



MEMORANDUM

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Re: Nevada's School Discipline Data Collection and Use Assessment: Findings and Recommendations

I. Background

Over the past several years, states and school districts across the country have started to rethink their approaches to school discipline. These efforts have led to remarkable reductions in suspensions, with suspensions down by 15 percent nationwide over the past five years, and some states experiencing reductions of nearly 30 percent over the same period.¹ While this progress has generated media attention and accolades, the singular focus on reductions in suspensions has typically not taken into account other important school characteristics that directly impact the success of school discipline policies, such as school safety and the learning environment. Without more complete information, policymakers are not able to ask the right questions and determine whether learning environments and student outcomes are improving as suspension rates decline.

A recent report by The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center identified three data-driven strategies that state and local leaders can use to gather robust information to advance comprehensive school discipline improvement efforts that not only reduce suspensions but also strengthen school climate, school safety, and student outcomes.² These strategies include:

- Collecting and analyzing comprehensive school discipline data to document and understand the impact of school discipline policies and practices;
- Sharing discipline metrics regularly with policymakers, state and local education leaders, parents, students, and the public; and
- Using data to inform and shape legislative and administrative improvements.

¹ "Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) for the 2015–16 School Year," Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, accessed July 9, 2018, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-2015-16.html>; individual State Education Agency websites.

² The Council of State Governments Justice Center, *Realizing the Full Vision of School Discipline Reform: A Framework for Statewide Change* (New York: The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2017).

In September 2017, Nevada was one of two states selected by the CSG Justice Center to receive technical assistance to examine the extent to which these data-driven strategies were being implemented and identify opportunities for improvement. With support from leaders across the state, Nevada is among a growing number of states demonstrating a commitment to improving its school discipline policies and practices. Over the past few years, Nevada has implemented several policy and practice improvements to better support students, including piloting Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in six districts; tracking bullying incidents and launching a bully prevention hotline; and implementing a comprehensive statewide data system to track student academic and behavioral information. At the same time, Nevada has continued to experience an uptick in the number of incidents resulting in a suspension or expulsion over the past five years.

In partnership with the Nevada Department of Education (NDE), the CSG Justice Center conducted an independent assessment of Nevada's school discipline and climate data, including a review of how these data are collected, shared, and used to inform policy, practice, and resource allocation. Based on the findings of the assessment, CSG Justice Center staff identified strengths and gaps in Nevada's current approaches to data collection, sharing, and use, and developed recommendations for improvement. This memo details the assessment's methodology, highlights key findings, and presents recommendations.

II. Methodology

To conduct its assessment, the CSG Justice Center considered data and information from a variety of sources. First, CSG Justice Center staff examined publicly available data on school discipline, climate, and safety. This included information on NDE's website, as well as data reports generated from NDE's Office of Safe and Respectful Learning Environments (OSRLE) and Assessment, Data, and Accountability Management (ADAM) team. To complement the examination of data, CSG Justice Center staff also conducted a document review, including relevant state legislation, administrative policies, NDE reports, and information on behavioral initiatives. Following this data and policy review, the CSG Justice Center conducted interviews with more than 50 stakeholders across the state, including policymakers, state and local education agency leaders, and practitioners to better understand opportunities for and barriers to improving data collection and use in Nevada.

CSG Justice Center staff synthesized the findings and identified key themes and preliminary recommendations, which were shared with stakeholders, NDE staff, and the Legislative Committee on Education in February 2018. Following these presentations, CSG Justice Center staff solicited additional feedback from stakeholders and conducted further interviews to ensure that multiple perspectives were accounted for in the analysis.

III. Findings

Findings from the CSG Justice Center's assessment are organized into three central themes: data collection, data sharing, and the use of data to drive decision making. An overview of findings is presented below.

Data Collection

Nevada has common data definitions at the state level for some, but not all, disciplinary offenses. State statute defines "bullying," "cyberbullying," and "habitual disciplinary problem." Certain districts and schools have developed common definitions for other disciplinary offenses and consequences, but inconsistencies across—and sometimes even within—districts make it difficult to meaningfully and accurately compare discipline data when it is rolled up to the state level.

Districts in Nevada are at different stages of implementation of Infinite Campus (IC). IC is a student information system that has been rolled out statewide and houses student academic and behavioral data. Whereas some larger districts, like Clark County, have several years of experience with the system, as well as an in-house team dedicated to customizing IC to meet the district's needs, other smaller districts are just beginning the implementation process and have less capacity to integrate and utilize IC technology beyond its basic functionality.

District-level school discipline data are not automatically shared with NDE. Currently, all Nevada school districts collect student-level information on disciplinary incidents and consequences through the IC student information system. While districts and schools are able to develop reports and analyze their own discipline data through IC, they currently do not leverage this data system to produce automated discipline reports in accordance with state data reporting requirements. Instead, districts manually report required discipline data fields to the state, which are then input into the state report card by staff in the NDE. However, the IC system is capable of automatically sharing data with the state, as several academic measures are shared in this manner.

Nevada reports state-level school discipline information through an online, interactive State Report Card and Accountability Portal. The Nevada Report Card and Accountability Portal allows users to access and customize reports on a number of important dimensions; however, the discipline data reported at the state level have several major limitations:

- Suspension and expulsion data are combined into one category, so it is not possible to see how in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions, as independent disciplinary consequences, increase or decrease over time.
- Only the total number of suspensions and expulsions—not the unduplicated number of students suspended or expelled—is currently reported. This is problematic because the unique number of students disciplined is needed in order to calculate a suspension rate.
- Discipline data are not disaggregated by student subgroup, which poses challenges to identifying any disparities that may exist in how students of various subpopulations are disciplined.
- The Report Card only covers suspensions and expulsions for a subset of offenses that the state requires districts to report, not the total number of suspensions and expulsions that occur in each district and statewide.

Nevada is one of very few states that administers a school climate survey statewide. With the exception of Washoe County and Clark County, all districts use the same school climate survey and results are made publicly available. School climate results are reported by domain with comparisons to a state and district average, and all data are disaggregated by race, gender, and grade. While the current school climate reports are thorough, they are not interactive or customizable, which makes it difficult to compare data across schools and years. Also, school climate data are presented on a completely separate website from school discipline data and other academic indicators, which makes it challenging to identify and analyze the relationships among climate, discipline, and other academic outcomes.

Data sharing

A limited amount of school discipline data is publicly available through the Nevada Report Card and Accountability Portal. While some school discipline data are available on the Nevada Report Card, it is not

possible to view these data disaggregated by student subgroup. In addition, suspension and expulsion data are combined, and the list of offenses for which suspension and expulsion counts are reported is not exhaustive. Users are able to customize reports within the Accountability Portal, but customization options for discipline reports are limited and there are no data visualization tools. Further, there is no way to easily examine discipline data in relation to climate data and other student outcome data, as data are housed on different websites. There are also very few mechanisms at the district level to regularly share discipline data with students, parents, and other stakeholders.

Navigating to school discipline data from NDE's website is not intuitive. While navigating to the Nevada Report Card from NDE's main webpage is relatively easy to do, determining how to access the more in-depth reports is more difficult. There is no clearly labeled "discipline" tab on the report card. In order to find information on suspensions and expulsions, users must click on either bullying statistics or a school safety tab to get to a link to more detailed discipline reports.

Using data to drive decision making

There is significant variation in how discipline data are used to inform decisions at the district level. While all districts in Nevada are now collecting school discipline data, the extent to which these data are used to inform decision making varies widely across districts. Several of the larger districts have been able to establish teams dedicated to data analysis for the district. For example, Washoe County employs district-level staff that review discipline data drawn from IC quarterly and produce reports on suspension, expulsion, time lost due to disciplinary actions, and disproportionality. For smaller districts with fewer resources, conducting this type of regular analysis is more challenging and often de-prioritized, particularly if it is not connected to district strategic plans for improvement.

Select schools are using data to address discipline disparities. Schools that are part of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program (approximately 25 percent of schools statewide), in collaboration with the University of Nevada, Reno's PBIS Research Center, have added capacity to develop and analyze data related to discipline disparities through the School-Wide Information System (SWIS). SWIS generates automated disproportionality reports that allow districts to assess disciplinary actions by student subgroup to identify if and where disparities exist in terms of disciplinary incidents and consequences.

Most districts and the state do not analyze discipline data as it relates to other academic outcomes. Because discipline data are not collected and analyzed alongside other academic indicators, most districts do not currently consider the connections between behavioral and academic outcomes.

IV. Recommendations

The following set of recommendations presented to NDE are meant to guide improvements to school discipline data collection, sharing, and use in Nevada. Implementing each recommendation will require varying degrees of action on the part of NDE, the state legislature, and/or other entities at the state and local level, with some requiring minimal resources and others needing more significant funding to bring this work to scale. Efforts are already underway to implement some of these recommendations.

Recommendation #1: Expand school discipline data collection in Nevada.

- Revise Nevada state statute to require districts to collect and report to the state separate counts of in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion.

- Amend Nevada state statute to disaggregate all school discipline data by the student subgroups identified in NDE's state plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act: federal race and ethnicity subgroups, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English learners. Data should also be disaggregated by gender.
- Consider collecting data on length of suspensions, proportion of students receiving multiple suspensions, and suspensions by grade and/or grade range (e.g., elementary, middle, high school).
- Expand IC's capabilities to allow districts to report discipline data directly to the state.
- Provide guidance and support to districts to help them expand their use of IC to track and analyze school discipline data trends.
- In addition to quantitative data on suspension trends, gather qualitative data from district and school officials, as well as parents and students, on how school discipline improvements have been implemented at the local level and their observed impact on students.

Recommendation #2: Promote consistent collection of school discipline data across all schools and districts in Nevada.

- Establish a state-local task force to lead the development of standard definitions for all offense types (e.g., violence against staff, weapons, etc.), as well as sanctions (e.g., in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, expulsion).
- Amend state statute or administrative policy to require schools and districts to adopt the standard definitions that have been established by the task force.
- Disseminate shared definitions to all districts and schools to ensure consistency in collection of this information. Discipline definitions should be shared annually and included in trainings related to school discipline, climate, and safety.

Recommendation #3: Ensure that all districts are collecting the same school climate data and that this information is publicly available.

- Identify items to include in school climate surveys that are administered in all districts and schools across the state, including Clark County and Washoe County.
- Make school climate survey results publicly available and, if possible, house these results in the same place as school discipline, safety, and other student outcome data.
- Include an "other" gender category on school climate surveys for students who do not identify exclusively as male or female.

Recommendation #4: Improve access to publicly available data on the NDE website.

- Establish a clear pathway to school discipline data on the NDE website, making it more intuitive and user-friendly. This may involve adding suspension and expulsion statistics to the "At-a-Glance" portion of the state report card that links to the detailed discipline reports, as well as renaming the "Safety" tab on the "Data Details" section of the report card as "Safety/Discipline." Also consider adding a tab at the top of the report card called "Customizable Reports" with a direct link to the customizable report section of the website.

- Explore opportunities to develop more customized reports for discipline data, including the ability to examine school discipline data by student subpopulation and compare data by district and to a state average. Also consider providing options to output data into graphics that may be easier to interpret than the large tables currently available. This customization capability would enable schools and districts to drill down on particular discipline data trends and identify areas for improvement, and would invite collaboration with community partners and families to address these trends.

Recommendation #5: Regularly share relevant school discipline and climate data with state policymakers and the public.

- Expand the Nevada Report Card to include complete school discipline data, including data on total in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions, disaggregated by the student subgroups identified above for all offense types. Also include school climate data on the Report Card.
- Develop an annual presentation or report to share with the state legislature that includes discipline metrics and provides an in-depth analysis of key discipline data trends, spotlights areas of particular concern, and shares steps NDE is taking to address these trends. The presentation/report can also serve as an opportunity to highlight districts and schools demonstrating positive change that can be studied and replicated.
- Include school discipline and climate metrics in NDE's regular reports to the Nevada State Board of Education.
- Establish regular opportunities for state and local education leaders to meet with students, families, and other members of the public to share school discipline, climate, and safety data; review trends; and discuss how NDE and local districts are initiating and supporting improvements to address these trends.

Recommendation #6: Provide training to build staff capacity to analyze and use data to inform decisions.

- Provide resources to support training and professional development in the following areas: maximizing the use of and creating reports in IC; interpreting results; and developing an action plan to address areas of need related to school discipline, climate, and safety.
- Facilitate opportunities for data staff from larger school districts that have more expertise and experience tracking and analyzing school discipline metrics (e.g., Clark and Washoe Counties) to partner with smaller districts to build their capacity in these areas.

Progress Underway in Nevada

Nevada is already taking steps to address the findings and recommendations outlined in this memo. Below is a brief summary of these efforts.

Discipline Data Collection

NDE has already identified the need to establish common definitions for disciplinary offenses and sanctions and is working to convene stakeholders to move forward with developing these shared definitions. Additionally, Nevada's plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act expands state-level discipline data collection and reporting to include suspension rates, school arrests, and referrals to law enforcement.

School Climate Surveys

Clark and Washoe Counties have been implementing school climate surveys for several years and understandably may be hesitant to switch to a different survey and lose valuable historical data. However, both counties recognize the value of being able to examine results across the state. To that end, Clark County has expressed a willingness to administer the state survey and Washoe County is interested in incorporating a subset of common items into its existing survey.

State Report Card

NDE's ADAM team is already exploring ways to incorporate school climate data into the Nevada Report Card. This will enable school and district leaders, as well as policymakers and the public, to examine academic, discipline, and climate data in tandem and better understand the relationship among these factors.

Discipline Disparities

While IC does not currently provide automated disproportionality reports like the SWIS data system, steps are being taken to include this functionality and allow non-PBIS sites the benefit of these reports to inform decisions.

Staff Training

Last year, NDE's OSRLE and ADAM teams facilitated a training for district leaders and data staff to discuss effective strategies for using data to inform decision making. A key component of this training was examining academic and school climate data together for performance planning. Similar trainings are expected for the 2018–2019 school year.