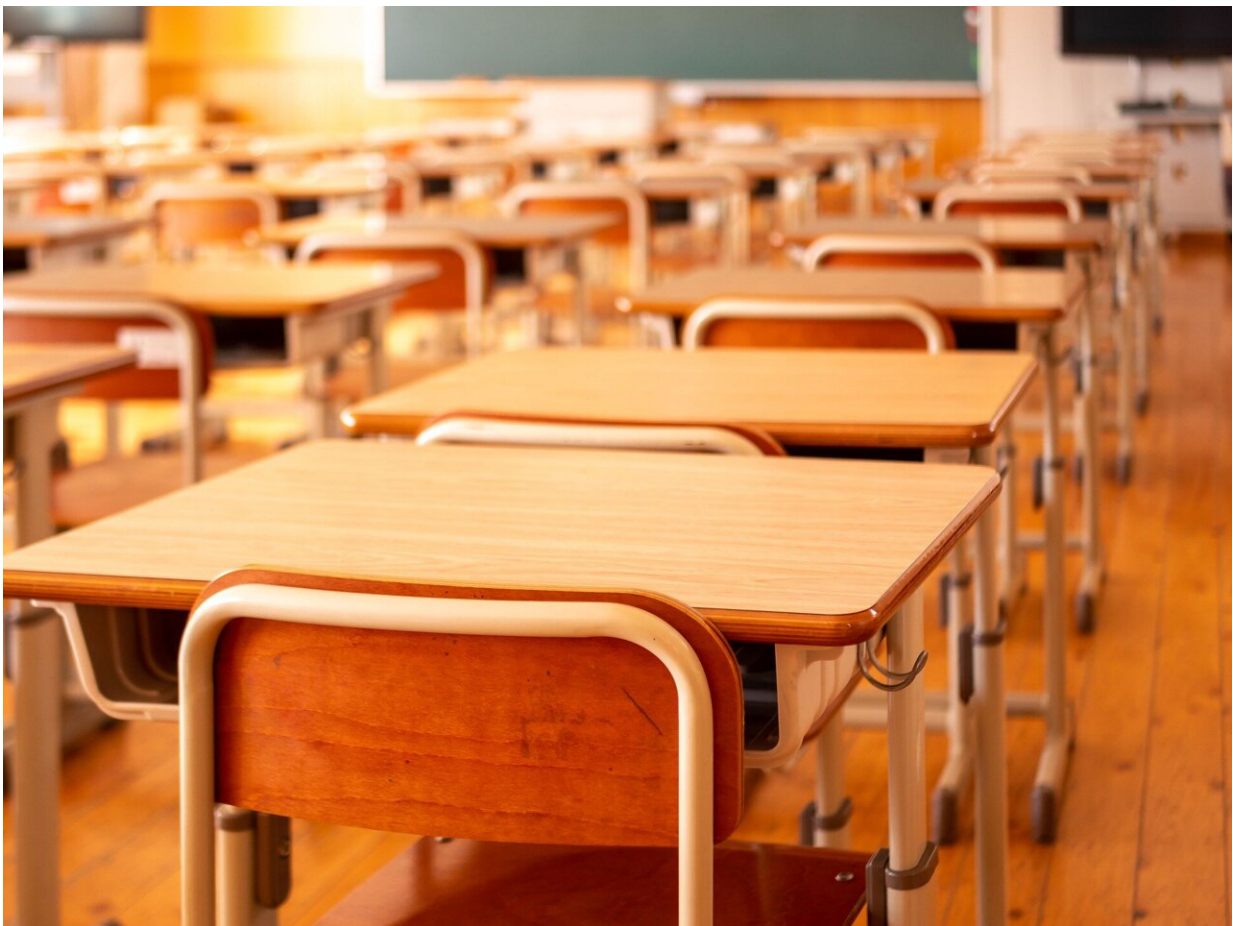


# Study reveals persistent racial disparities in school exclusionary discipline, recommends promising reforms

August 11 2023, by Jenna Somers

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Despite the practice of exclusionary discipline in schools declining over the past decade, policy and program reforms intended to replace the practice largely have not benefited African American students, according to a new study from Associate Professor of Education and Public Policy Richard Welsh recently published in *Children and Youth Services Review*.

Welsh synthesized a decade of [empirical evidence](#) on the effectiveness of school discipline policies across the United States, finding that racial disparities in office disciplinary referrals and suspensions persist. However, a handful of reforms have shown promising results at reducing racial disparities and inform Welsh's recommendations for policymakers and education leaders:

- Reject race-neutral school discipline reforms and replace them with racial and culturally aware policies and programs.
- Prohibit suspensions for attendance-related infractions.
- Invest in and faithfully implement school-based programs such as Restorative Justice (RJ) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and complement these programs with school-based mental health supports.
- Invest in developing an empathic mindset in classroom management and culturally responsive practices for educators through individual coaching and professional development.

Importantly, no single policy or program can serve as a silver bullet solution to reduce or eliminate [racial disparities](#) in exclusionary discipline. According to Welsh, districts and schools need to faithfully enact and adhere to a combination of student- and educator-focused reforms, such as those mentioned in the preceding list.

"There is a need for greater alignment of the contributors of racial inequality in exclusionary discipline and school discipline reforms. As

such, taking stock of the impacts of policy and programmatic interventions in the rapidly growing literature provides actionable insights for district and school leaders grappling with disparities in students' disciplinary outcomes," Welsh said.

Welsh notes the need for more research, improved research methods, empirical evidence on how and if certain policies and programs are effective, as well as the importance of studying disciplinary reforms within more suburban and rural contexts, as most research has focused predominantly on urban school districts. Enhanced [research methods](#) could include disaggregating data on disciplinary outcomes by race/ethnicity, including office disciplinary referrals and suspensions in analyses, and focusing on intersectionality in school discipline.

**More information:** Richard O. Welsh, Up the down escalator? Examining a decade of school discipline reforms, *Children and Youth Services Review* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.106962](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.106962)

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