

# Disciplinary Procedures in Mississippi's Public Schools: A Look at What Educators Have to Say

Mississippi Department of Education Conference on Chronic Absenteeism

Jackson, Mississippi: August 22, 2018



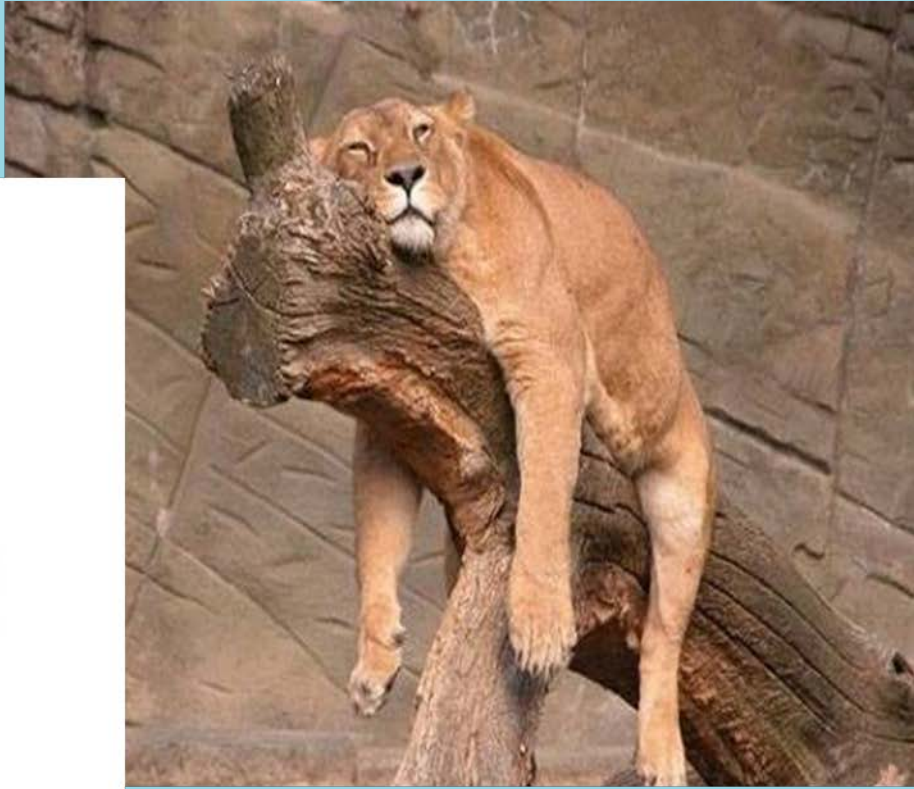
Anne Buffington

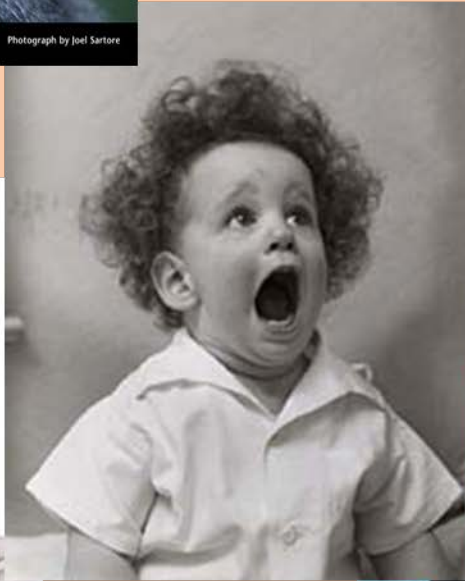
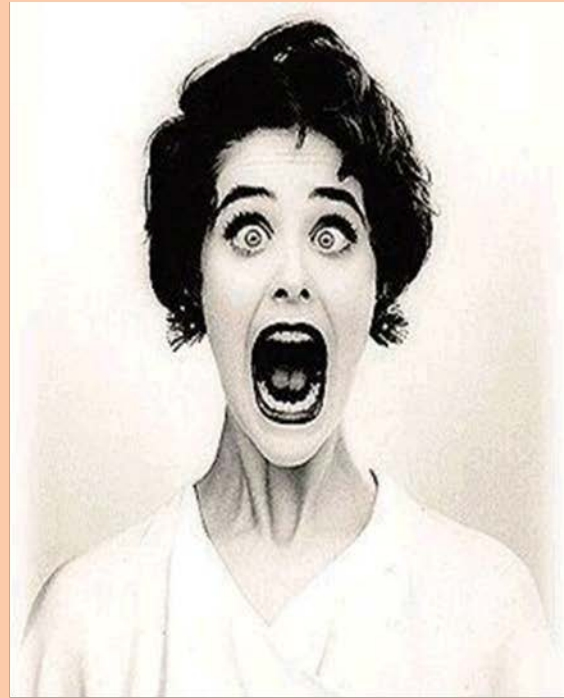
Lisa Long

Ben Walker

Mississippi State University  
Social Science Research Center  
Family and Children Research Unit







# What is Mississippi KIDS COUNT?

Leading resource for comprehensive information on Mississippi's children and serves as a catalyst for improving outcomes for children, families, and communities.

Part of a **national network** of state-based advocates supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

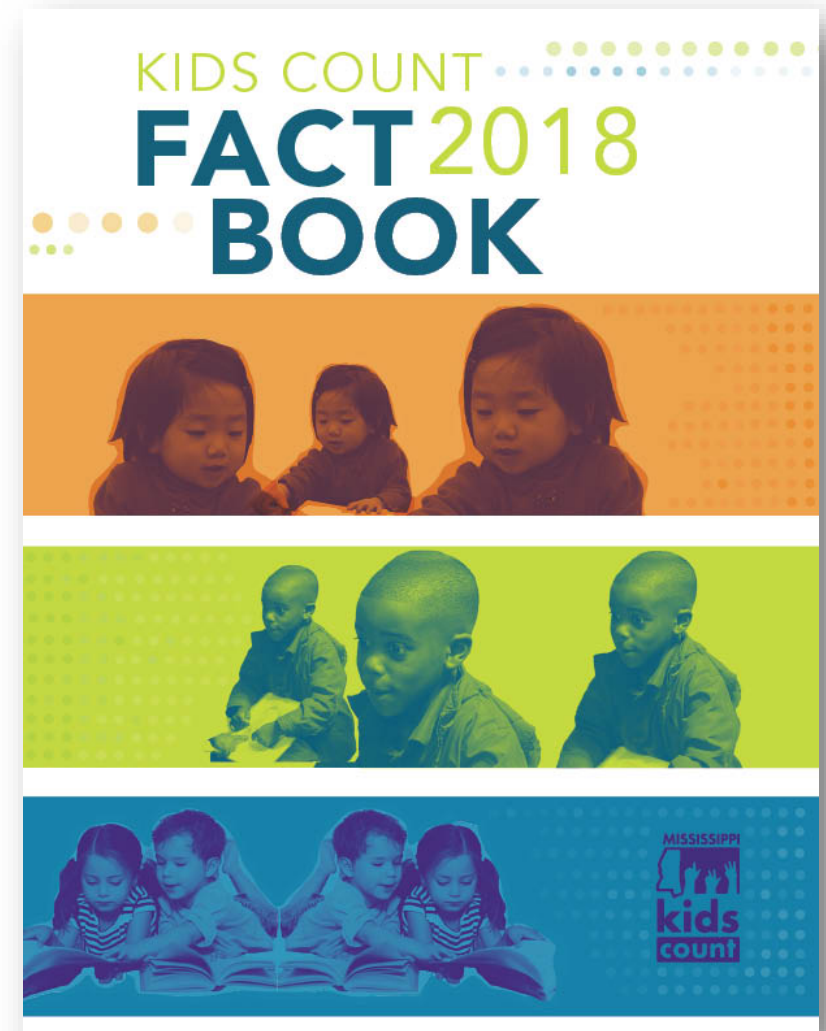
Housed at Mississippi State University's Social Science Research Center.

<https://kidscount.ssrc.msstate.edu>



# What services do we provide and how can we help you?

- KIDS COUNT Data Center: provides an interactive resource with the best available data and statistics on the educational, social, economic and physical well-being of children.
- KIDS COUNT Data Book: published annually with a ranking of states on 16 key measures of child well-being.
- Mississippi KIDS COUNT Fact Book: published in February annually
- Downloadable Infographics and Maps
- Policy Briefs/Surveys: focused on specific issues of importance to our state





# Following the Data Policy Grants

Awarded by AECF July 2014 – 2018

Specific Focus on **Chronic Absence**

Began with district-level data and awareness campaign

Data use agreement with MDE in 2015 allowed student-level data

Survey conducted in 2017 with attendance officers

Solid partnership with MDE Office of School Attendance Enforcement

<https://msdatapoint.com/>



### Education Suspended: The Consequences of School Suspension on Student Dropout

January 2018

Suspension is an exclusionary discipline practice which has often become a preferred strategy for addressing unwanted behavior in many schools, especially with the introduction of zero tolerance discipline policies in the mid-90s.<sup>1</sup> Despite such trends, there is no evidence which shows that suspensions are effective in reducing unwanted behavior.<sup>2-3</sup> Rather, research has shown that suspension is associated with negative outcomes such as lower academic achievement and higher risk of dropout.<sup>4-5</sup> The negative effects of suspension are especially relevant in Mississippi which consistently ranks among the lowest of US states in educational outcomes.<sup>6</sup> During the 2014-2015 school year, nearly a quarter (23.5%) of high school freshmen in Mississippi public schools received a suspension; this was the highest rate of any grade, K-12.<sup>7</sup> What are the consequences of suspending students at various points in their high school careers?

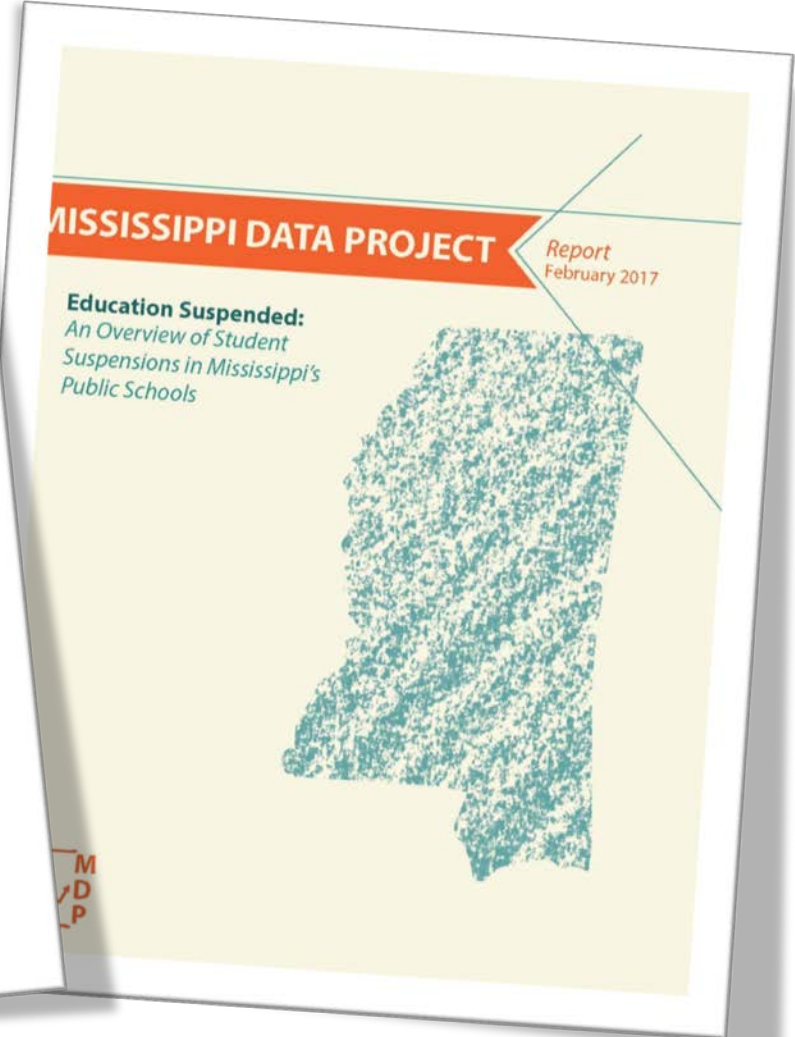
#### Costs of High School Suspensions

An analysis of 34 school suspension studies showed a significant relationship at the school level between suspensions and achievement; the higher the suspension rate, the poorer the school achievements.<sup>8</sup> The research also revealed a relationship between suspensions and school dropout; the higher the suspension rate, the higher the school dropout rate.<sup>9</sup> A study of 20 schools with the highest dropout rates in Kentucky found a positive relationship between dropout and suspension rates and describes dropping out as a "cumulative process" of unsuccessful school experiences such as behavior and discipline problems and academic failure, rather than a sudden "impulsive action."<sup>10</sup> The study suggests that some schools may actually be "perpetuating a failure cycle" when they rely on suspension and other exclusionary discipline practices, which result in students having fewer opportunities to learn and grow socially and academically.<sup>11</sup> As Mississippi schools seek to increase graduation rates and decrease dropout rates, a close examination of school suspension rates could be a first step towards keeping students enrolled and on the path to successfully completing their high school degrees. To our knowledge there have been few, if any systematic studies which have documented the effects of suspension on dropout rates in Mississippi.

At the national level, a 2016 study estimated that suspensions in 10th grade alone produced more than 67,000 dropouts.<sup>12</sup> The social and economic costs of dropping out of high school are huge, due to lost wages and taxes, higher welfare costs, poorer health, and increased crime.<sup>13</sup> In 2006-2007, incarceration rates among individuals ages 16-24 were 63 times higher for dropouts than among college graduates.<sup>14</sup> The intersection of race, educational attainment, and incarceration is striking; a 2014 study found a nearly 70% chance of an African American man without a high school diploma being imprisoned in his mid-thirties.<sup>15</sup> The long-term fiscal and social costs of these losses have been estimated at \$11 billion in fiscal impact in lost tax revenues over the lifetimes of these additional dropouts, and \$35 billion in social impact and costs to the larger society.<sup>16</sup> From a cost-savings perspective, there would be substantial economic benefits from reducing suspension rates. The study estimated that even a one percentage-point reduction in the national suspension rate would reduce the number of dropouts due to suspension, resulting in a fiscal benefit of \$691 million and a social benefit of \$2.2 billion.<sup>17</sup> As the poorest state in the nation (ranked by median household income)<sup>18</sup> it is important to answer the question of how our zero tolerance exclusionary discipline policies are related to school dropout rates and Mississippi's long-term fiscal and social costs.

This brief is the second in a series on school suspension. The previous brief in this series, *Education Suspended: An Overview of Student Suspensions in Mississippi's Public Schools* (February 2017), found that compared to the national average of 6%, Mississippi had a higher rate of students receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions (OSS) during the 2013-2014 school year.<sup>19</sup> Approximately 42,100 Mississippi students (K-12) or 8.3% of all public school students, were given one or more out-of-school suspensions. When disaggregating data from the 2014-2015 school year, we found that Black students (12.7% OSS rate) were over three times as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspension as White students (4.0% OSS rate). Nationally, studies show that Black students are more likely to be suspended for infractions which are determined subjectively by the referring teacher such as insubordination, willful defiance, disrespect, excessive noise, threat, and loitering while White students tend to be referred for suspension due to offenses which can be objectively determined (obscene language, leaving without permission, smoking, and vandalism).<sup>20,21</sup>



This brief follows up on this previous effort and summarizes information on the consequences of suspension on dropout, and outlines policy considerations. The purpose of this policy brief is to advance data driven decision-making in promoting best practice models and educational policies for children and families in Mississippi.



## MISSISSIPPI DATA PROJECT

Report  
February 2017

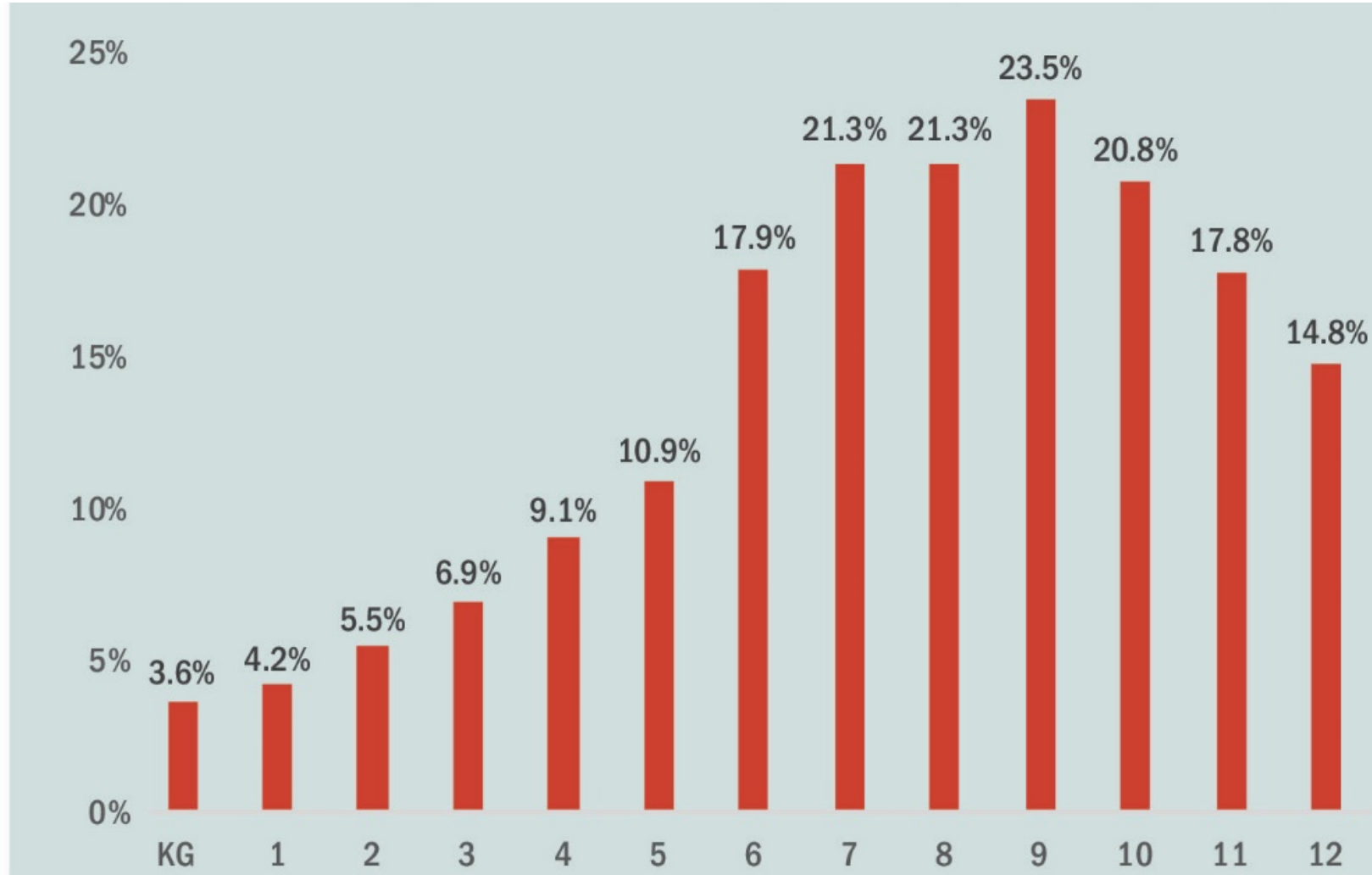
### Education Suspended: An Overview of Student Suspensions in Mississippi's Public Schools



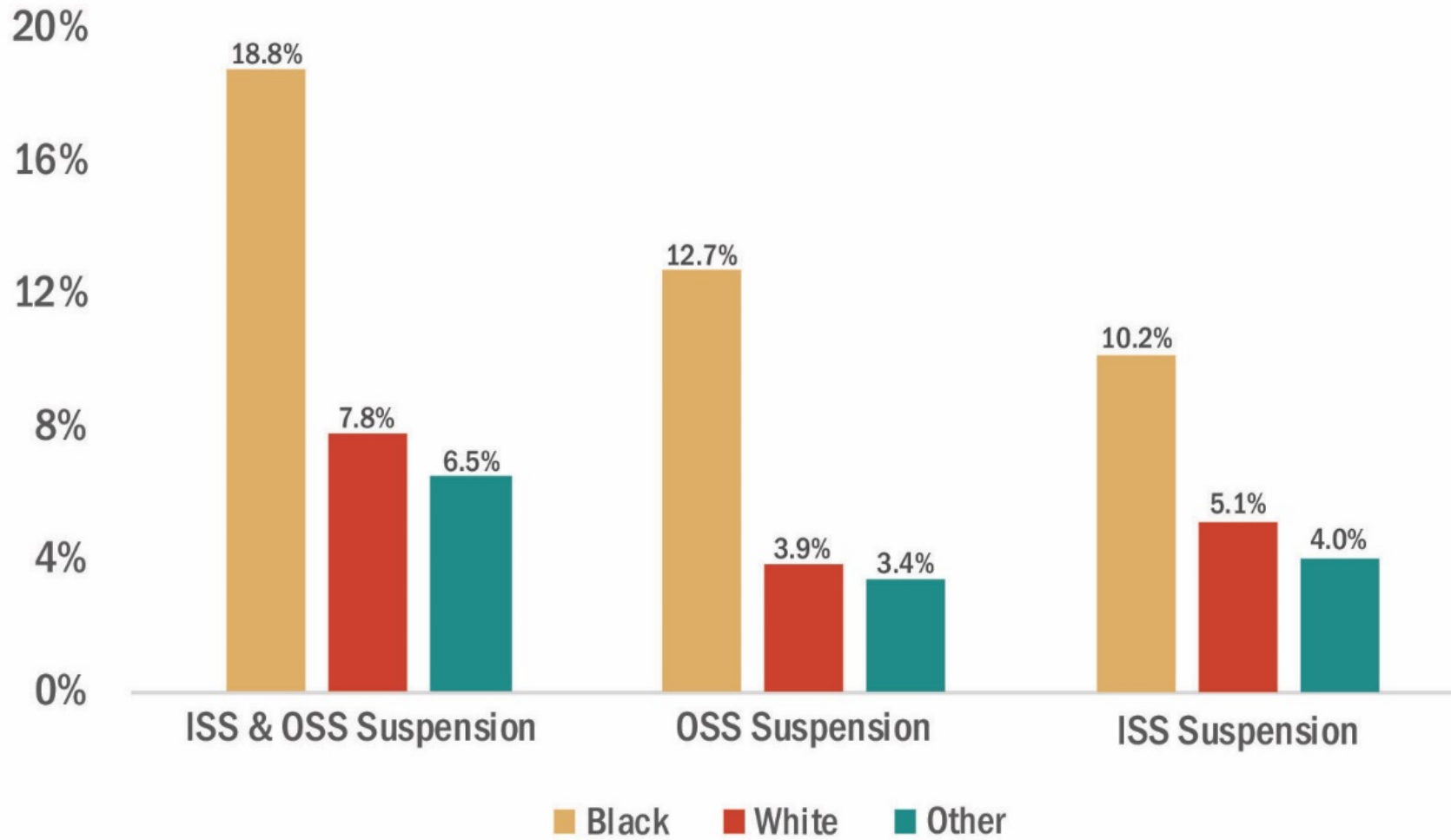




## Suspension Rates (OSS and ISS) by Grade (2014-2015)



Suspension Rates by Race (2014-2015)





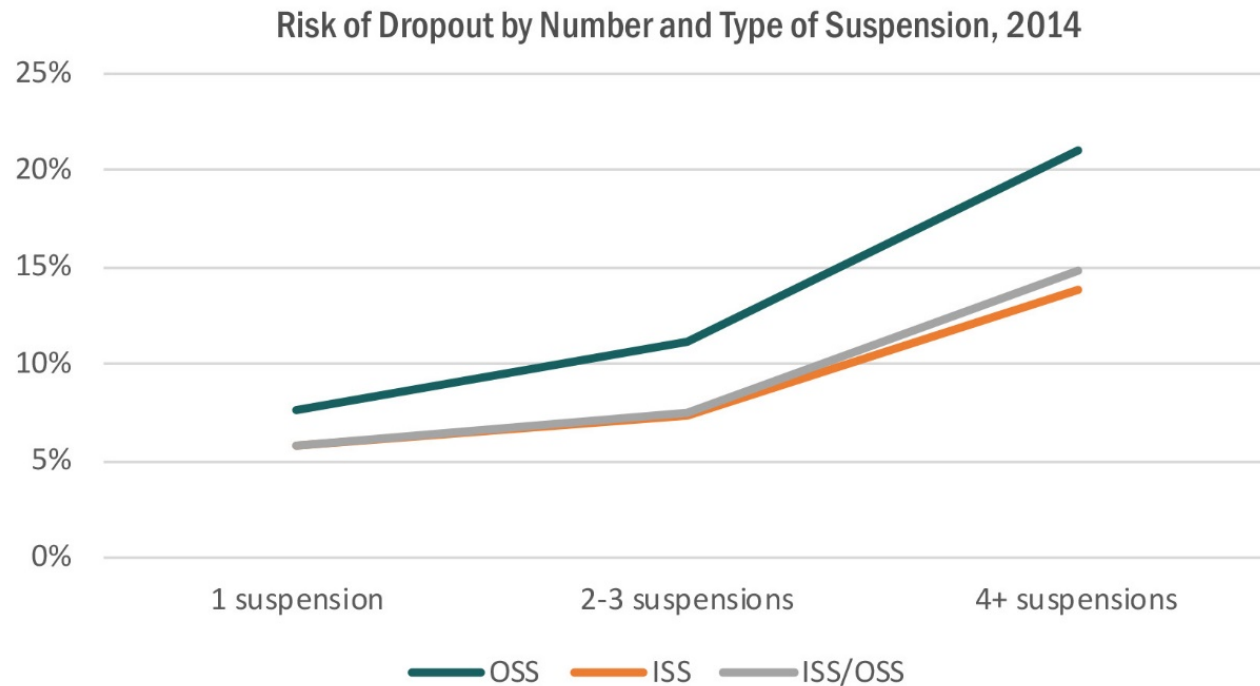
Please share – does your district use a variety of corrective strategies that do NOT remove children from valuable instruction time?





“A Suspension can be life altering. It is the number-one predictor – more than poverty – of whether children will drop out of school, and walk down a road that includes greater likelihood of unemployment, reliance on social-welfare programs, and imprisonment.”

National Education Association, neaToday (Flannery 2015)



# BALANCING ACT: Mississippi Administrators and Teachers Weigh in on Discipline Policies in Schools





HD

# Methodology of Survey

Conducted in March 2018

Web-based survey developed by Mississippi KIDS COUNT

Sent to all K-12 Principals

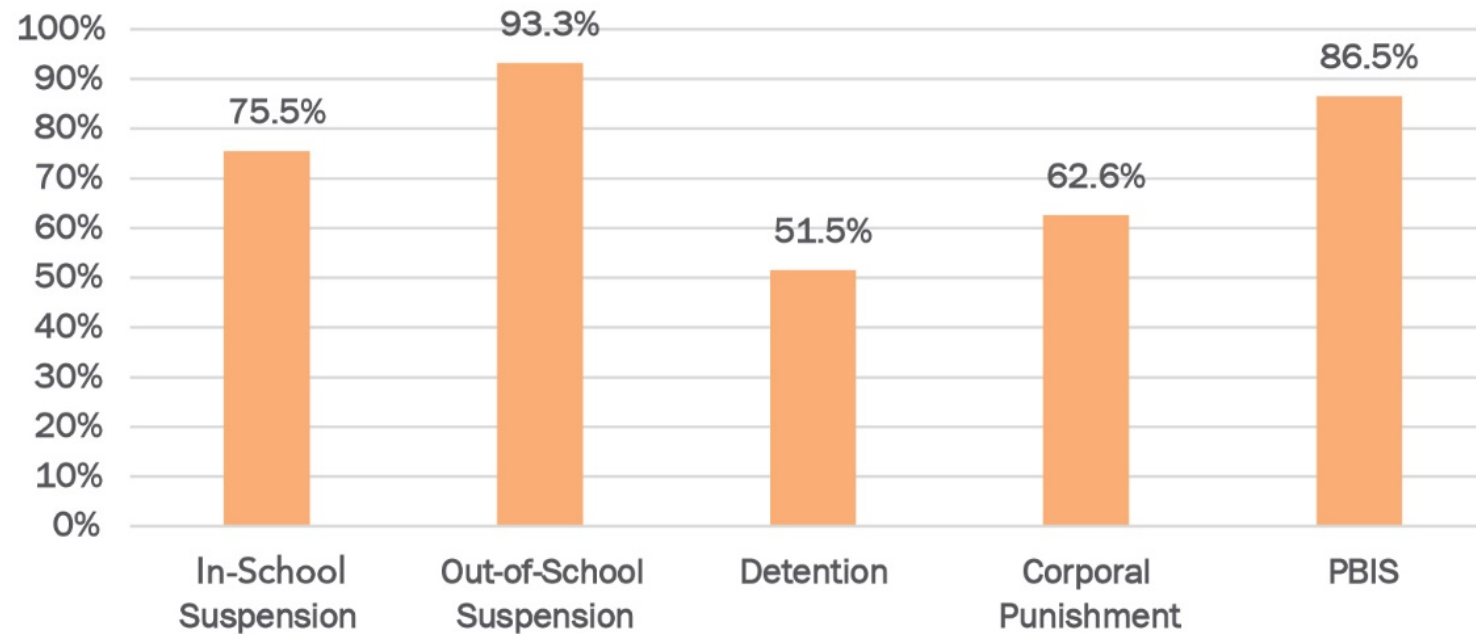
Asked to Participate and Forward to Teachers, Interventionists, School Counselors

433 Respondents

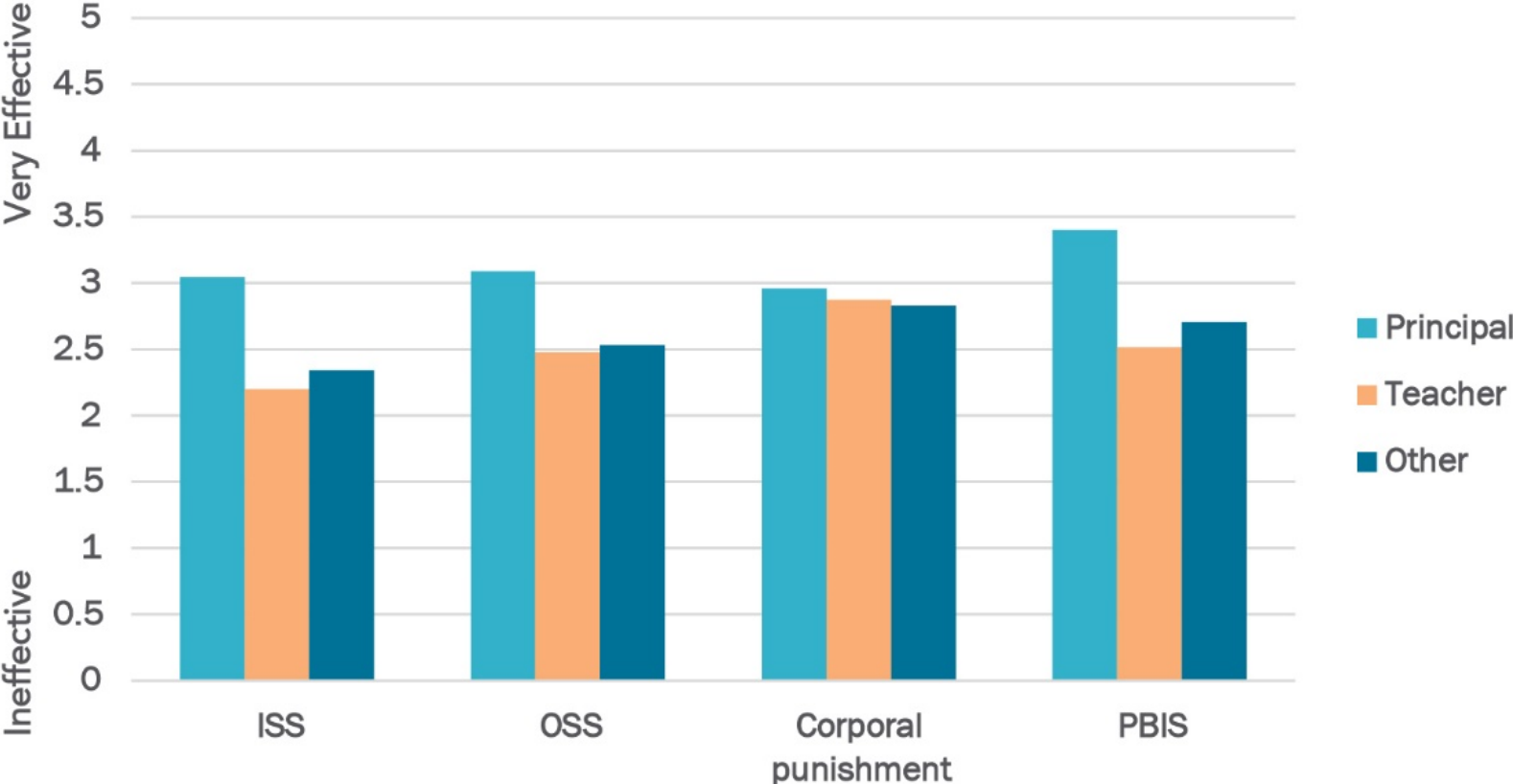
Qualitative Phone Interviews also conducted



## MISSISSIPPI PRINCIPALS' REPORTED USE OF DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES



# PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER RATINGS OF DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES



# Percentage of Mississippi School Districts Allowing Use of Corporal Punishment

50%

90%

35%

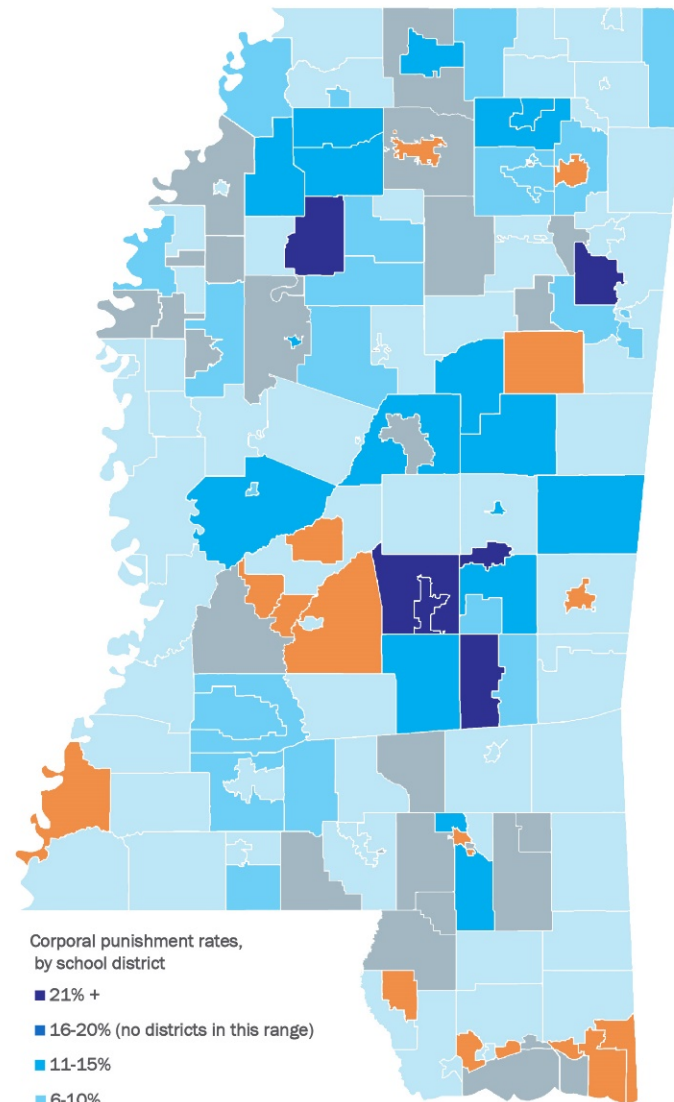
10%



90%



# CORPORAL PUNISHMENT RATE BY DISTRICT, 2016-2017



Corporal punishment rates,  
by school district

- 21% +
- 16-20% (no districts in this range)
- 11-15%
- 6-10%
- 0-5%
- CP Prohibited
- data suppressed to protect confidentiality

Source: Public Information Request, April 2018  
Mississippi Department of Education

## DISTRICTS PROHIBITING CORPORAL PUNISHMENT, BY YEAR ENACTED

District	Year Enacted
Oxford	1980
Gulfport	1991
Jackson Public	1991
Hattiesburg	1999
Canton	2004
Starkville-Oktibbeha Consolidated	2005
Ocean Springs	2006
Clinton	2012
Meridian	2012
Tupelo	2013
Moss Point	2014
Natchez-Adams	2014
Pass Christian	2014
Pascagoula-Gautier	2015
Pearl River Co.	2015
Greenville	2018

*Source: District Board Policies*

*“We ultimately envision corporal punishment being totally removed [from the district policies]. But we also had some pretty intense discussions. We had a student leadership team that represented schools across the district. It’s amazing. Corporal punishment is ingrained in students and the culture of our area. In that conversation, we had students say, ‘Yes, we need it.’ And parents said, ‘Yes, we need it.’ It’s been so much a part of it [the culture]. So we were not going to strip it all the way out, but we reduced it.”*

*“Corporal punishment is the opposite of what we’re trying to build and creates a culture of fear... We worked with administrators to identify the only times it can be used. It’s a last resort for only a few infractions.... Before, it could pretty much be used at any time. We... gave a definition so parents and administrators can see what it should look like, when it should be used, who can do it—just to make sure all those lines are covered. We did reduce it greatly, with the hope that we are ultimately able to move away from it altogether.”*

- 66% of principals surveyed say their students can be suspended for **willful disobedience** or **willful defiance**
- 64% said they use “zero tolerance” policies
- 93% reported using a “discipline ladder” for determining the consequences of an infraction
- 68% said they have a **law enforcement** presence in their schools



Teachers (66%) and school interventionists, special education teachers, counselors and social workers (73%) believe they have **little to no influence** in setting discipline policies in their schools.



Who believes that PBIS strategies are more effective than suspension and/or corporal punishment?

**Teachers?**

**Principals?**

**Others:** Interventionists, Special Education Teachers, Counselors, Social Workers?

On average, **principals** rated positive behavior supports at 3.4 with 5 being the highest on the scale.

Teachers and the “other” group rated it as 2.5 and 2.7 respectively

# Alternative Strategies to Suspension:

- Parents attending class with their children
- Community Service
- Restorative Justice
- Detention
- Overnight Suspension

# Policy Considerations

- Require school districts to track their suspension rates over time (by race, age, gender, disability status, type of infraction, and date of suspension) to better understand how suspensions contribute to chronic absenteeism.
- Provide pre-service and in-service professional development opportunities so that school staff understand culturally relevant positive classroom discipline, classroom management, and the root problems triggering misbehavior.
- Increase the use of PBIS and Social and Emotional Learning across the K-12 landscape.



# Policy Considerations

- Ensure that teachers, students, and parents have input when reviewing student codes of conduct and school handbook discipline policies.
- Request that MDE analyze school discipline policies (including school suspensions and corporal punishment) and consider their effects on chronic absenteeism, graduation rates, student academic achievement, and the state of Mississippi's economic well-being.

anne.buffington@ssrc.msstate.edu

lisa.long@ssrc.msstate.edu

ben.walker@ssrc.msstate.edu

662.325.7127

“We have to address behavior in the same manner as we do reading and math, science and social studies. We have to know what is developmentally appropriate, and we have to do those things that help the student acquire that skill set. We weren’t born with that skill set—none of us were. We’ve learned it by trial and error. We’re hoping by being proactive and having well-developed systems of support, our staff can do the same things they need to do without as much pain as some of us had in learning those strategies.”