Unfinished Business: Assessing Our Progress on School Discipline After Massachusetts Chapter 222

Data and Methods Appendix

The data in this report is primarily drawn from several different Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Datasets, using data from all of the years 2012-13 through 2016-17.

Several of the datasets are available publicly online at the DESE website: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/. These are the Student Discipline reports, for both districts and schools, as well as the Student Discipline Days of Missed Instruction reports.

The Student Discipline tables provide, separately for different demographic groups and incident categories, the enrollment numbers, number of students disciplined, and rates in each disciplinary category: in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, expulsion, removal to an alternate setting, and emergency removals. The overall discipline rate is calculated for our report by dividing the number of students disciplined by the enrollment within a group of interest.

The Student Discipline Days of Missed Instruction datasets provide information on how many cumulative days of instruction are missed due to discipline for students in a range of demographic groups and incident types. Rates of days of missed instruction are provided in ranges: 1 day, 2-3 days, 4-7 days, 8-10 days, and 10+ days. These are converted to days of missed instruction per 100 students enrolled using the methodology reported in Losen, Sun & Keith (2017), page 12. In short, the percentage of students in each missed-days range is converted to a number by multiplying by the students enrolled. Then this number is multiplied by the average days missed in each range to produce an estimate of days missed in that range. This is then summed to produce a total estimate of days missed. This estimate is divided by enrollment, and multiplied by 100 to produce the estimated days missed per 100 students. The total days missed is also divided by the number of students disciplined to produce an estimate of days missed per student disciplined. Because these estimates use averages within a range, they are likely to be conservative. DESE does collect the exact days missed, but does not make this data public.

Incident-level datasets are made available upon request to DESE. In addition, there are two different incident datasets, for privacy reasons – one that reports incidents connected with student demographic details and another that reports incidents connected with school information. These datasets report all incidents that occurred in the state, and can count more than one incident that leads to a single suspension. That is to say, an incident that involved both drugs on campus and a fight could be reported twice in this dataset, even if only one suspension was assigned in response to the incident. For this reason, the incident-level datasets are used with caution in this report. However, they are used for the regression analyses because it is unlikely that there is systematic variation across years in the double-counting of incidents that would lead to biases in the estimates.

In addition to the Massachusetts data, we use the data collected as part of the 2015-16 US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights' (OCR) bi-yearly Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). This data is available online at https://ocrdata.ed.gov/. This collection requires every school in the country to report on a variety of topics, including their discipline data. This federal data is not directly comparable to the state data because of different reporting procedures and different categories. However, the data is broken out by race, gender, and disability status, allowing for a more fine-grained picture of discipline than is permitted by Massachusetts' public data. To calculate the out-of-school suspension rates for different student groups, we totaled the counts reported within an individual group and divided by the reported enrollment. We cannot compare these rates to the national averages because the OCR has not released national estimates.

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