

## Classroom Management Styles and Disparities Related to Disciplinary Practices

*Disciplinary practices are the facet of classroom management that often dominates discussion and raises concerns about the impact on students in general and the disproportionate application to subgroups.*

Classroom management style shapes how teachers interact with students in general and what disciplinary actions are pursued when students do not conform to rules and established standards of behavior. This resource underscores different classroom management styles, disciplinary practices and related disparities, and some systemic changes that can help improve the situation.

### About Classroom Management Styles

Classroom management styles vary and are strongly shaped by such factors as a teacher's knowledge, skills, and attitudes/beliefs/biases and current situations. Researchers have formulated classroom management styles in different ways over the years. For example, in the 1990s, Martin and Baldwin defined the activity as "a multi-faceted process that includes three broad dimensions – person, instruction, and discipline" and three management styles – interventionist, non-interventionist and interactionist. In a recent guide, Chew (2023) defined classroom management as “approaches used by educators to establish and maintain a conducive and productive learning environment for students.”

Currently, the four most discussed classroom management styles are described as: **authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and indulgent**. Research indicates that each has positive and negative effects on students.

All discussions make it clear that classroom management activity is not just a set of techniques; it is a platform to develop relationships. Positive teacher-student relationships are seen as fundamental to classroom management (e.g., Cobb & Krownapple, 2019). Such relationships are characterized as authentic, warm, empathic, supportive, and fair. These qualities contribute to an environment that feels safe, where there is a feeling of trust and mutual respect, and which supports students' developmental, emotional, and academic needs.

For more on classroom management approaches, see  
[23 Brilliant Classroom Management Strategies and Techniques](https://www.weareteachers.com/classroom-management-techniques/)  
<https://www.weareteachers.com/classroom-management-techniques/>

### About Discipline

The reality in every school, and especially in schools that are the greatest focus of public criticism, is that teachers are confronted daily with some students who misbehave. That is why classroom management approaches pay special attention to disciplinary practices.

At all schools, disciplinary practices are used to deal with infringement of rules and established standards of behavior. The practices usually take the form of punishing misbehavior (e.g., doing something that the staff believes the student does not want to happen). In addition, a demand for future compliance usually is made, along with threats of harsher punishment if compliance is not forthcoming.

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\*The material in this document builds on work done by Isabelle Antaran as a participant with the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA in 2023.

The center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA. Website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

Concerns raised about disciplinary practices stress that the benefits of using punishment to control behavior often are offset by “side effects” (e.g., Mowen, Brent, & Boman IV, 2020). Staff and peers may come to perceive and act toward a student in negative ways. The student may manifest enhanced negative attitudes toward school and school personnel, increased anti-social acts, and mental health problems. Disciplinary procedures also are associated with school dropouts. Indeed, extreme disciplinary practices often are referred to as "pushout" strategies.

For some time, the call has been for moving away from punitive to positive approaches (National Association of school Psychologists, 2020). However, it remains the case that punishment is widely used, and significant disproportionalities in application regularly occur. For example, suspensions and expulsions are widely viewed as producing disparities and inequities related to subgroups of students (Leung-Gagné et al., 2022).

For more on discipline practices in schools, see  
[Effective School Discipline Policies and Practices: Supporting Student Learning](https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Research%20and%20Policy/School_Discipline_Congressional_Briefing%20(1).pdf)  
[https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Research%20and%20Policy/School\\_Discipline\\_Congressional\\_Briefing%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Research%20and%20Policy/School_Discipline_Congressional_Briefing%20(1).pdf)

### About Disparities and Inequities

From: Rodriguez and Welsh (2022)

School discipline is an issue of utmost importance to educational policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders because of long-standing disparities in who receives punishment and experiences the impact of exclusionary discipline on education and long-term life outcomes. Students with disabilities, non-heterosexual youth, low-socioeconomic-status students, low-performing students, Black, Latinx, and male students experience exclusionary discipline (e.g., suspensions and expulsions) at higher rates than their peers (Shores et al., 2020; Skiba et al., 2014; Welsh & Little, 2018a, 2018b). For instance, in 2017-2018, Black students represented 15.1% of total K-12 enrollment, yet Black students represented 38.8% of expulsions, 38.2% of one or more out-of-school suspensions (OSS), and 31.4% of one or more in-school suspensions (ISS) (Office for Civil Rights, 2021). These patterns are alarming considering the detrimental effects of exclusionary discipline on student academic performance and long-term life outcomes. Students lose millions of instructional days due to suspensions (Losen & Whitaker, 2017). Recent studies have confirmed the adverse impact of suspensions on student achievement (Anderson et al., 2019; Lacoce & Steinberg, 2019), and some scholars have contended that the racial, income, and gender disparities in exclusionary disciplinary outcomes contribute to achievement gaps (Gregory et al., 2010; Losen et al., 2015).

From Leung-Gagné and colleagues (2022)

Decades of data have shown that certain groups of students are disproportionately suspended, including students of color (except Asian students), students receiving special education services, students from low-income families, LGBTQ students, and males. Differences in behavior do not account for the large racial disparities in suspension rates. Prior research has identified a number of school and systemic factors associated with the disproportionate suspension of certain students, including educator implicit bias, insufficient educator preparation, poor educator working conditions, ineffective school leadership, harsh discipline policies, and inequitable resource allocation. Furthermore, these suspensions contribute to inequity in educational outcomes.

Others have cited exclusionary discipline as a factor in the "school-to-prison pipeline" (Hemez Brent, and Mowen, 2019).

For more on disparities and inequities related to students, see  
[Disparities in Discipline Practices](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/equity/indicator_g15.asp)  
[https://nces.ed.gov/programs/equity/indicator\\_g15.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/equity/indicator_g15.asp)

## Some Systemic Changes to Improve the Situation

Appropriately responding to misbehavior at school is not just about controlling students; it's about engaging and reengaging them positively and productively in the learning process. In many situations, it is not feasible for teachers to do this alone, and they shouldn't be expected to.

For a long time, teachers have gone into their classrooms and figuratively and often literally have shut their doors behind them. As a result, for better and worse, they and their students have been on their own. On the positive side, the closed door limits outside inappropriate monitoring and meddling in classrooms. The downside is that, in too many instances, teachers are deprived of essential supports, as well as opportunities to learn from colleagues. And, too often, negative classroom dynamics and the isolation from colleagues leads to feelings of alienation and "burn out" for teachers. At the same time, too many students are cut off from a variety of resources and experiences that can help ensure they can succeed at school.

Calls are increasing for "opening the classroom door" to enhance collegial collaboration, consultation, mentoring, and enable use of a variety of expert assistance, volunteers, family members, and the community-at-large. Such collaboration enhances efforts to address a wider range of individual differences by personalizing instruction and also providing special assistance in the classroom when needed.

Relatedly, it is essential to revamp the ways schools provide student and learning supports. The number of students not doing well at a school can be staggering. For far too long, it has been clear in many schools that student/learning supports as they currently operate can't meet the need. A particular concern is the degree to which existing supports are marginalized and fragmented in school improvement policy and practice.

Current efforts to integrate supports and develop a multi-tiered system (MTSS) are moves in the right direction and can readily be built upon. However, they represent only first steps in moving toward the type of unified, comprehensive, and equitable system that can make a significant dent in the increasing number of student learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

Ending harmful disciplinary practices requires the type of policy and practice changes noted above in order to significantly alter school and classroom culture. While such changes are not easy to make, they are the route to enhancing equity of opportunity for all students.

For more on these and related systemic changes, see the following resources:

>Chapter 2. "About School and Classroom Climate: Opening Doors"  
in *Improving School Improvement*

[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving\\_school\\_improvement.html](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html)

>Rethinking Discipline to Improve School Climate

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/disciplineclimate.pdf>

>*Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/briefguide.pdf>

>*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/barriersbook.pdf>

>*Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/mh20a.pdf>

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