

Lessons from the principal's office

May 7 2010

The majority of students (about 80%) are never sent out of class to the principal's office or it happens only once in a year and why children are referred changes as they age, according to an article in the April 2010 issue of the *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*. Elementary school-aged students primarily are disciplined for fighting with fellow classmates, middle school students for being defiant or disruptive with teachers and staff, and high school students for being late or skipping class.

Researchers from the University of Oregon (Scott Spaulding, Larry Irvin, Rob Horner, Seth May, Monica Emeldi and Tary Tobin) and the University of Connecticut (George Sugai) studied office referrals (being sent to the "principal's office") across more than 1,500 schools in the U.S. The researchers asked questions like, "What does it take for a student to be sent out of class to be disciplined? Does this change as [students](#) move through their school years? What can we learn from visits to the principal's office?"

"These data help describe patterns of office discipline referrals within schools, across students from various grade levels, and for different problem behaviors," said lead author Scott Spaulding. "The findings add to our understanding about school-wide practices for addressing [problem behavior](#) and should allow us to further examine the ways referral data are used."

The information from this study should prove useful to schools in their efforts to track their students and help improve the educational

experience.

More information: Spaulding, S. A., Irvin, L. K., Horner, R. H., May, S. L., Emeldi, M., Tobin, T. J., et al. (2010). Schoolwide social-behavioral climate, student problem behavior, and related administrative decisions: Empirical patterns from 1,510 schools nationwide. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 12(2), 69-85.

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