

Policy Brief: Connecticut General Assembly Statute: Public Act 15-96 An Act Concerning Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions for Students in Preschool and Grades Kindergarten to Two

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Executive Summary

Over the course of the past ten years there have been increasing concerns related to the effects of exclusionary discipline used in schools that have been linked to academic achievement, chronic absenteeism, juvenile delinquency and disproportionalities associated with Black and Hispanic males as well as negative impacts on life outcomes into adulthood (Carter & Welner, 2013; Losen, 2011; U.S DOE, 2011; Council, 2011). In 2011, a groundbreaking study titled *Breaking Schools Rules* was conducted in Texas on approximately one million students that presented a number of significant findings related to the effects of school discipline practices and used as a foundation for the establishment of federal collaborative efforts to provide schools with effective alternatives to exclusionary discipline (Council, 2011).

During the 2014 fiscal year, the Obama Administration proposed a budget that focused on a number of new programs to help schools and community partnerships to better support mental health and behavior while working on improving student safety. Therefore, the U.S Department of Education (DOE) and U.S Department of Justice (DOJ) provided funds to assist schools in training teachers and other school staff to implement evidence-based strategies to help improve school climate and support approaches to reducing the use of suspension, expulsion and arrest as responses to misbehavior. In addition, the Connecticut Education Commission proposed an amendment to the suspension and expulsion General Statute titled *An Act Concerning Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions for Students in Preschool and Grades Kindergarten to Two* which was referred to the Joint Committee on Education of the Connecticut General Assembly on March 5, 2015 and enacted on July 1, 2015 (Connecticut, 2015).

According to the Joint Favorable Report dated March 27, 2015 the purpose of the bill was “to require school districts to intervene in behavioral issues involving students in grade K-2 by prohibiting out-of-school suspensions or expulsions”

(Joint, 2015, p. 1). According to the OLR Bill Analysis SB 1053 (File 714, as amended by Senate “A”) this bill would also prohibit out-of-school suspensions for preschool students with the exception of PK-2 students receiving out-of-school suspensions or expulsions for conduct that is of a violent or sexual nature, possession of firearms or certain other weapons, selling or distributing controlled substances on or off school grounds or at school-sponsored activities offered by local and regional boards of education, states and local charter schools, and interdistrict magnet schools in accordance with federal law (OLR, 2015, p.1).

The main sponsors of the bill were the Education Commission, Senators Martin M. Looney, 11th District and Beth Bye, 5th District and Representative Bruce V. Morris, 140th District. (Joint, 2015, p. 1). A total of nineteen stakeholders were involved including the Interim Commissioner of Education, Dianna R. Wentzell of Connecticut, a variety of commissions, agencies, parents, legal services, advocacy groups, researchers and superintendents across the state (Joint, 2015, p. 1-2). According to information obtained from the DOE, Connecticut General Assembly (CGA), Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and Wakefield Public Schools (WPS) (Pseudonym) there have been a variety of efforts that have aided in the process of implementing this policy. Therefore, the CSDE created the *Connecticut Consolidated State Plan: Ensured Equity and Excellence for All Connecticut students* and the *Connecticut State Board of Education’s Five Year Comprehensive Plan 2016-2021* that contains a strategic plan to address school performance based on twelve indicators to fulfill the obligations of this legislation

However, this comprehensive plan does not provide an indicator for the area of social-emotional learning but secondary goals were created for the inclusion of improvements in the area of school climate, safety and cultural responsiveness. In addition, according to longitudinal data obtained on discipline outcomes between the years 2014-2019 by the CSDE’s EdSight Data Collection database it appears that disproportionalities continue to exist in the elementary grades. Black and Hispanic male students also continue to receive the highest rate of out-of-school suspension. More specifically, in WPS out-of-school suspensions predominately were 75% male and 65% Hispanic. Furthermore, this data also indicates that the type of sanctions WPS students have obtained continue to be predominately in the areas of Physical and Verbal Confrontations (33%), Fighting and Battery (35%) and School Policy Violations (31%) (EdSight, 2015-2019).

Therefore, this policy brief outlines the planning and implementation process of Connecticut’s General Statute Public Act 15-96: *An Act Concerning Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions for Students in Preschool and Grades Kindergarten to Two* that includes the passage of legislation, the development of strategic policies and practices by the CSDE and WPS on school climate, school safety, positive behavioral intervention (PBIS) and the allocation of resources at the district, administrative and school building levels. Finally, the policy brief presents powerful evidence to examine how this policy is functioning through the use of the

PELP Coherence Framework lens, the CSDE Edsight Data Collection database and WPS Annual Reporting measures between 2014-2019. In addition, the policy brief also presents potential policy proposals options through the use of the Culturally Responsive Leadership Framework (CRLF) lens to support policy makers in the development of future policies related to school climate, school safety, PBIS and the allocation of mental and behavioral health resources for schools.

Introduction

Over the course of the past ten years there have been increasing concerns related to the effects of exclusionary discipline used in schools that have been linked to academic achievement, chronic absenteeism, juvenile delinquency and disproportionalities associated with Black and Hispanic males as well as negative impacts on life outcomes into adulthood (Carter & Welner, 2013; Losen, 2011; U.S DOE, 2011; Council, 2011). In 2011, a groundbreaking study titled *Breaking Schools Rules* was conducted in Texas on approximately one million students that presented a number of significant findings related to the effects of school discipline practices and used as a foundation for the establishment of federal collaborative efforts to provide schools with effective alternatives to exclusionary discipline (Council, 2011).

During the summer of 2011, Education Secretary Duncan and Attorney General Holder announced the launch of a collaborative project titled the Supportive School Discipline Initiative between the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and U.S Department of Justice (DOJ) to support the use of school discipline practices that utilizes methods that foster safe, supportive and productive learning environments while keeping students in school (Dear Colleague, 2014). The Supportive School Discipline Initiative then formed The School Discipline Consensus Project which was granted \$840,000 by the DOJ along with other philanthropic collaborators and was managed by the Council of State Governments to initiate the project and launched in October 2012 whose purpose was to dismantle the “school-to-prison pipeline” (DOE, 2014). The School Discipline Project consisted of educational practitioners, law enforcements, members of the juvenile justice system, behavioral health as well as state and local policymakers, researchers, advocates and students to develop a comprehensive set of recommendations for change agents working on disciplinary practices (DOE, 2014).

Furthermore, beginning in the spring of 2012 the DOE’s Office for Civil Rights developed a data collection system titled the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) to track in-school and out-of-school suspensions, law enforcement referrals, student arrests, and expulsions under the zero-tolerance policies (Supportive, 2014). In turn the DOJ granted \$1.5 million through the 2012 Field Initiated Research and Evaluation Program (FIREP)) to incentivize researchers to conduct research on types of programs, practices and policies that support student engagement and academic achievement by keeping students in school (Supportive,

2014). In addition, in March 2012 the Initiative and the New York Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children hosted a National Leadership Summit that was held for top state education and judicial officials from forty-five states, territories and the District of Columbia to work on improving policy and practice related to school discipline. This initiative brought together expert practitioners, researchers and innovators from education, justice and school health that lead to the creation of the Supportive School Discipline Community of Practice (SSDCOP), a web based community, that is utilized for members of the summit to discuss Discipline Policy Reform, Supportive Discipline Practices, Truancy and Prevention as well as Juvenile Justice Alternatives. Furthermore, this community has developed into a variety of state run tasks forces engaged in school discipline practice reforms to date (Supportive, 2014).

The Race to the Top-District competition allocated \$400 million to help school districts with the implementation of comprehensive education reform in 2012 which included a requirement by the DOE for districts containing disproportionalities in discipline rates associated with student of color and students with disabilities to conduct an analysis of the root causes and develop an action plan to address it (Supportive, 2014). In addition, the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders was also formed by the DOE that awarded incentives to state education departments for the integration of competencies relevant to student engagement and positive discipline practices into teacher and administrator evaluation systems, professional development and other activities associated with enhancing the workforce (Supportive, 2014).

Moreover, the research conducted by the members of the FIREP was utilized as part of the DOE and DOJ's joint effort to formulate legal and resource guidance to assist public schools and districts in administering student discipline to meet the legal obligations under Title IV and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act in January 2014 (Supportive, 2014). More specifically *Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline* contains resources that focus on school climate, discipline policy and practice improvement, reducing disproportionality, federal resources for the implementation of the principles, a compendium of state-level laws and regulations relevant to school discipline policy and practice as well as an overview of the initiatives activities (DOE, 2014).

I: Plan

During the 2014 fiscal year the Obama Administration proposed a budget that focused on a number of new programs to help schools and community partnerships to better support mental health and behavior while working on improving student safety. Therefore, the Obama administration allocated \$50 million for a new School Climate Transformation Grant administered by the DOE to assist schools in training their teachers and other school staff to implement evidence-based strategies to help improve school climate. The Obama Administration also

allocated \$20 million to Juvenile Justice and Education Collaboration Assistance Grants under the DOJ to support approaches to reduce the use of suspension, expulsion and arrest as responses to misbehavior. (Supportive, 2014). In addition, \$55 million is requested for the U.S Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to implement Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education) to increase awareness of mental health issues and connect youth with behavioral health issues and their families with needed services (Supportive, 2014).

The proposals presented during the 2014 fiscal year were used to develop a collaborative framework for reducing youth involvement by helping judges, educators, school administrators, law enforcement and other involved persons to keep students in schools and out of the juvenile justice system while improving the safety and climate within schools (Dear Colleague, 2014). Therefore, an emphasis was placed on the development of a tiered approach that utilized PBIS to help educators implement evidence-based practices that prevent misbehavior, provide critical mental and emotional supports to troubled and at risk-students and thereby reducing reliance on suspensions and expulsions (Dear Colleague, 2014).

II: Develop Policy

In order to respond to the DOE and DOJ's requests for the synoptic policy formulation and implementation, policymakers focused on including policies and practices associated with reducing the reliance on suspensions and expulsions, encouraging the use of evidence based practices to prevent misbehavior and provide critical mental and emotional support for at risk students the Connecticut Education Commission proposed an amendment to the suspension and expulsion the General Statute titled *An Act Concerning Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions for Students in Preschool and Grades Kindergarten to Two* which was referred to the Joint Committee on Education of the CGA on March 5, 2015 (Connecticut, 2015). According to the Joint Favorable Report dated March 27, 2015 the purpose of the bill was "to require school districts to intervene in behavioral issues involving students in grade K-2 by prohibiting out-of-school suspensions or expulsions (p. 1)." According to the OLR Bill Analysis SB 1053 (File 714, as amended by Senate "A") this bill would also prohibit out-of-school suspensions for preschool students with the exception of PK-2 students receiving out-of-school suspensions or expulsions for conduct that is of a violent or sexual nature, possession of firearms or certain other weapons, selling or distributing controlled substances on or off school grounds or at school-sponsored activities offered by local and regional boards of education, states and local charter schools, and interdistrict magnet schools in accordance with federal law (OLR, 2015).

Before General Statute P.A 15-96 was amended it indicated that students in kindergarten through grade two could receive out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for the same reasons as students in grades three through 12 (e.g. posing

a danger to persons or property, disrupting the educational process) (OLR, 2015). In addition, this statute only required mental health programs to be administered by local and regional boards of education to identify children experiencing early school adjustment problems only (OLR, 2015). SB 1053 proposed that local and regional boards of education include a component for systematic early detection and screening to solely identify children experiencing behavioral or disciplinary problems, provide services and programs to address the problems and encourage the education commissioner to consider additional factors when awarding school based primary mental health program grants to local and regional boards of education (OLR, 2015). Furthermore, according to the Office of Fiscal Analysis SB-1053 the amendment was intended to make technical and procedural changes which would result in no fiscal impact (Office, 2015).

III: Legitimize Policy

The main sponsors of the bill were the Education Commission, a commission responsible for all matters relating to the DOE local and regional boards of education, Senators Martin M. Looney, 11th District and Beth Bye, 5th District and Representative Bruce V. Morris, 140th District (Connecticut, 2015). In order to ensure all educators and stakeholders had the opportunity to provide feedback, a public hearing was held on March 11, 2015 and written testimony was collected as part of the process of developing the amendment (Connecticut, 2015). A total of nineteen stakeholders were involved including the Interim Commissioner of Education, Dianna R. Wentzell of Connecticut, a variety of commissions, agencies, parents, legal services, advocacy groups, researchers and superintendents across the state (Connecticut, 2015).

There was a total of thirteen stakeholders in support of the bill and a total of six stakeholders who opposed the bill. Testimony from stakeholders that were in support of the bill were primarily advocates, commissions, parents, researchers and legal agencies who stated that the number of out-of-school suspensions has continued to be too high for children that are seven years of age and younger and that they were disproportionately higher for students of male African American and Hispanic ethnicity (Connecticut, 2015). Sarah Eagan, Child Advocate for the State of Connecticut stated in her testimonial that “1,200 children under the age of 7 were suspended during the last school year, over 900 of those children (or 76.1%) were Black or Hispanic, the vast majority were male, and the number of students receiving at least one suspension has increased in each of the last two years.” (Joint, p. 2). In addition, a common theme among the other testimonials was that too many students were being suspended for minor policy violations, that out-of-school suspensions do not address underlying issues and lead to negative life outcomes and that schools need to provide services and practices that would assist in addressing underlying causes of behavioral and discipline concerns (Connecticut, 2015).

On the other hand, stakeholders that were in opposition of the bill were the Dianna R. Wentzell, Interim Commissioner of Education as well as school superintendents and union associations who have all illustrated concerns regarding adequate funding and support needed to fulfill the legislations purposes. Wentzell stated that “the State Department of Education (SDE) cautions against moving toward a mandate that would potentially eliminate local discretion on student discipline” (Joint, p. 1). More specifically, Sal Pascarella, Superintendent of the Danbury School System stated that “prohibiting out-of-school suspensions removes the resources necessary to adequately address a child's behavioral issues” and that “without sufficient financial support for the implementation of the bill, there will be a tremendous burden placed on the school district to implement the legislation” (Joint Favorable Report, p.3). Based on the information provided by the Joint Favorable Report the bill passed on March 27, 2015 on a vote of 33-0 and the CGA Bill History stated that it was named Substitute Senate Bill No. 1053 Public Act No. 15-96 by the Legislative Commissioner’s Office on June 8, 2015 and signed by the governor on June 23, 2015 with the date of enactment beginning on July 1, 2015 (Connecticut, 2015).

IV: Implement Policy

The implementation of Public Act No. 15-96: *An Act Concerning Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions for Students in Preschool and Grades Kindergarten to Two* at the state, district and school levels has been a complex undertaking that is continuing to take a significant amount of time, funds and resources. According to information obtained from the DOE, CGA, CSDE and WPS there have been a variety of efforts that have aided in the process of implementing this policy between 2014-2019. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA/ESEA) enacted by the Obama Administration in 2015 provided states with the ability to apply for funding through the creation of school improvement plans through ESEA section 1003. Therefore, the CSDE created the *Connecticut Consolidated State Plan: Ensured Equity and Excellence for All Connecticut students* (CCP) and the *Connecticut State Board of Education’s Five-Year Comprehensive Plan 2016-2021* to fulfill the obligations of this legislation. The CCP contains a strategic plan to address school performance based on twelve indicators: Academic Achievement; Academic Growth; Participation Rate; Chronic Absenteeism; Preparation for Postsecondary and Career Readiness Coursework; Preparation of Postsecondary and Career Readiness Exams; Graduation, On Track in Ninth Grade; Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate; Six Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate; Postsecondary Entrance; Physical Fitness; and Arts Access.

However, this comprehensive plan does not provide an indicator for the area of social-emotional learning. More specifically, during the development of this plan, feedback survey results indicated that one of the common themes regarding priorities and concerns related to this plan was the “desire for social-emotional learning guidance, mental health supports, and social-emotional indicators” (CCP,

2016, p.22). Therefore, secondary goals were created for the inclusion of improvements in the area of school climate, safety and cultural responsiveness.

In order to implement this comprehensive plan WPS underwent a vast majority of incremental changes. In order to understand how these policy changes have affected WPS, the PELP Coherence Framework was utilized to analyze the implementation of their strategic plan and use of strategies. According to the Harvard Education Leadership Project the PELP Coherence Framework was developed as a framework to “help leaders recognize the interdependence of various aspects of their school district – its culture, systems and structures, resources, stakeholder relationships, and environment – and to understand how they reinforce one another to support the implementation of an improvement strategy” (Harvard, 2020). More specifically, the PELP framework poses critical diagnostic questions that are critical to high performance used in the development of strategic plans (Harvard, 2020).

Since the 2014-2015 school year there have been three changes in superintendents. According to WPS’s Annual Reports leadership has also implemented the following changes since the 2014-2015 school year in accordance with the PELP Framework: adopted PBIS; established school climate and safety committees in each school building; created school climate plans for each school; created the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) program to increase parent outreach; held annual cultural responsive and positive discipline workshops for administration; updated discipline policy for the school years 2017-2019; provided annual administration training on school climate, bullying, restorative practices and social skills groups; and implemented a 100 Day Entry plan in 2018 that included a needs assessment due to a recent change in superintendents. To evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used in this plan a variety of feedback surveys were sent out to all stakeholders involved such as the students, staff, parents and community members. In addition, data was collected on school discipline through the S.W.I.S PBIS discipline data collection database (Annual, 2014-2019).

V. Evaluate, Analyze and Revise Policy (as needed)

Based on the information provided by the CSDE EdSight Data Collection Database on WPS district data for grades K-5 from the school years 2014-2015 to 2018-2019 indicates that since Public Act No. 15-96 was enacted on July 1, 2015 there was an 80% decrease in kindergarten, 36% decrease in first grade and 25% decrease in second grade students receiving at least one suspension from the 2014-2015 to the 2015-2016 school year. Furthermore, this data also indicates that there was a 22% decrease in third grade, 24% decrease in fourth grade and a 31% decrease in fifth grade students receiving at least one suspension. However, it appears that the total number of students in grades three through five receiving at least one suspension from the 2015-2016 school year makes up 76% of the population for that given year (please see Figure 1). Therefore, it appears that this data indicates an unequal

distribution of suspensions from grades three through fifth just in one given year of data collected. In addition, the CSDE EdSight Data Collection Database also indicates that students that were granted out-of-school suspensions between the 2014-2015 to 2018-2019 school years were approximately 75% male and 65% Hispanic.

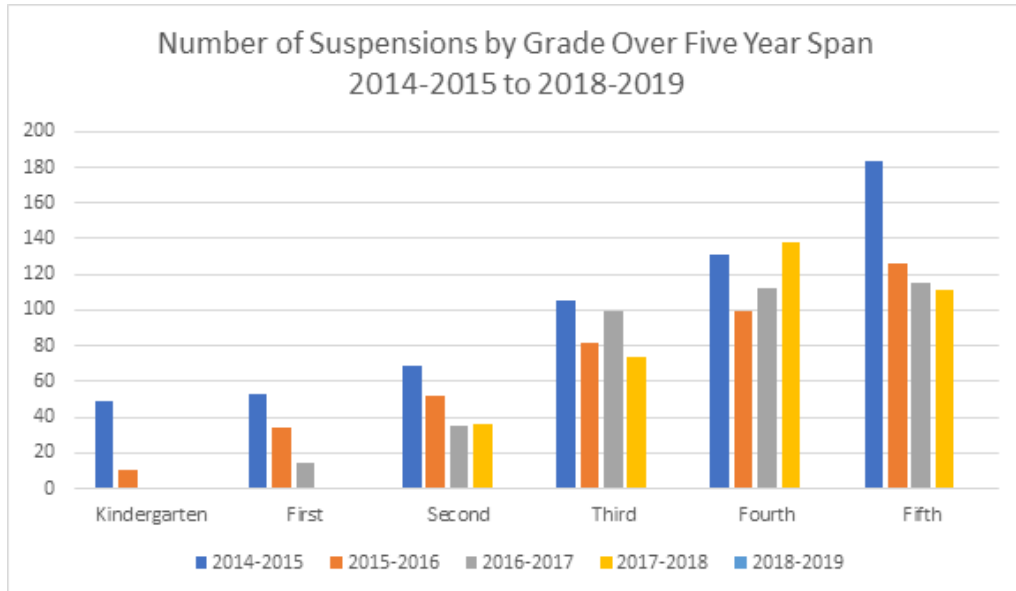


Figure 1: Data based on the number of suspensions granted disaggregated by grade between the years 2014-2015 to 2018-2019)

Furthermore, it appears that disproportionalities appear to exist in the upper elementary grades, Hispanic population and students that are identified as the male gender. The data also indicates that there is a disproportionality that exists in the type of sanctions these students receive as justification for suspension. According to the CSDE EdSight Data Collection Database students have been suspended in the categories of Physical and Verbal Confrontations (PVC), Fighting and Battery (FB) and School Policy Violations (SPV) between the school years 2014-2015 to 2018-2019 at the Elementary level (please see Figure 2).

Based on the data collected through the WPS Annual Reports over the course of the past five years and discipline data collected from the CSDE EdSight Data collection database it appears that even though the total number of overall suspensions has since decreased there continues to be disproportionalities for upper elementary school children, the number of students obtaining sanctions for Physical and Verbal Confrontations, Fighting and Battery and School Policy Violations as well as the number of Black and Hispanic students receiving out-of-school suspensions (EdSight, 2014-2019). In addition, there have been little to no requirements for building administrators to share feedback results on school

climate, PBIS and safety to their staff and parents; providing consistent professional development on school climate, PBIS, classroom safety, cultural responsiveness, and legislation outside of administrators and limited pupil personnel (i.e. school psychologists, social workers); equitable allocation of resources to support mental and behavioral health for each school (i.e. behavioral technicians, Board Certified Behavioral Analysts (BCBA)); implementation of specified curriculum and programming to support mental and behavioral health through PBIS.

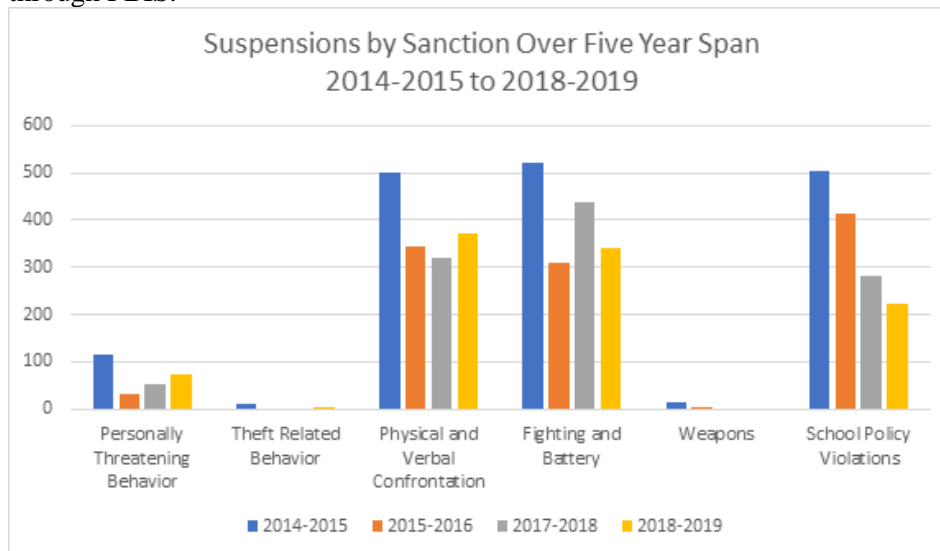


Figure 2: Data based on the number of sanctions granted disaggregated by category between the years 2014-2015 to 2018-2019

In order to assist policy makers in addressing the disproportionalities associated with increased suspensions for students grades 3-5, students that are predominately Black and Hispanic males as well as students receiving sanctions in the areas of PVC, FB and SPV, it is necessary to develop policies and practices that support cultural competence, systems and structures that support positive discipline, provide the ability to allocate vital mental and behavioral funds to support resources and transparency between stakeholders across all environments within the school system. According to Carter and Welner (2013):

“When students’ cultural backgrounds are dissimilar to the backgrounds of their teacher and principals, the disadvantages experienced by those students are due to educator’s lack of familiarity with their social backgrounds, which in turn hinders those educators’ capacity to engage with the students effectively. The inability of educators to comprehend the social realities, cultural resources, and understandings of Black, Latino, Native American, and other nondominant groups is one of the main drivers of the opportunity gap in American education” (p. 147).

In other words, policy makers and policy actors need to acquire a deep understanding of the relationship between the socio-cultural and socio-economic structures of educators and students in order to design policies and practices that decrease the subjectivity associated with suspension sanctions such as PVC, FB and SPV. For example, if a student receives a sanction for disrespect under the category of SPV for talking back it is important for educators to understand how culture may play a role in the strategies that they have learned regarding self-advocacy and whether or not the disrespect was ill conceived.

More importantly, educational leaders should be actively participating in feedback groups when policy is being planned and created using a Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (CRSL) that can provide a depth of understanding of school based culture for researchers, commissions and advocates and can also aid in the active development of policy that meets the needs of the stakeholders involved. According to Khalifa, Gooden & Davis (2016) culturally responsive school leaders “are responsible for promoting school climate inclusive of minoritized students, particularly marginalized within most school contexts (p. 1274). In other words, culturally responsive school leaders maintain presence and relationships with the community members they service, they lead professional development to make certain that teachers and staff and curriculum are consistently responsive to minoritized students as population demographics continually shift (Khalifa et. el, 2016).

Therefore, based on the evidence indicated above the following recommendations may assist policymakers as they consider positive discipline, school climate, safety and cultural responsiveness for synoptic change and implementation:

- The District Climate Coordinator should review current school climate, safety and PBIS plans to determine what available resources will need to change to accommodate culturally responsive policy and practice implementation at the building level.
- The District Climate Coordinator should review current assessment and data collection practices and evaluate options for analyzing and reporting at the district, building and classroom level to aid in continuous progress monitoring and implementation.
- The District Climate Coordinator should collaborate with the Talent & Professional Development Supervisor to compile information of professional learning on positive discipline, school climate, safety and cultural responsiveness in order to provide annual professional development for administrators, educators, families, communities and policymakers.
- Director of Personal and Talent management and Chief Financial Officer should collaborate on the acquisition of Board-Certified Behavioral Analysts (BCBA) and behavioral technicians to support the mental and behavioral health of students requiring intensive interventions.

- The Chief Operating Officer should collaborate with the FACE coordinator to develop policies and practices that support Parent Teacher Organizations for each school to encourage parent partnerships.
- The Waterbury Board of Education, Superintendent, and Legal Services should collaborate on the development of updated policies and practices associated with student conduct, positive discipline and professional code of conduct that aligns with the district, state and federal standards on school climate, safety and cultural competencies standards.

Implementation of all discipline policies and practices created by the district will need to be continually assessed and evaluated on a quarterly basis at the very least to ensure fidelity and continuity with fulfilling the obligations of CT General Statute P.A. 15-96. Policy makers at all levels, from classroom teachers up through the state level will need to be able to evaluate and document the effect that CT General Statute P.A. 15-96 has on the implementation of programs, funding, creation of new legislation and overall progress towards meeting state and federal goals towards ESSA.

Due to the frequency in leadership turnover in WPS it is important for the Superintendent to first understand how well WPS is responding to CT General Statute P.A. 15-96 in its current state in order to identify the critical differences in the law's intentions and the actual implementation methods that were selected. As indicated earlier, CT General Statute P.A. 15-96 proposes that local and regional boards of education include a component for systematic early detection and screening to identify children experiencing behavioral or disciplinary problems, provide services and programs to address the problems and encourage the education commissioner to consider additional factors when awarding school based primary mental health program grants to local and regional boards of education (Connecticut, 2015). However, due to the language used in this policy some of the consequences resulted in the lack of clarification regarding what is meant by systematic early detection and screening, services and programs, behavioral or disciplinary problems, additional factors and school based primary mental health programs. Therefore, these items will need to be further examined and addressed in order for stakeholders to determine the appropriate course of action for this policy.

Other consequences that will require further examination is the process of early identification as well as the funding types (i.e. programs, staffing, services, resources) and amounts that need to be allocated in order to assist in fulfilling the obligations of this legislation. Further examination will also be required by local districts to address the alignment of standards at the state and national levels. An accountability system that includes a requirement for consistent data reporting will need to be implemented to determine the district and the state's needs towards progress. Currently the CSDE requires the EdSight data collection database to collect district reports on in-school, out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for

the categories of race/ethnicity, sanction and gender. There are options for grade input but it is not used consistently. In addition, data collection is often missing for the categories of race/ethnicity and gender which can skew the data and provide limitations in feedback. Data collection is also inconsistent across districts for comparative analysis when attempting to combine any given category (i.e. race/ethnicity and sanction) In addition to accountability systems, professional development will need to be required for all stakeholders once the selection of culturally responsive positive school discipline processes and content are established. Lastly, if facilities are to be utilized as an in-school suspension option leaders may be required to update spaces if rooms are currently unavailable for In-School Suspension.

The main policy actors that were responsible for the initial agenda setting, policy formulation, legitimization, implementation, evaluation and policy maintenance strategies at the federal level regarding ESSA were the Obama Administration, the DOE, DOJ and DHHS among other professional experts, commissions and advocacy groups. Their roles were to forward the initiative on Positive School Discipline and continue the process in reducing exclusionary discipline with the intention of increasing student achievement, reducing incarceration and chronic absenteeism. This ideology played a major role in the development of procedural requirements in order to further engage states in support of this initiative. Due to this incentive the CDE and CSDE developed comprehensive plans that further supported this initiative and encouraged the CGA to pass updated legislation in support of positive discipline, school climate, safety and accountability in regards to academic achievement and chronic absenteeism. Other policy actors that have aided in the passage of this legislation were state educational experts, advocacy groups and local commissions.

Once a comprehensive plan was developed the CSDE sent correspondence to the Superintendents of Schools in 2017 who were then encouraged to work with their local boards of education and legal services to develop local policies and practices that aligned with state and federal goals to support the ESSA legislation that are currently in place today. Lastly, once the Waterbury Board of Education developed policies and practices for its district, the superintendent sent correspondence to the building administrators and classroom teachers, who were then responsible for implementing and modifying building-based goals that are currently in support of these legislations, policies and practices.

Conclusion

Overall, the implementation of Public Act No. 15-96: *An Act Concerning Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions for Students in Preschool and Grades Kindergarten to Two* at the state, district and school levels has been a complex undertaking that is continuing to take a significant amount of time, funds and resources. Implementation of all discipline policies and practices created by the

district will need to be continually assessed and evaluated to ensure fidelity and continuity with fulfilling the obligations of CT General Statute P.A. 15-96. However, it is also important to consider that this policy did not come with allocated funding requirements and the stakeholders involved in the development of this policy (i.e. CEA, FTA, Superintendents, Commission of Education) highlighted notable concerns regarding funding and allocation of resources. Future policymakers must be willing to include the concerns of stakeholders that are closest to the problem if they are going to develop policy that doesn't lead to a numerous amount of incremental policy changes.

Since this policy was enacted there have been a total of ten additional laws and regulations presented that address school climate, safety and discipline which has led to constant shifts in the way policy has been implemented over the past five years and has led to conflicts associated with finding best practices that provide the stability for addressing the obligations of ESSA. Therefore, it is important for legislators to utilize a comprehensive approach to educational policy that includes all stakeholders that are closest to the issue so that they can make data informed decisions to drive policy development and better meet the needs of all students and educators. Lastly, this policy brief does not include the impact of funding associated with the ESSA grants and allocation requirements associated with social emotional learning. Therefore, further areas for additional research could include an analysis on the specifications for the process of allocating grants and funds to support social-emotional development in accordance with ESSA at the state and local levels in order to assist policy makers with the development of educational policies associated with social-emotional learning.

The relevance of this brief has come during a pivotal shift in the dynamics of best teaching and learning practices associated with academic achievement and the link it has with the development of the whole child as part of the process for becoming active citizens within our society today. Therefore, it is necessary for educational leaders and policymakers to work collaboratively has one cohesive team in order to develop comprehensive policies and practices that are appropriate for our students so that they may develop into successful individuals within the global market that can result in a positive impact on the economy and society. However, if educational leaders fail to address the gaps in policymakers understanding of the purpose behind social emotional learning and academic achievement during the policy development phase, it can lead to fragmented and disjointed practices that not only fail to address the root causes of the issues but it can ultimately lead to the continued failure of a school systems ability to address the needs of its students in a way that only adds to continued low performance and negative life outcomes into adulthood.

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