

Discipline Discussions: The Impact and Harm of Exclusionary Discipline

DISCIPLINE AND BEHAVIOR SERIES

Introduction

Over seven million children with disabilities and their families rely on the effective, high-quality implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ([IDEA](#)) to support a lifetime of success.

Make no mistake about it, IDEA — and the rights and protections it affords — impacts a child's future, how they view themselves as learners today and leaders tomorrow. In fact, the [National Center for Educational Outcomes](#) estimates that 85–90% of children with disabilities can be expected to achieve at grade-level when they are provided with the best instruction, supports, and accommodations. Indeed, the promise of IDEA rests with the full implementation of the law.

High-quality implementation of IDEA starts with a clear understanding of the law's requirements, and that is why OSEP recently released the most [comprehensive guidance package](#) on IDEA's discipline and behavior requirements since the law was reauthorized in 2004.

As our country's first African American OSEP Director, and as the parent of a child with a disability, this guidance holds special meaning to me. It gives hope to parents, strategies to educators, and direction to state and local leadership.

Perhaps, most importantly, it motivates us at the federal, state, district, school, and program levels to have conversations about current disciplinary practices, their immediate and long-term impact on children with disabilities, and how we can change our systems and practices to focus on preventing interfering behaviors rather than relying on punitive, exclusionary approaches. Bottom line: this guidance package compels us to take a smarter approach to addressing discipline in our schools.

The data trends are longstanding and clear: children with disabilities, particularly children of color with disabilities, are disciplined at far greater rates than their peers without disabilities and these trends start as early as preschool and extend throughout high school. For example:

- Preschool students served under IDEA accounted for [22.7 percent of total preschool enrollment but 56.9 percent of preschool students who were expelled](#).



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- School-age students with disabilities served under IDEA represented [13.2 percent of total student enrollment but received 20.5 percent of one or more in-school suspensions and 24.5 percent of one or more out-of-school suspensions.](#)
- During the 2019–20 school year, Black children with disabilities made up [17.2 percent of children with disabilities aged 3–21 served under IDEA](#) yet [43.5 percent of all children with disabilities aged 3–21 served under IDEA who were suspended out of school or expelled for more than 10 school days.](#)

The impact is alarming:

- [Over 3 million missed days from school due to out-of-school suspension](#)
- [Out-of-school suspensions do not serve as a deterrent for future problem behavior and can lead to school dropout](#)

We cannot suspend our way to better behavior, but we can invest in what works.

I am proud that OSEP has invested millions of dollars over decades to deeply consider how to best address the behavioral needs of children with disabilities. These investments have yielded powerful, evidence-based strategies and approaches that can be used by schools and early childhood programs to mitigate or even prevent interfering behavior before it occurs. In fact, according to the [Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#) and the [National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations](#), implementation of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) [results in:](#)

- Improved outcomes, such as increased academic achievement and social and emotional competence for children with disabilities, and reduced bullying behaviors;
- Significant reductions in inappropriate behavior;
- Reduced use of exclusionary discipline, including reduced discipline referrals and suspensions; and
- Reduced use of restraint and seclusion.

When we pair these tools with leadership and motivation to have honest and reflective discipline discussions, the outcomes can be powerful for children with disabilities and their families.

Over the next few months, I will be writing a series of blog posts that highlights challenges and opportunities before us and connects stakeholders with OSEP funded resources. I will address topics such as informal removals, alternatives to exclusionary discipline, and proactive approaches to supporting a child's behavioral needs; and will provide you with resources you can use in your own discipline discussions.

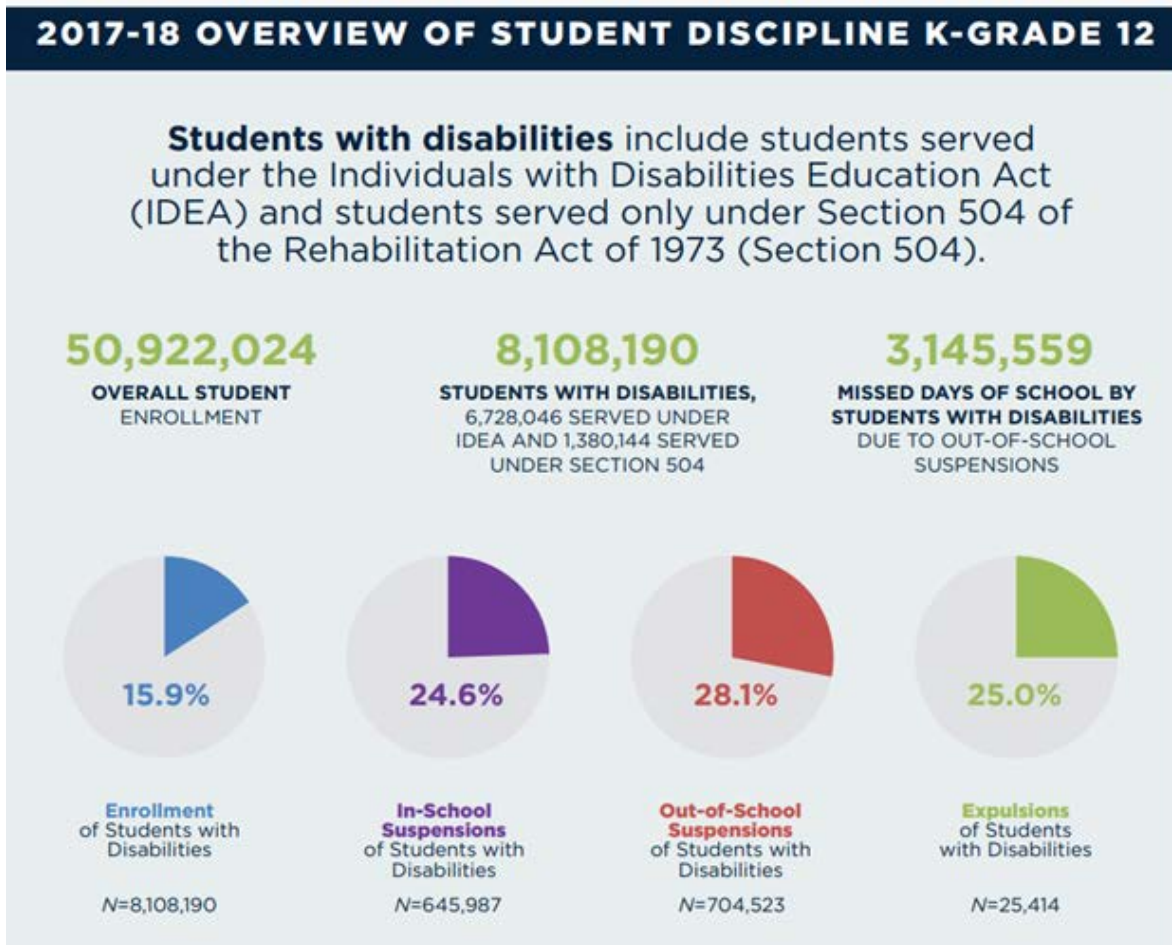
Additional information about OSEP's Guidance to Help Schools Support Students with Disabilities and Avoid Disparities In the Use of Discipline:

- OSEP Dear Colleague Letter on Implementation of IDEA Discipline Provisions. (July 19, 2022) [English](#) | [Español](#)
- Questions and Answers Addressing the Needs of Children with Disabilities and IDEA's Discipline Provisions. (July 19, 2022) [English](#) | [Español](#)
- Positive, Proactive Approaches to Supporting the Needs of Children with Disabilities: A Guide

for Stakeholders. (July 19, 2022) [English](#) | [Español](#)

- [OSEP 2022 Behavior, Discipline Guidance Video](#) (July 2022)
- [Resource Guides on Positive, Proactive Approaches to Discipline](#)

Visual:



Source: [Suspensions and Expulsions of Students with Disabilities in Public Schools \(PDF\)](#) (ed.gov)