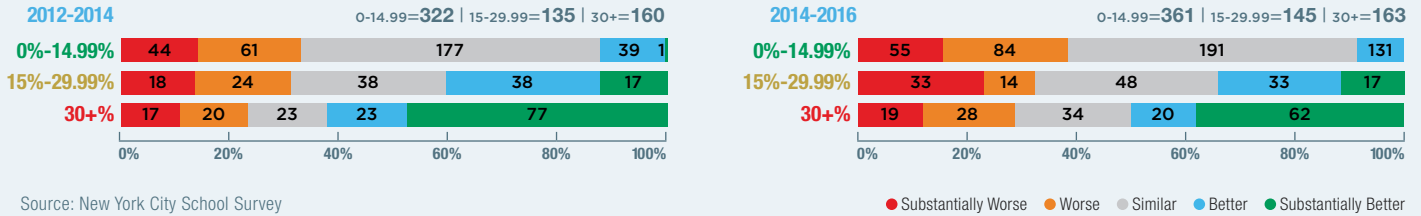
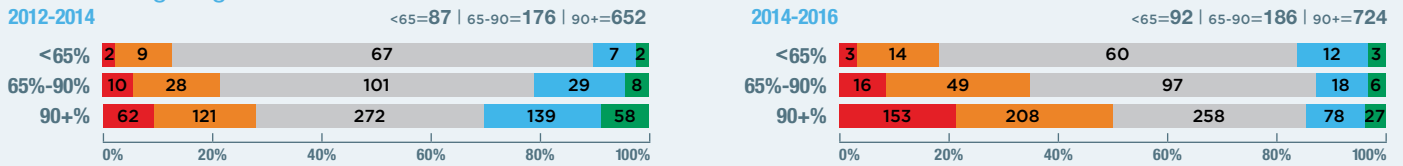


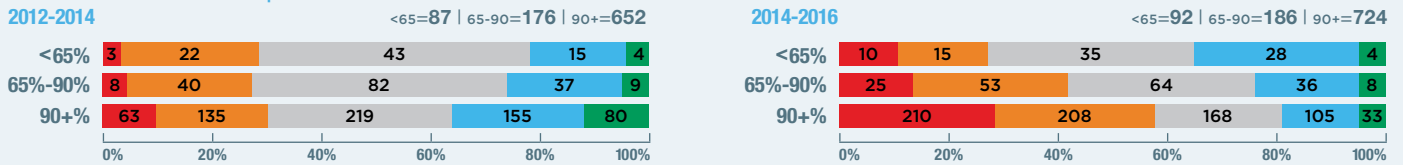
FIGURE 10.

Distribution of Differences by Percentage of Nonwhite Students, Schools, Period 1 vs. Period 2

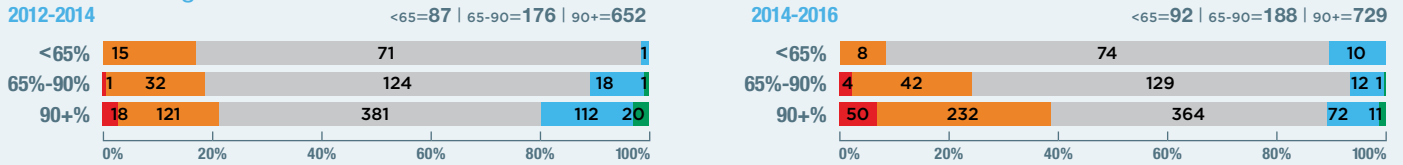
Students: Fighting



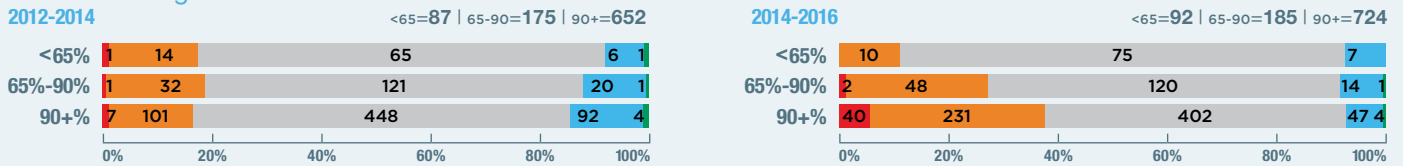
Students: Mutual Respect



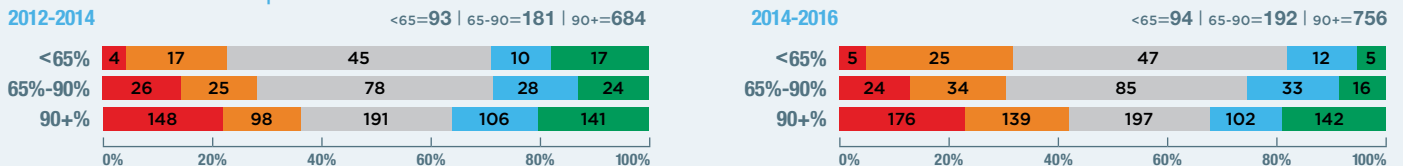
Students: Gangs



Students: Drugs/Alcohol



Teachers: Order/Discipline



Consider the following percentages for the 90+% minority schools:

Students—Fighting

Period 1: Improved: 30%; deteriorated: 28%

Period 2: Improved: 14%; deteriorated: 50%

Students—Mutual Respect

Period 1: Improved: 36%; deteriorated: 30%

Period 2: Improved: 19%; deteriorated: 58%

Students—Drugs/Alcohol

Period 1: Improved: 15%; deteriorated: 17%

Period 2: Improved: 7%; deteriorated: 37%

Students—Gangs

Period 1: Improved: 20%; deteriorated: 21%

Period 2: Improved: 11%; deteriorated: 39%

Teachers—Order/Discipline

Period 1: Improved: 36%; deteriorated: 36%

Period 2: Improved: 32%; deteriorated: 42%

In other words, schools where an overwhelming majority of students are not white saw huge deteriorations in climate during the de Blasio reform. This suggests that de Blasio's discipline reform had a significant disparate impact by race, harming minority students the most.

Does discipline reform have a disparate impact by socioeconomic status? **Figure 11**, which shows the distribution of differences by the percentage of a school's student body in poverty, indicates that it does. According to students, in Period 1, under Bloomberg, and in Period 2, under de Blasio, there was relatively little difference in the distri-

bution of differences among schools where the student poverty rate was less than 65%. But under de Blasio, in schools where the student poverty rate was higher than 65%, the school environment deteriorated dramatically.

Consider the following percentages for the 90+% poverty schools:

Students—Fighting

Period 1: Improved 34%; deteriorated: 25%

Period 2: Improved: 14%; deteriorated: 46%

Students—Mutual Respect

Period 1: Improved: 37%; deteriorated: 28%

Period 2: Improved: 18%; deteriorated: 62%

Students—Drugs/Alcohol

Period 1: Improved: 12%; deteriorated: 15%

Period 2: Improved: 7%; deteriorated: 36%

Students—Gangs

Period 1: Improved: 21%; deteriorated: 22%

Period 2: Improved: 9%; deteriorated: 40%

Teachers—Order/Discipline

Period 1: Improved: 35%; deteriorated: 31%

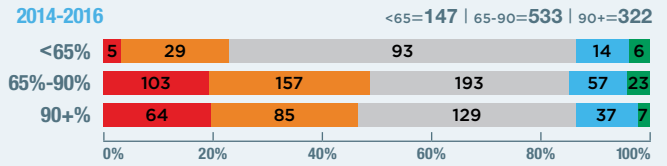
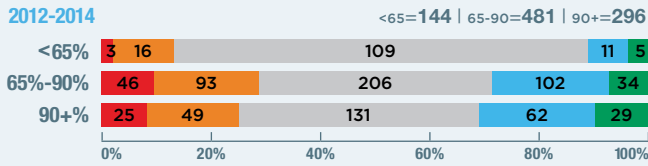
Period 2: Improved: 32%; deteriorated: 38%

In other words, de Blasio's discipline reform is associated with a disparate impact in school climate by socioeconomic status, harming low-income students the most.

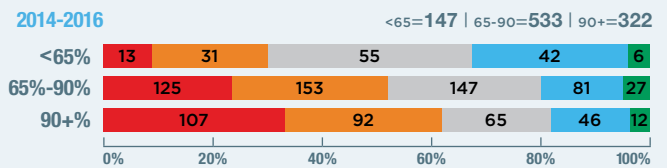
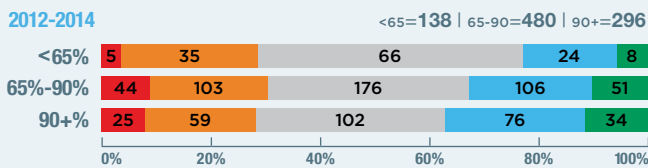
FIGURE 11.

Distribution of Differences by Percentage of Students in Poverty, Schools, Period 1 vs. Period 2

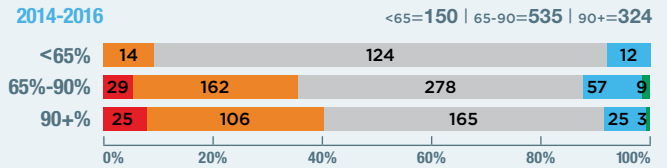
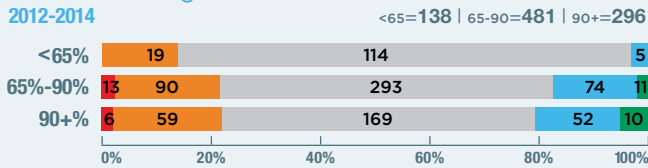
Students: Fighting



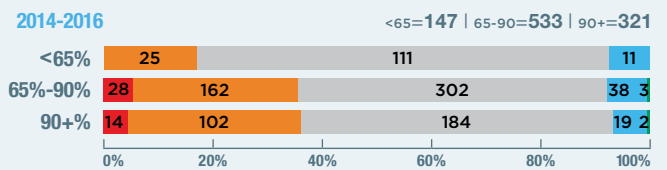
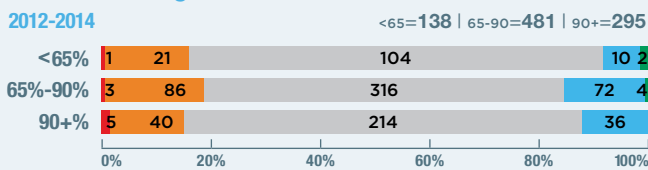
Students: Mutual Respect



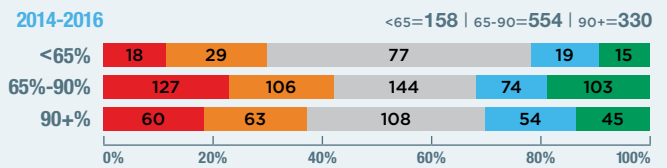
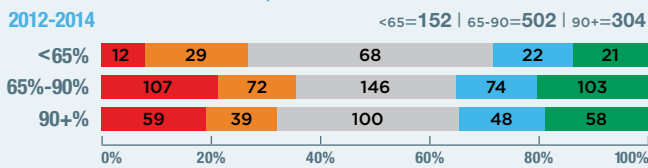
Students: Gangs



Students: Drugs/Alcohol



Teachers: Order/Discipline



Source: New York City School Survey

● Substantially Worse ● Worse ● Similar ● Better ● Substantially Better

Conclusion

Overall, the pattern is consistent and unmistakable: school climate remained relatively steady under Bloomberg’s discipline reforms but has deteriorated rapidly under de Blasio’s. As noted, these findings are descriptive, and this strong association is not necessarily enough to draw a causal conclusion. And yet, the differences between the periods around each reform give a strong impression of a causal link. If we assume that shifts in school discipline policy do relate to shifts in school climate, the implications from this study for American education are profound.

Discipline reform may be associated with significant harm to school climate. Most policy discussion about discipline reform centers on the student being disciplined. It is often assumed that reducing suspensions will help those students without imposing negative spillover effects on their better-behaved peers. However, research demonstrates that disruptive peer behavior can have significant negative effects on students. And this study’s findings strongly suggest that discipline reform in New York City public schools contributed to a significant increase in disruptive behavior and a deterioration in school climate.

Whereas school climate held steady during the period of Bloomberg’s discipline reform (2011–12 to 2013–14), school climate deteriorated significantly during the period of de Blasio’s reform (2013–14 to 2015–16). In 2015–16, New York City Public Schools issued 15,857 fewer suspensions than in 2013–14. And in 2015–16, 376,716 students attended a school where a higher percentage of teachers reported that order and discipline were not maintained.

Similarly, during the period of de Blasio’s reform, more than half (521 out of 1,002) of nonelementary schools—serving 282,761 students—saw a higher percentage of students report that their peers do not respect one another. In 443 schools serving 268,591 students, a higher percentage of students reported frequent physical fighting. More than three times as many schools saw a higher percentage of students report frequent drug and alcohol use or gang activity as saw lower percentages report it.

I shall leave it to future researchers to explore whether these changes in school climate have a causal link to lower academic achievement. We know from research conducted by Johanna Lacoe that there is a strong link between student-reported feelings of safety and student achievement.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, the de Blasio administration changed the wording of the student questions about feeling safe, so we can’t say with great confidence that student achievement has suffered. But standardized test

scores are, fundamentally, a second-order concern. If we believe what students and teachers report, hundreds of thousands of students in New York City are now being educated in schools that are less respectful, less orderly, and more violent.

The harm associated with discipline reform appears to have a disparate impact by race and socioeconomic status. Under de Blasio’s discipline reform, of schools that serve 90+% minority students, nearly 60% saw a deterioration in mutual student respect, about 50% saw a deterioration in student-reported physical fighting, more than 40% saw a deterioration in teacher-reported order and discipline, and nearly 40% saw an increase in student-reported drug and alcohol use and gang activity. Across every student question, about three times as many schools reported a deterioration as an improvement. By contrast, schools where less than two-thirds of the students were not white or in poverty saw relatively little deterioration compared with the way these schools changed under Bloomberg’s discipline reform. Indeed, under de Blasio’s reform, these schools even saw net improvement in certain areas.

Discipline reform isn’t necessarily associated with harm to school climate. Based on the answers to the NYC School Survey, the lion’s share of the deterioration in school climate took place during the 2014–15 and the 2015–16 school years, under de Blasio’s discipline reforms. School climate held relatively steady during Bloomberg’s reforms, even as the number of suspensions decreased by nearly 16,000. One can only speculate on whether the rapid deterioration during the more recent period was a delayed and cumulative response to both reforms, or whether it was primarily a response to de Blasio’s reform. If the former, it suggests that discipline reform is an entirely bad idea. If the latter, it suggests that the specific details of the discipline reform—and the context in which it is implemented—matter greatly.

School order may be more a function of dynamics set by discipline policy than a function of the number of suspensions. The difference between the two interventions—both of which were associated with approximately the same numerical drop in suspensions but affected school climate very differently—may puzzle observers who would expect a linear, inverse relationship. But school order is ultimately not the product of the number of students suspended but rather of classroom culture. The Bloomberg and de Blasio administrations’ interventions had a significantly different character, which could be expected to have a significantly different effect on the human dynamics in a school. Bloomberg told teachers that they could no longer use suspension as a tool of first resort for low-level infractions. De Blasio told teachers that if they wanted to suspend a student,

they had to ask their principal to apply in writing to the central office and have the central office approve that request. Common sense suggests that these reforms would play out differently in the classroom.

In the first reform, which was not widely publicized, prohibiting teachers from suspending a student at first offense may have reduced suspensions for behaviors that didn't truly merit them, while making teachers take at least a couple of rounds at trying to manage a disruptive student before excluding him from class.

But the second reform, a major national and local news story, may have shifted classroom dynamics significantly. Students, especially those prone to disruptive behavior, were likely aware that there was a district-wide suspension-reduction initiative afoot and may have felt greater license to push boundaries. Teachers—knowing that they would have to ask their principal to do something that would reflect poorly on both of them under the new policy regime—may have felt pressure to give students more leeway. Principals, knowing that central office administrators were hoping to achieve a suspension reduction, may have been less inclined even to attempt a suspension. And, of course, central office administrators had an incentive to second-guess the judgment of teachers and principals as to the necessity of temporarily excluding a disruptive student from the classroom.

“Restorative” interventions should complement, not replace, traditional discipline. The fact that school climate deteriorated as the de Blasio administration attempted to shift discipline policy from an “exclusionary” to a “restorative” approach does not necessarily argue that “restorative” approaches are inherently counterproductive. More likely, the potential of “restorative justice” was undercut by the attempt to couple it with suspension reductions. As the research literature notes, significant human and financial investment over the course of several years is required for “restorative” approaches to achieve their presumed potential. That investment is extremely unlikely to be sustained if a simultaneous effort to reduce suspensions makes overall school climate deteriorate. District leaders should consider phasing in restorative interventions as an approach to address initial, low-level behavioral issues rather than as a replacement for a disciplinary response to more serious misbehavior.

Without school-climate surveys, district leaders and policymakers will be flying blind. Without a means to assess shifts in school climate, district leaders will have no reliable way to gauge whether their reforms are helping or hurting school climate. Even after inheriting a robust school-climate survey, the de Blasio administration changed the vast majority of questions, invalidating their power to make reliable comparisons. The ques-

tions that remained, however, showed a significant deterioration in hundreds of schools. It is not clear how the School Climate Leadership Team nonetheless concluded that their reforms were making discipline “fairer and more effective,”⁹⁸ despite the fact that the only reliable climate data remaining, after making the vast majority of school order questions useless for comparison, suggested the opposite. It is clear that other districts where such surveys are not implemented have essentially no reliable basis on which to gauge whether their reforms are effective or counterproductive.

The more aggressive the discipline reform, the higher the risk of disorder. The data cover shifts associated with two sets of reform—one modest and one more aggressive. The modest intervention (Bloomberg’s) was associated with no discernible shift in school climate, and the more aggressive intervention (de Blasio’s) was associated with a significant deterioration in school climate. Two data points are not necessarily enough to definitively suggest a trend line, but policymakers and district leaders must act based on the evidence that exists. If we assume that the more aggressive nature of the second reform led to the deterioration in school climate, that would be very troubling. Many other major urban districts have implemented reforms that are far more aggressive than de Blasio’s, giving us reason to fear that those reforms may be engendering even more significant negative results.

Discipline reforms may be doing great harm to students, especially the most vulnerable. Discipline reformers alarmed by racial differences in suspension rates—and assuming them to be largely the result of teachers’ racial bias—have pushed policies to lower suspensions at the district, state, and federal levels. They have operated largely in ignorance of the effects of their reforms. But what we know now should alarm parents—and not only those in New York.

We should believe what students and teachers are collectively reporting about their classrooms. We should not assume that teachers, collectively, are being driven by implicit racial bias (40% of New York teachers are not white).⁹⁹ We should trust that teachers, collectively, are well-intentioned and are trying to balance complex classroom dynamics and exercise the use of discipline for the greater good. Teachers should not be deprived of a tool that they find useful to maintain classroom order. Unfortunately, by second-guessing teachers’ judgments about how to maintain order, policymakers and district administrators are likely harming the education of many millions of well-behaved students in an effort to help the misbehaving few.

Policy Recommendations

Federal Government

Rescind the “Dear Colleague” guidance on school discipline.

School order is a complex human dynamic into which federal spreadsheets provide no insight. By coercing school district administrators to second-guess their teachers by the threat of a federal investigation, the ED’s Office of Civil Rights has likely caused serious school disruption for millions of children.

States

Don’t include disciplinary incidents as an indicator of school quality under ESSA accountability plans.

Even if the Trump administration rescinds federal disciplinary guidance, more powerful and sustained pressure to instill schoolhouse disorder may come from state accountability systems under the Every Student Succeeds Act. ESSA gives states considerable flexibility to design their school accountability systems; while they must give “substantial weight” to academic achievement, states can still give significant weight to nonacademic indicators. Discipline-reform groups are currently pressuring states to include disciplinary incidents as an indicator of school quality under their ESSA accountability plan. This would be a disaster. Under ESSA’s predecessor, No Child Left Behind, schools were graded exclusively on academic performance. Instances of entire districts “gaming” standardized tests to avoid identification as “failing” became national scandals. Disciplinary incidents are significantly easier to “game” than standardized tests: a school needs simply not punish behavioral infractions. ESSA requires states to identify the bottom 5% of schools on state accountability systems and target them for intervention. Including disciplinary incidents in state accountability systems would therefore give the worst schools an incentive to become more disorderly and less safe.

States are currently drafting their accountability plans, many of which will be submitted to the secretary of education as soon as April 3, 2017. Some states—such as Ohio, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Maryland—indicate that they intend to use disciplinary incidents as a nonacademic indicator under ESSA. State policymakers must not lock in an incentive to make their worst schools more chaotic.

School Districts

When adopting discipline-reform initiatives, begin with modest reforms and always implement a school-climate survey.

Any district or state contemplating a discipline-reform initiative should keep the results from New York City in

mind and begin with modest measures. Discipline-reform initiatives should also be implemented alongside school-climate surveys that ask students and teachers about school order and the classroom environment. Without such data, districts will be flying blind. Districts that have already implemented discipline-reform initiatives should conduct thorough reviews, in consultation with teachers, as to whether the reforms have harmed school climate and quality.

New York City

Restore all school-order questions to how they appeared on the 2013–14 survey.

Even small changes to question wording can render survey results useless for comparison. The five questions that this study was able to compare (fights; respect; gangs; drugs and alcohol; and order and discipline) are blunt measures compared with other questions that were removed. Answers to these additional questions will offer a fuller picture of school climate.

Go no further in its discipline-reform efforts and consider rolling back current reforms.

For the 2016–17 school year, the de Blasio administration revised the discipline code to end suspensions for K–2 students. As there was already a negative trend in elementary school order during de Blasio’s first reform—one especially pronounced in well-ordered elementary schools—this was not advisable. The administration also required principals to show proof of attempting restorative justice interventions before recommending suspensions. Given the negative trend in climate associated with requiring principals to apply to suspend students, this was also not advisable. There was no discernible shift in school order under the Bloomberg reform, which reduced suspensions by about 16,000. This suggests that before the Bloomberg reform, more students were suspended than perhaps was necessary. However, the de Blasio reform, which also reduced suspensions by about 16,000, was associated with a significant negative shift in school climate. This suggests that de Blasio’s reform was a step too far. As such, returning to the discipline regime in place when Bloomberg left office appears prudent.

Research on Outcomes of Discipline Reform

Encourage more of it.

This paper is intended in part to set the groundwork for that research. New York City Public Schools provides perhaps the best data for that purpose of any district in the country; but other districts in which such an analysis may be possible are listed in Appendix F.



Appendices

APPENDIX A

Nonelementary Schools with Most Improved Climate, 2013–14 to 2015–16

These are the schools that saw a 15+% improvement on student-reported fighting and teacher-reported school order. This list and the following lists exclude elementary schools, where students were not asked questions.

School Name	School Type**	Change in Suspension Rate, %
M.S. 256 Academic & Athletic Excellence	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-33
Accion Academy	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-20
World View High School	High	-12
J.H.S. 078 Roy H. Mann	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-9
I.S. 285 Meyer Levin	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-7
P.S. 191 Amsterdam	K–8	-7
Murry Bergtraum High School for Business Careers	High	-5
I.S. 192 Linden	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-1
I.S. R002 George L. Egbert	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-1
Gordon Parks School	K–8	0
P.S./M.S. 147 Ronald McNair	K–8	0
P.S. 178 Saint Clair Mckelway	K–8	0
P.S. X037 Multiple Intelligence School	K–8	0
James Baldwin School	High	0
J.H.S. 050 John D. Wells	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	1
Brooklyn Collegiate: A College Board School	High	2
August Martin High School	High	4
Brooklyn Urban Garden Charter School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	*
DREAM Charter School	K–8	*
Icahn Charter School	K–8	*

* = value not given

**New York City classified schools in one of six ways, depending on the grades they serve. Elementary schools typically serve students from pre-K or kindergarten through fifth or sixth grade. K–8 and K–12 schools serve the broader range described in their title. Junior high-intermediate-middle typically serve grades 6–8, though some serve students through 12th grade. High schools typically serve students in grades 9–12, and secondary schools typically serve the same grades but are specialized in their curricular offerings.

APPENDIX B

Nonelementary Schools with Significant Deterioration in Climate, 2013–14 to 2015–16

Schools on this list saw the number of their students reporting frequent physical fights and the number of their teachers reporting that order and discipline were not maintained increase by at least 15 percentage points from 2013–14 to 2015–16.

School Name	School Type**	Change in Suspension Rate, %
School for Democracy and Leadership	Secondary	-53
J.H.S. 162 Lola Rodriguez De Tio	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-41
Brooklyn Theatre Arts High School	High	-35
Bronx Career and College Preparatory High School	High	-25
Bronx High School of Business	High	-23
Eagle Academy for Young Men of Harlem	Secondary	-22
Frederick Douglass Academy IV Secondary School	High	-21
Felisa Rincon de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy	High	-20
Schuylerville Preparatory High School	High	-19
Queens United Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-18
High School for Youth and Community Development at Erasmus	High	-16
Frederick Douglass Academy VI High School	High	-14
Jill Chaifetz Transfer High School	High	-12
Brooklyn Lab School	High	-12
John Ericsson Middle School 126	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-10
New Design Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-10
Gregory Jocko Jackson School of Sports, Art, and Technology	K–8	-9
P.S. 109	K–8	-8
Fannie Lou Hamer Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-7
Frederick Douglass Academy V. Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-6
High School for Service & Learning at Erasmus	High	-6
Bronx River High School	High	-6
Riverdale Avenue Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-5
Gotham Professional Arts Academy	High	-5
P.S. 5 Port Morris	K–8	-4
P.S. 327 Dr. Rose B. English	K–8	-4
Archimedes Academy for Math, Science and Technology Applications	Secondary	-4
Baychester Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-3
Astor Collegiate Academy	High	-2
Bronx Leadership Academy II High School	High	-2
P.S./M.S. 029 Melrose School	K–8	-2
College Academy	High	-1
P.S. 377 Alejandrina B. De Gautier	K–8	-1
Hunts Point School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-1
Fordham Leadership Academy for Business and Technology	High	-1

Theatre Arts Production Company School	Secondary	-1
High School for Enterprise, Business and Technology	High	-1
P.S. 108 Assemblyman Angelo Del Toro Educational Complex	K–8	-1
P.S. 180 Hugo Newman	K–8	0
M.S. 390	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	0
Goldie Maple Academy	K–8	0
P.S. K231	K–8	0
Urban Assembly School of Design and Construction	High	0
P.S./I.S. 045 Horace E. Greene	K–8	0
P.S. 308 Clara Cardwell	K–8	0
High School for Language and Diplomacy	High	0
I.S. 49 Berta A. Dreyfus	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	0
P.S. 183 Dr. Richard R. Green	K–8	0
Hawtree Creek Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	0
P.S. 046 Arthur Tappan	K–8	1
Urban Assembly School for Wildlife Conservation	Secondary	2
Eagle Academy for Young Men III	Secondary	2
Life Sciences Secondary School	Secondary	2
Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis High School	High	3
J.H.S. 143 Eleanor Roosevelt	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	3
I.S. 340	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	3
Renaissance School of the Arts	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	6
Collegiate Institute for Math and Science	High	6
Pelham Lab High School	High	9
Monroe Academy for Visual Arts & Design	High	9
Brownsville Academy High School	High	9
Queens Preparatory Academy	High	10
Bushwick School for Social Justice	High	10
Cultural Academy for the Arts and Sciences	High	11
Coalition School for Social Change	High	13
Metropolitan High School	High	18
Invictus Preparatory Charter School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	*
Roads Charter School I	High	*
Urban Dove Charter School	High	*
Explore Charter School	K–8	*
Brownsville Collegiate Charter School	Secondary	*
Harlem Village Academy Leadership Charter School	K–12	*

* = value not given

**New York City classified schools in one of six ways, depending on the grades they serve. Elementary schools typically serve students from pre-K or kindergarten through fifth or sixth grade. K–8 and K–12 schools serve the broader range described in their title. Junior high-intermediate-middle typically serve grades 6–8, though some serve students through 12th grade. High schools typically serve students in grades 9–12, and secondary schools typically serve the same grades but are specialized in their curricular offerings.

APPENDIX C

Disorderly Nonelementary Schools, 2015–16

Schools on this list saw more than 30% of students and teachers report frequent physical fighting and disorder in 2015–16.

School Name	School Type**	Change in Suspension Rate, %
H.E.R.O. High	High	-62
School for Democracy and Leadership	Secondary	-53
J.H.S. 162 Lola Rodriguez De Tio	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-41
School of the Future Brooklyn	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-41
New Explorers High School	High	-37
Brooklyn Theatre Arts High School	High	-35
Bronx Park Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-32
Bronx Career and College Preparatory High School	High	-25
Bronx High School of Business	High	-23
Technology, Arts, and Sciences Studio	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-22
Felisa Rincon de Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy	High	-20
Schuylerville Preparatory High School	High	-19
Brooklyn School for Music Theatre	High	-19
Queens United Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-18
School of Performing Arts	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-18
Eagle Academy for Young Men	Secondary	-18
Fort Greene Preparatory Academy	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-16
Urban Assembly School for Music and Art	High	-16
J.H.S. 131 Albert Einstein	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-16
Ebbets Field Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-16
I.S. 250 Robert F. Kennedy Community Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-15
Frederick Douglass Academy VI High School	High	-14
Science Skills Center High School for Science, Technology and the Creative Arts	High	-14
Parkside Preparatory Academy	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-13
Wings Academy	High	-12
Brooklyn Lab School	High	-12
J.H.S. 123 James M. Kieran	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-12
Brooklyn Frontiers High School	High	-11
Urban Assembly Bronx Academy of Letters	Secondary	-11
Mott Hall Community School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-11
Bronx Mathematics Preparatory School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-10
Urban Assembly Institute of Math and Science for Young Women	Secondary	-10
High School for Civil Rights	High	-10
I.S. 232	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-10

John Ericsson Middle School 126	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-10
Urban Science Academy	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-10
Academy for Scholarship and Entrepreneurship: A College Board School	High	-10
New Design Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-10
P.S. 149 Sojourner Truth	K–8	-9
Bronx Alliance Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-9
George Washington Carver High School for the Sciences	High	-9
Gregory Jocko Jackson School of Sports, Art, and Technology	K–8	-9
P.S. 123 Mahalia Jackson	K–8	-9
P.S. 111 Jacob Blackwell	K–8	-8
Entrada Academy	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-8
Academy for Young Writers	Secondary	-8
P.S. K140	K–8	-8
P.S. 109	K–8	-8
Clara Barton High School	High	-7
Women’s Academy of Excellence	High	-7
East Flatbush Community Research School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-7
Urban Action Academy	High	-7
Martin Van Buren High School	High	-7
Explorations Academy	High	-7
P.S. 050 Vito Marcantonio	K–8	-7
J.H.S. 022 Jordan L. Mott	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-6
P.S./M.S 042 R. Vernam	K–8	-6
P.S./M.S. 031 William Lloyd Garrison	K–8	-6
Frederick Douglass Academy V. Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-6
High School for Service & Learning at Erasmus	High	-6
I.S. 181 Pablo Casals	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-6
New Heights Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-6
School for Legal Studies	High	-6
Isaac Newton Middle School for Math & Science	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-6
Pathways College Preparatory School: A College Board School	Secondary	-6
Bronx River High School	High	-6
Herbert H. Lehman High School	High	-6
Mathematics, Science Research and Technology Magnet High School	High	-6
Riverdale Avenue Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-5
Catherine & Count Basie Middle School 72	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-5
Young Scholars Academy of the Bronx	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-5
Gotham Professional Arts Academy	High	-5
Urban Assembly Unison School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-5
East Fordham Academy for the Arts	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-5
Leaders of Tomorrow	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-5
Curtis High School	High	-4

P.S. 5 Port Morris	K-8	-4
J.H.S. 151 Lou Gehrig	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-4
I.S. 061 William A Morris	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-4
High School for Law Enforcement and Public Safety	High	-4
Humanities & Arts Magnet High School	High	-4
P.S. 096 Joseph Lanzetta	K-8	-4
P.S. 327 Dr. Rose B. English	K-8	-4
P.S. 034 Franklin D. Roosevelt	K-8	-4
P.S. 043	K-8	-4
Archimedes Academy for Math, Science and Technology Applications	Secondary	-4
I.S. 229 Roland Patterson	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-4
Baychester Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-3
I.S. 528 Bea Fuller Rodgers School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-3
P.S. 041 Francis White	K-8	-3
Transit Tech Career and Technical Education High School	High	-3
Brooklyn Academy of Science and the Environment	High	-3
Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists	Secondary	-3
M.S. 246 Walt Whitman	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-3
Angelo Patri Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-2
P.S./I.S. 384 Frances E. Carter	K-8	-2
William Cullen Bryant High School	High	-2
Astor Collegiate Academy	High	-2
Boerum Hill School for International Studies	Secondary	-2
P.S./M.S. 138 Sunrise	K-8	-2
George Westinghouse Career and Technical Education High School	High	-2
P.S. 66	K-8	-2
J.H.S. 226 Virgil I. Grissom	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-2
P.S./M.S. 029 Melrose School	K-8	-2
J.H.S. 218 James P. Sinnott	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-2
P.S. 288 Shirley Tanyhill	K-8	-1
Brooklyn Studio Secondary School	Secondary	-1
College Academy	High	-1
P.S. 377 Alejandrina B. De Gautier	K-8	-1
A. Philip Randolph Campus High School	High	-1
Hunts Point School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-1
J. M. Rapport School Career Development	High	-1
P.S. 306 Ethan Allen	K-8	-1
J.H.S. 008 Richard S. Grossley	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-1
Fordham Leadership Academy for Business and Technology	High	-1
I.S. 117 Joseph H. Wade	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-1
J.H.S. 210 Elizabeth Blackwell	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-1
Theatre Arts Production Company School	Secondary	-1
DeWitt Clinton High School	High	-1

High School for Enterprise, Business and Technology	High	-1
Long Island City High School	High	-1
I.S. 303 Herbert S. Eisenberg	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-1
I.S. 219 New Venture School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-1
Bronx Leadership Academy High School	High	-1
P.S. 108 Assemblyman Angelo Del Toro Educational Complex	K–8	-1
Thomas C. Giordano Middle School 45	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	-1
Frederick Douglass Academy	Secondary	-1
Irwin Altman Middle School 172	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	0
Rockaway Park High School for Environmental Sustainability	High	0
P.S. 035	K–12	0
P.S. 181 Brooklyn	K–8	0
P.S./I.S. 116 William C. Hughley	K–8	0
P.S. 180 Hugo Newman	K–8	0
M.S. 390	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	0
P.S. Q023 @ Queens Children Center	K-12	0
Cobble Hill School of American Studies	High	0
J.H.S. 088 Peter Rouget	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	0
I.S. 238—Susan B. Anthony Academy	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	0
Goldie Maple Academy	K–8	0
P.S. K231	K-8	0
Mott Hall High School	High	0
P.S. 007 Samuel Stern	K–8	0
M.S. K394	K–8	0
P.S. 018 Park Terrace	K–8	0
P.S. 212	K–8	0
P.S. 165 Ida Posner	K–8	0
High School for Violin and Dance	High	0
M.S. 301 Paul L. Dunbar	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	0
I.S. 313 School of Leadership Development	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	0
P.S. 308 Clara Cardwell	K–8	0
P.S. 214	K–8	0
High School for Language and Diplomacy	High	0
I.S. 49 Berta A. Dreyfus	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	0
P.S. 183 Dr. Richard R. Green	K–8	0
J.H.S. 145 Arturo Toscanini	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	0
KAPPA IV	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	1
Essence School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	1
I.S. 237	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	1
P.S. 165 Robert E. Simon	K–8	1
J.H.S. 292 Margaret S. Douglas	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	1
Queens High School of Teaching, Liberal Arts and the Sciences	High	1
William E. Grady Career and Technical Education High School	High	1

P.S./M.S. 20 P.O. George J. Werdann, III	K–8	1
John Adams High School	High	1
I.S. 339	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	1
P.S. 046 Arthur Tappan	K–8	1
Urban Assembly School for Wildlife Conservation	Secondary	2
Marie Curie School for Medicine, Nursing, and Health Professions	High	2
I.S. 254	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	2
Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning and Social Change	Secondary	2
J.H.S. 190 Russell Sage	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	2
P.S. 127 Aerospace Science Magnet School	K–8	2
Eagle Academy for Young Men III	Secondary	2
East Bronx Academy for the Future	Secondary	2
Collaborative Arts Middle School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	2
Life Sciences Secondary School	Secondary	2
High School for Environmental Studies	High	3
Antonia Pantoja Preparatory Academy: A College Board School	Secondary	3
Middle School for Art and Philosophy	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	3
Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis High School	High	3
Banana Kelly High School	High	3
J.H.S. 143 Eleanor Roosevelt	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	3
I.S. 340	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	3
P.S./I.S. 30 Mary White Ovington	K–8	3
High School of Arts and Technology	High	4
John Dewey High School	High	4
Academy for Social Action	High	4
P.S. 282 Park Slope	K–8	5
J.H.S. 383 Philippa Schuyler	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	5
High School for Contemporary Arts	High	5
Renaissance School of the Arts	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	6
Collegiate Institute for Math and Science	High	6
Bronx Academy of Health Careers	High	7
South Bronx Academy for Applied Media	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	7
Brooklyn High School for Law and Technology	High	7
Queens Transition Center	High	7
I.S. 204 Oliver W. Holmes	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	8
Pelham Lab High School	High	9
Monroe Academy for Visual Arts & Design	High	9
Brownsville Academy High School	High	9
Queens Preparatory Academy	High	10
Bushwick School for Social Justice	High	10
North Bronx School of Empowerment	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	11
Rockaway Collegiate High School	High	11
Urban Assembly Academy of Government and Law	High	11

Cultural Academy for the Arts and Sciences	High	11
J.H.S. 118 William W. Niles	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	12
J.H.S. 098 Herman Ridder	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	12
Coalition School for Social Change	High	13
Urban Assembly School for Global Commerce	High	15
Metropolitan High School	High	18
Bronx Lab School	High	19
Frederick Douglass Academy II Secondary School	Secondary	28
Bronx Aerospace High School	High	30
M.S. 358	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	*
Explore Exceed Charter School	K–8	*
Invictus Preparatory Charter School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	*
Roads Charter School I	High	*
Explore Charter School	K–8	*
New Visions Charter High School for the Humanities III	High	*
Explore Empower Charter School	K–8	*
Unity Prep Charter School	Junior High-Intermediate-Middle	*
Opportunity Charter School	Secondary	*
Harlem Children’s Zone Promise Academy 1 Charter School	K–12	*
Renaissance Charter High School for Innovation	High	*
Broome Street Academy Charter School	High	*
New Visions Charter High School for the Humanities II	High	*
Equality Charter School	Secondary	*

* = value not given

**New York City classified schools in one of six ways, depending on the grades they serve. Elementary schools typically serve students from pre-K or kindergarten through fifth or sixth grade. K–8 and K–12 schools serve the broader range described in their title. Junior high-intermediate-middle typically serve grades 6–8, though some serve students through 12th grade. High schools typically serve students in grades 9–12, and secondary schools typically serve the same grades but are specialized in their curricular offerings.

APPENDIX D

Disorderly Elementary Schools, 2015–16

Below is a list of all elementary schools where more than 30% of teachers reported that order and discipline were not maintained in 2015–16.

School Name	% of Teachers
P.S. 194 Countee Cullen	94
P.S. 045 Clarence Witherspoon	89
P.S. 044 David C. Farragut	88
P.S. 020 Anna Silver	84
Christopher Avenue Community School	83
P.S. 111 Seton Falls	82
P.S. 269 Nostrand	81
La Cima Charter School	80
P.S. 38 Roberto Clemente	78
P.S. 39 Francis J. Murphy Jr.	78
P.S. 132 Garret A. Morgan	77
Fairmont Neighborhood School	77
P.S. 044 Thomas C. Brown	77
P.S. 165 Edith K. Bergtraum	76
P.S. 195	74
P.S. 134 Hollis	71
Hamilton Heights School	70
P.S. 028 Warren Prep Academy	70
P.S. 024 Spuyten Duyvil	69
P.S. 068 Bronx	69
P.S. 076 William Hallet	69
P.S. 109 Sedgwick	68
P.S. 067 Mohegan School	68
P.S. 139 Alexine A. Fenty	68
Boys Preparatory Charter School of New York	67
East New York Elementary School of Excellence	66
P.S. 329 Surfside	65
P.S. 050 Talfourd Lawn Elementary School	65
P.S. 092 Bronx	64
P.S. 305 Dr. Peter Ray	63
P.S. 013 Roberto Clemente	62
P.S. 085 Great Expectations	61
P.S. 226	60
P.S. 021 Philip H. Sheridan	59

P.S. 076 Bennington School	59
P.S. 134 George F. Bristow	59
Lighthouse Elementary School	59
P.S. 80 Thurgood Marshall Magnet School of Multimedia and Communication	59
P.S. 015 Jackie Robinson	59
P.S. 118 Lorraine Hansberry	59
P.S. 014 Fairview	58
P.S. 199X Shakespeare School	57
P.S. 396	57
P.S. 250 George H. Lindsay	57
P.S. 163 Flushing Heights	57
P.S. 048 William Wordsworth	57
P.S. 031 William T. Davis	57
P.S. 098 Shorac Kappock	56
P.S. 214 Cadwallader Colden	56
Bellaire School	56
P.S. 133 Fred R. Moore	55
P.S. 244 Richard R. Green	55
P.S. 197 Ocean School	55
Global Community Charter School	54
Bronx Charter School for the Arts	54
P.S. 198 Isador E. Ida Straus	53
P.S. 182	53
P.S. 107 Thomas A. Dooley	53
P.S. 243K Weeksville School	52
P.S. X140 Eagle School	51
P.S. 149 Danny Kaye	51
P.S. 035 Nathaniel Woodhull	51
P.S. 307 Daniel Hale Williams	50
Dr. Jacqueline Peek-Davis School	50
P.S. 114 Ryder Elementary	50
P.S. 214 Michael Friedsam	50
P.S. 162 John Golden	50
P.S. 182 Samantha Smith	50
P.S. 033 Timothy Dwight	49

P.S. 192 Jacob H. Schiff	48
P.S. 208 Alain L. Locke	47
P.S. 008 Luis Belliard	47
Dr. Emmett W. Bassett School	47
P.S. 094 Kings College School	47
P.S. 74 Future Leaders Elementary School	47
P.S. 054 Samuel C. Barnes	46
P.S. 242 Young Diplomats Magnet Academy	45
P.S. 030 Hernandez/Hughes	45
P.S. 333 Museum School	45
P.S. 093 William H. Prescott	45
P.S. 345 Patrolman Robert Bolden	45
P.S. 188 Michael E. Berdy	45
P.S. 071 Forest	45
P.S. 143 Louis Armstrong	45
P.S. 123	45
P.S. 78	45
STEM Institute of Manhattan	44
P.S. 057 Crescent	44
P.S. K315	44
P.S. 174 William Sidney Mount	44
Sheridan Academy for Young Leaders	43
P.S. 108 Philip J. Abinanti	43
P.S. 153 Helen Keller	43
P.S. 006 West Farms	43
A.C.E. Academy for Scholars at the Geraldine Ferraro Campus	43
Jamaica Children's School	43
New Hope Academy Charter School	43
New York French American Charter School	43
P.S. 033 Chelsea Prep	42

P.S. 124 Silas B. Dutcher	42
P.S. 140 Edward K Ellington	42
Harlem Link Charter School	42
Merrick Academy—Queens Public Charter School	42
P.S. 132 Juan Pablo Duarte	41
P.S. 163 Arthur A. Schomburg	41
P.S. 261 Philip Livingston	41
Fresh Creek School	41
P.S. 251 Paerdegat	41
P.S. 088 Seneca	41
P.S. 201 Discovery School for Inquiry and Research	41
Jermaine L. Green STEM Institute of Queens	41
P.S. 034 John Harvard	41
P.S. 032 Gifford School	41
Manhattan Charter School II	41
East Village Community School	40
P.S. 163 Alfred E. Smith	40
P.S. 018 John Peter Zenger	40
P.S. X088 S. Silverstein Little Sparrow School	40
P.S. 046 Edgar Allan Poe	40
Luisa Pineiro Fuentes School of Science and Discovery	40
P.S. 016 Wakefield	40
P.S. 087 Bronx	40
P.S. 219 Kennedy-King	40
P.S. 139 Rego Park	40
P.S. 102 Jacques Cartier	39
Cornerstone Academy for Social Action	39
P.S. 223 Lyndon B. Johnson	39
P.S. 251 Queens	39

P.S. 022 Graniteville	39
P.S. 200 James McCune Smith School	38
P.S. 073 Bronx	38
P.S. 044 Marcus Garvey	38
P.S. 11 Thomas Dongan School	38
P.S. 045 John Tyler	38
P.S. 055 Benjamin Franklin	37
P.S. 132 Conselyea School	37
P.S. 025 Eubie Blake School	37
P.S. 200 Benson School	37
Citizens of the World Charter School New York 2 Crown Heights	37
Brooklyn Charter School	37
P.S. 049 Willis Avenue	36
P.S. 202 Ernest S. Jenkyns	36
P.S. 186 Dr. Irving A. Gladstone	36
P.S. 082 Hammond	36
Cynthia Jenkins School	36
P.S. 001 Alfred E. Smith	35
P.S. 268 Emma Lazarus	35
P.S. 097 Forest Park	35
P.S. 146 Ann M. Short	34
Family School	34
P.S. 193 Gil Hodges	34
P.S. 148 Queens	34
Teachers College Community School	33
Young Leaders Elementary School	33
P.S. 103 Hector Fontanez	33
P.S. 005 Dr. Ronald McNair	33
P.S. 399 Stanley Eugene Clark	33
P.S. 135 Sheldon A. Brookner	33

P.S. 007 Abraham Lincoln	33
P.S. 203 Floyd Bennett School	33
P.S. 298 Dr. Betty Shabazz	33
P.S. 038 Rosedale	33
P.S. 019 Curtis School	33
Success Academy Fort Greene (Brooklyn 5)	33
P.S. 048 Joseph R. Drake	32
P.S. 066 School of Higher Expectations	32
New Bridges Elementary	32
P.S. 115 Daniel Mucatel School	32
P.S. 070	32
Hebrew Language Academy Charter School	32
Bedford Park Elementary School	31
Linden Tree Elementary School	31
Urban Scholars Community School	31
P.S. 032 Samuel Mills Sprole	31
P.S. 051 Elias Howe	30
P.S. 153 Adam Clayton Powell	30
P.S. 043 Jonas Bronck	30
P.S. 75 School of Research and Discovery	30
P.S. X114 Luis Llorens Torres Schools	30
P.S. 160 Walt Disney	30
Red Hook Neighborhood School	30
P.S. 020 John Bowne	30
P.S. 036 J. C. Drumgoole	30

APPENDIX E

Questions Modified Beyond Recognition

Many useful questions were removed between the 2013–14 survey and the 2015–16 survey. Others were modified to the point where they did not provide a reasonable basis for comparability.

Even the smallest changes in wording can have huge effects in survey response. Consider the questions regarding student perception of school safety. In earlier surveys, these questions appeared in the middle of question batteries with the prompt, “At my school... ‘I am safe in my classes.’” In 2014–15, all four questions regarding student perceptions of school safety were moved into a question battery of their own, with the prompt, “How much do you agree with the following statement? I feel safe... ‘in my classes at this school.’” The change in wording coincided with a sharp change in response, and it is impossible to know if the change in response is attributable to real changes in schools or simply to the change in wording. Thus, in **Figure 12** we see that the year the wording was changed, the percentage of students who answered that they felt safe in their classroom increased sharply.

FIGURE 12.

Schools with Negative Responses, 2012–13 to 2015–16

Source: NYC School Survey

Negative Responses	2012-2013		2013-2014		2014-2015		2015-2016	
	# of Schools	% of Schools	# of Schools	% of Schools	# of Schools	% of Schools	# of Schools	% of Schools
0%–14.99%	660	70.1%	595	63.2%	840	89.3%	791	84.1%
15%–29.99%	259	27.5%	314	33.0%	128	10.0%	146	15.5%
30+%	22	2.3%	32	3.4%	1	0.1%	4	0.4%
TOTAL	941	100.0%	941	100.0%	941	104.2%	885	100.0%

Hence, we excluded the questions asking students if they felt safe in their classes, in the hallways, outside on school grounds, and outside but nearby the school. We excluded a student question on school cleanliness: the addition of a “don’t know” response option invalidated comparisons. We also excluded student questions regarding bullying, which shifted in the following manner (relevant changes in italics):

“At my school students harass or bully other students.” (2013–14)

“At my school, students harass, bully, or *intimidate* other students.” (2015–16)

School Surveys in Major Districts Implementing Discipline Reforms

School District	Student Enrollment (2014-2015)	Has a School Survey?	Asks Students and Teachers Order-Related Questions?	School-Level Data Publicly Available?
Anchorage SD	48,089	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bakersfield City SD	30,076	Yes	No	No
Baltimore City PS	84,976	Yes	Yes	Yes
Broward County PS	266,265	No	No	No
Buffalo City SD	35,234	No	No	No
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	145,636	Yes	Yes	Yes
City of Chicago SD	392,558	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dallas ISD	160,253	Yes	No	Yes
DeKalb County School System	101,103	Yes	Yes	Yes
District of Columbia PS	46,155	Yes	Yes	Yes
Durham PS	34,172	Yes	Yes	Yes
East Baton Rouge Parish School System	41,850	Yes	Yes	No
El Paso ISD	60,852	No	No	No
Fairfax County PS	185,541	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fort Bend ISD	72,152	Yes	Yes	No
Fort Worth ISD	85,975	No	No	No
Fresno Unified SD	73,543	Yes	No	No
Glendale Unified SD	26,168	Yes	Yes	No
Hillsborough County PS	207,469	Yes	Yes	Yes
Houston ISD	215,225	Yes	Yes	Yes
Indianapolis PS	31,794	Yes	No	No
Long Beach Unified SD	79,709	Yes	Yes	No
Los Angeles Unified SD	646,683	Yes	Yes	Yes
Madison Metropolitan SD	27,274	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mesa PS	63,849	No	No	No
Miami-Dade County PS	356,964	Yes	Yes	Yes
Minneapolis Public SD	36,999	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mobile County PS	57,910	Yes	No	No
Montgomery County PS	154,434	Yes	No	Yes
New Orleans RSD	30,596	No	No	No
New York City PS	972,325	Yes	Yes	Yes
Oakland Unified SD	48,077	Yes	No	No
Oklahoma City SD	41,074	Yes	No	No
Omaha PS	51,928	Yes	Yes	Yes
Philadelphia City SD	134,241	Yes	Yes	Yes

Pinellas County PS	103,774	Yes	No	Yes
Pittsburgh PS	24,657	Yes	Yes	No
Portland SD 1J	47,806	Yes	No	Yes
Prince George's County PS	127,576	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sacramento City Unified SD	46,868	Yes	Yes	No
San Diego Unified SD	129,779	No	No	No
San Francisco Unified SD	58,414	No	No	No
San Jose Unified SD	32,938	Yes	No	No
Santa Ana Unified SD	56,815	Yes	Yes	No
Denver PS	88,839	No	No	No
SD of Palm Beach County	186,605	Yes	Yes	Yes
Seattle PS	52,834	Yes	Yes	Yes
Saint Paul Public SD	37,969	Yes	No	No
St. Louis City PS	30,831	No	No	No
Toledo City PS	21,836	No	No	No
Tulsa PS	39,999	No	No	No
Wake County Public School System	155,820	Yes	No	Yes
Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools	54,762	Yes	No	No

Citations demonstrating recent school discipline reforms: New York City,¹⁰⁰ Los Angeles,¹⁰¹ Chicago,¹⁰² Houston,¹⁰³ Philadelphia,¹⁰⁴ San Diego,¹⁰⁵ Dallas,¹⁰⁶ San Jose,¹⁰⁷ Indianapolis,¹⁰⁸ San Francisco,¹⁰⁹ Fort Worth,¹¹⁰ Charlotte,¹¹¹ El Paso,¹¹² Seattle,¹¹³ Denver,¹¹⁴ Washington, D.C.,¹¹⁵ Baltimore,¹¹⁶ Portland,¹¹⁷ Fresno,¹¹⁸ Sacramento,¹¹⁹ Long Beach,¹²⁰ Mesa,¹²¹ Raleigh,¹²² Omaha,¹²³ Miami,¹²⁴ Tulsa,¹²⁵ Minneapolis,¹²⁶ New Orleans,¹²⁷ Bakersfield,¹²⁸ St. Louis,¹²⁹ Pittsburgh,¹³⁰ Anchorage,¹³¹ St. Paul,¹³² Toledo,¹³³ Oakland,¹³⁴ Oklahoma City,¹³⁵ Buffalo,¹³⁶ Madison,¹³⁷ Durham,¹³⁸ Winston-Salem,¹³⁹ Glendale,¹⁴⁰ and Baton Rouge.¹⁴¹ Also see Broward County, DeKalb County School System, Durham Public Schools, Fairfax County Public Schools, Fort Bend Independent School District, Hillsborough County, Madison Metropolitan, Mobile County Public School System, Pinellas County, and Prince George's County.¹⁴² All school-survey links at this citation.¹⁴³

Endnotes

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⁹³ There was a slight wording change in this question. In 2011–12, it was worded: “Discipline in my school is fair.” In 2015–16, it was worded: “Discipline is applied fairly in my school.” I include the question because the wording seemed similar. Also, the fact that the question was not asked every year provides no grounds to suspect that a shift in wording contributed to a significant shift in student response.

⁹⁴ Provided to the author by the NYC DOE’s Office of Youth Safety and Development.

The small differential between K–12 schools that asked students questions and nonelementary schools are due to a handful of elementary schools that asked students questions. I excluded these for the purpose of consistent analysis. N values for student and teacher answers: 2012 K–12 = 948; 2012 nonelementary = 920; 2014 K–12 = 1,031; 2014 nonelementary = 1,010; 2016 K–12 = 1,069; 2016 nonelementary = 1,056. For the teacher order question, N values are: 2012 K–12 = 1,582; 2012 nonelementary = 962; 2014 K–12 = 1,712; 2014 nonelementary = 1,043; 2016 K–12 = 1,781; 2016 nonelementary = 1,084. (The differential between K–12 and nonelementary is larger because all elementary schools ask teachers questions.)

Reported N values vary slightly across survey years or survey questions given variations in reporting by schools. When reporting data for a particular question varied across years, I included only schools with values for all years in question, dropping schools for which data were missing for any given question. We excluded survey responses from district pre-K centers, early childhood centers, and uncoded schools, which were frequently nontraditional schools, such as homeschooling or arts conservatories. Using District Borough Numbers provided by the NYC Department of Education, I linked the NYC School Climate Survey results with Office of Youth Safety and Development school-level suspension and the NYC DOE’s Demographic Snapshot data sets.

⁹⁵ The author thanks Rooney Columbus for his farsighted assistance in analyzing the data in this report.

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Abstract

There has been a dramatic shift in school discipline policy, spurred by national statistics showing stark racial differences in school suspension rates and the assumption that bias was behind the differences. Twenty-seven states have revised their laws to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline, and more than 50 of America's largest school districts, serving more than 6.35 million students, have implemented discipline reforms. From 2011–12 to 2013–14, the number of suspensions nationwide fell by nearly 20%.

Advocates of discipline reform claim that a suspension may have negative effects on the student being disciplined. Critics are concerned that lax discipline may lead to more disruptive behavior, disrupting classrooms and harming students who want to learn.

While school climate is impossible to measure in most districts, it can be measured in New York City, America's largest school district, thanks to surveys that question students and teachers about learning conditions in their school. Over the last five years, two major discipline reforms have taken effect in New York: one at the beginning of the 2012–13 school year, under former mayor Michael Bloomberg; and one in the middle of the 2014–15 school year, under current mayor Bill de Blasio. Though the reforms resulted in similar reductions in total suspensions, Bloomberg's reform prevented teachers from issuing suspensions for first-time, low-level offenses. De Blasio's reform required principals to seek permission from district administrators to suspend a student.

This report analyzes student and teacher surveys covering the five-year period of 2011–12 to 2015–16. The key findings: school climate remained relatively steady under Bloomberg's discipline reform, but deteriorated rapidly under de Blasio's. Specifically, teachers report less order and discipline, and students report less mutual respect among their peers, as well as more violence, drug and alcohol use, and gang activity. There was also a significant differential racial impact: nonelementary schools where more than 90% of students were minorities experienced the worst shift in school climate under the de Blasio reform.