



## WHY IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION IS NOT A HELPFUL ALTERNATIVE



As state and local education agencies modify school discipline plans as part of an inclusive recovery, it is time to dispel several myths about in-school suspension. These myths may otherwise lead to a reliance on seemingly innocuous but harmful and racially disparate discipline practices. Accordingly, this newsletter addresses four common misconceptions about in-school suspension.

The U.S. Department of Education has defined both out-of-school suspension *and* in-school suspension as exclusionary. Nevertheless, relying on one or more of the following four myths, school leaders and others may see in-school suspension as a benevolent alternative to out-of-school suspension.

### **Myth 1: In-School Suspension Keeps Students On Track Academically**

Some believe that by keeping students in school, in-school suspension allows them to stay on track with coursework. But researchers have found long-term adverse relationships between in-school suspension and [academics](#) as well as [college success](#). NEPC Fellow Dr. Kathryn Wiley and her colleagues found that in-school suspension classrooms created adverse conditions and few educational opportunities.

### **Myth 2: In-School Suspension Can Help Meet Racial Equity Goals**

The recent [research](#) conducted by Wiley and colleagues also found that Black students were significantly more likely to receive in-school suspension compared to White students, and often for minor offenses (e.g., being late to class, profanity). This is consistent with other

[studies](#). These patterns are replicating the same patterns long documented for out-of-school suspension. Wiley and colleagues also [found](#) that in-school suspension contributed to within-school racial segregation.

### **Myth 3: In-School Suspension Impacts a Small Number of Students**

According to [federal data](#), approximately 2.7 million students received one or more in-school suspensions nationally, putting this practice on par with the number of students nationally receiving out-of-school suspensions. Both forms of suspension lead to a loss of valuable opportunities to learn.

### **Myth 4: In-School Suspension Is a “New” Alternative**

The ahistorical nature of reform leaves some believing that in-school suspension is a “new” alternative to out-of-school suspension. But the recent era of in-school suspension, which began during President Obama’s administration, was preceded by a similar one in the 1970s. In-school suspension then, as now, raised significant civil rights concerns that must finally be heeded.

### **Conclusion**

States and local education agencies have been devising ways to safely and inclusively return to in-person instruction. But an *inclusive* return, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education, includes establishing policies and practices that avoid the overuse of exclusionary discipline measures. Such exclusion includes in-school suspension. The research on this exclusionary practice highlights the important role that district and school leaders must play in supporting racial equity and interrupting the historical cycle of exclusion. In-school suspension, seemingly innocuous, is not a new, helpful, nor racially just alternative.

## NEPC Resources on Discipline Policy

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