

# FAILED POLICIES, BROKEN FUTURES

The True Cost of Zero Tolerance in Chicago



a report by  
*Voices of Youth  
in Chicago Education*

JULY 2011



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The recommendations put forth in this report were developed in part through the inspiration provided by a set of youth-driven national site visits in the spring and fall of 2010. Dr. Pedro Noguera of New York University was instrumental in connecting VOYCE to many of the 13 high schools visited. The following schools shared their successful and innovative approaches to school discipline, teaching and learning and student supports with the 20 youth leaders, eight organizers, and eight school staff who conducted the visits:

**Boston, MA:** Edward Kennedy Academy for Health Careers, Fenway High School, TechBoston Academy

**Brockton, MA:** Brockton High School

**Minneapolis, MN:** El Colegio, Patrick Henry High School

**New York, NY:** Medgar Evers College Preparatory Academy, Student Success Centers at Bushwick High School, Multicultural High School, Banana Kelly High School, Thurgood Marshall Academy for Social Change, Hillcrest High School, and School of the Future.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**TELLING IT LIKE IT IS: *A Youth Perspective on School Safety***..... 1

**ABOUT VOYCE**..... 2

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**..... 3

**INTRODUCTION**..... 7

**KEY FINDINGS: *The True Cost of “Getting Tough”***..... 11

*Student Experiences with Security Measures*

*Myths and Facts about School Discipline*

*Jamar’s Story*

*Juan’s Story*

**RECOMMENDATIONS: Making Smart Investments**..... 23

*Best Practices from Other Cities*

*Students Speak Out: VOYCE Cross-City Youth Forum*

*Building a Foundation for Learning: Social-Emotional Supports in Freshman Year*

**CONCLUSION**..... 33



# TELLING IT LIKE IT IS: A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE ON SCHOOL SAFETY

In November 2008, the Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) collaborative released a report on our city's 50% graduation rate. We conducted a year and a half of participatory action research and used our experiences as Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students to make recommendations, such as strengthening social-emotional support systems, creating a rigorous and relevant curriculum, and ending zero tolerance. We called on CPS to support these student-led solutions to the dropout crisis, and for the past two years we have been organizing to bring greater social-emotional support systems to struggling freshmen at our high schools. But the reality is that every year, thousands of students across Chicago are still not graduating. In this new report, we are taking a deeper look at what we feel is a major obstacle to graduation for many CPS students: school discipline policy.

As students, we feel greatly affected by how CPS handles school discipline. Harsh discipline policies create institutions where we are expected to fail, because they are based on the fear that young people of color are future criminals, not the hope that we will be future leaders. Rather than giving us the positive environment we need to actually learn and accomplish our dreams, these policies suspend, arrest, or just kick us out of school for very minor actions, causing us to fall weeks behind in our classes and distrust the adults who are supposed to be looking out for us. No one wants safe schools more than we do, but getting arrested for writing your name on a desk doesn't make us feel safe. It makes us feel like we aren't even human—like we are animals. Being treated like this in a place where our dreams are supposed to be supported only breaks our spirits down.

The motto of CPS is to educate, inspire, and transform students. In order for CPS to really educate, inspire, and transform students, they have to learn to listen to us first! As the students most directly affected by an underperforming school system, we are calling on CPS to stop investing in harsh discipline policies and put that money towards what works, such as preventing conflict before it happens and responding to it better when it does happen. Instead of investing in the criminalization of students, we have to invest in creating a positive and safe environment that supports all students.

For too long our schools have failed us. We are tired of being blamed for the problems created by a broken system. Fortunately, there is a window of opportunity for our school system to change for the better. For the first time in decades, Chicago has a new mayor and a new board of education. We need our leaders to take a new direction when it comes to our education. This means creating a positive learning environment in all of our schools by ending harsh discipline policies and investing in student supports. CPS should no longer make policy based on fear, but on the hope of what public education can really do—transform lives.

- VOYCE  
Voices of Youth  
in CHICAGO Education

# ABOUT VOYCE

Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) is a youth organizing collaborative whose mission is to advance education justice through youth-led policy reforms that increase the graduation rates and college readiness of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students. All of VOYCE's work is driven by the belief that the people most directly affected by the problem must be the ones to develop meaningful, long-lasting solutions. Since its formation in 2007, VOYCE has worked towards increasing Chicago's graduation rate by using youth-driven research and organizing to advance district-level policies that support student achievement.

Through VOYCE, youth leaders designed and conducted a high-level Participatory Action Research (PAR) project, culminating in a comprehensive report, "Student-Led Solutions to the Dropout Crisis," which was printed and distributed in the fall of 2008. The report, for which 100 youth conducted and analyzed 1325 surveys and 383 interviews with students, parents and teachers, highlighted a set of key findings and recommendations. For one, in line with the academic research, students consistently emphasized the important role that positive peer-to-peer and student-staff relationships play in safety, motivation and learning. In order to build a positive school culture where learning can take place, VOYCE recommended the following youth-led solutions:

**Increasing social-emotional supports and early college planning for students, particularly in the critical first year of high school, through the development of year-round, peer-led support systems.**

**Fostering student-teacher feedback and collaboration on how to increase engagement in the classroom through rigor, relevance, and positive relationships.**

**Shifting the focus of disciplinary policy from zero tolerance to prevention and effective intervention.**

Upon completion of the research phase, VOYCE youth met with former Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan and won his support for their recommendations. Together, VOYCE and CPS launched a series of pilot projects as the first phase of student-led, community-based school reform, including student-led VOYCE leadership teams at ten partner schools, as a vehicle for ongoing student voice at the school and district level, and a Freshman Year Initiative aimed at strengthening social-emotional supports for struggling freshmen through youth-led retreats, a peer-mentoring program, and the completion of personalized four-year graduation plans.

With financial support from CPS, VOYCE youth leaders engaged 313 freshmen, 104 peer mentors, and 37 school staff in the first year of the Freshman Year Initiative (2009-2010). Surveys administered at the beginning and end of the school year point to an increase in "teacher-student trust," a measure that has been proven by the Consortium on Chicago School Research to impact academics more than any other measure of school climate. Freshmen also reported that their mentors expected them to graduate from both high school and college, evidence of VOYCE's success in building a peer-to-peer system of high expectations.

The students of color who lead VOYCE's work come from seven community organizations throughout the city of Chicago, all of which have long histories of successfully organizing students and parents for educational justice: Albany Park Neighborhood Council, Brighton Park Neighborhood Council, Kenwood Oakland Community Organization, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, Organization of the NorthEast, Southwest Organizing Project and TARGET Area Development Corporation.





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chicago Public Schools, like other school districts across the country, has struggled for years to figure out how to make its schools safe. Parents and students need to know that going to school means that young people will be learning, not fearing that they will be harassed, beaten up, or worse. No one wants safe schools more than the students themselves, whose experiences form the basis of this report.

Their personal stories, combined with a growing body of academic research, show that CPS's approach to school discipline has failed to create safe learning environments, at a huge cost to taxpayers. The ongoing investment of scarce funding in costly and ineffective discipline policies has resulted in the chronic underfunding of policies and practices that truly support student achievement.

For the past twenty years, CPS has pursued a zero tolerance approach, which operates by "sending a message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated, by punishing all offenses severely, no matter how minor" (Skiba, 2008). It is important to note that an official endorsement of zero tolerance was removed from the CPS Student Code of Conduct in 2006 and the use of restorative justice practices is now encouraged.

However, a lack of adequate resources for the transition to restorative justice and a failure to provide strong limits on the use of suspensions, expulsions and arrests has resulted in a district-level approach to discipline policy that is drastically uneven at best, and at worst still looks very much like zero tolerance.

As both the student stories and academic research cited in this report show, despite twenty years of this approach, school safety

remains a key concern for students and teachers alike. In fact, research shows that a zero tolerance approach actively harms the development of positive learning environments by damaging student-teacher relationships, increasing student fear of violence, and ushering younger and younger students into the criminal justice system, particularly Black and Latino students (Advancement Project, 2010; APA, 2008; Skiba, 2000; Steinberg et al., 2011).

Moreover, by prioritizing spending on zero tolerance measures, CPS has under-invested in more effective approaches to increasing school safety and student achievement.

In order to raise student achievement, all schools must be places where learning can take place. This means building a foundation

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**Student stories and academic research show that that CPS's approach to school discipline has failed to create safe learning environments.**



for student success through policies that foster trusting and supportive relationships with peers and school staff, the sense of purpose that comes from high expectations and academic engagement, and emotional and physical safety (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; American Psychological Association, 2008; Steinberg et al., 2011; VOYCE 2008). As this report shows, this is not simply the right thing to do, but the most cost-effective thing to do.

Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) is an organizing collaborative for education justice led by students of color from seven community organizations throughout the city of Chicago. Since its formation in 2007, VOYCE has used youth-driven research and school-level partnerships to advocate for district-wide policies that support student achievement. In this

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**By investing in policies that truly support student achievement and school safety, CPS can not only raise the graduation rates of its students but save taxpayers huge amounts of money in both the short and long term.**

report, VOYCE partnered with the national civil rights organization Advancement Project to examine the true costs of CPS's continued investment in zero tolerance policies. Driven by students' daily experiences with school discipline, this report brings their anecdotal evidence together with an analysis of publicly-available budget and discipline data and published academic studies to highlight the following key findings:

**Zero tolerance does not make schools safer or lead to improved student achievement.**

The goal of any effective discipline system—and, by extension, any effective school district—is to maximize student learning by providing safe, supportive and engaging environments in which that learning can take place. An analysis of youth experiences with zero tolerance and academic research on its implementation shows that zero tolerance policies have consistently failed to deliver on this goal.

### **Enforcing and administering zero tolerance costs taxpayers tens of millions of dollars in the short term.**

Despite the evidence suggesting that zero tolerance does not make schools safer or improve student achievement, CPS continues to spend tens of millions of dollars every year on the enforcement and administration of a Code of Conduct based on zero tolerance principles. This figure includes spending on both school security measures, such as metal detectors and surveillance cameras, as well as the administrative costs associated with harsh punishments such as suspensions, expulsions and school-based arrests. For example, in 2011 alone, CPS spent \$67 million on the Office of Safety and Security—a figure that doesn't even include school-level spending on security.

### **Over the long term, the negative outcomes of zero tolerance—including an increase in dropout and incarceration rates—cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.**

Zero tolerance is not only ineffective, but in fact counter-productive. Zero tolerance has been shown to increase the likelihood of negative outcomes, such as truancy, dropout, and incarceration, that effective education policies seek to eradicate. The combination of existing cost-analysis projections and publicly available city and state data suggests that in Chicago alone, the public costs of these long-term negative outcomes add up to at least \$240 million every year, not including the hundreds of millions of dollars in lost state revenue caused by low attendance.

Smarter investments in our youth can reverse this lose-lose situation, in which students lose valuable learning time and schools lose funding that could have otherwise been used to genuinely support student safety and achievement. The research has shown that the most effective discipline policies focus on preventing student misconduct before it can escalate and using effective interventions—including mental health services, peer mediation and restorative justice—when it does occur. By investing in policies that truly support student achievement and school safety, CPS can not only raise the graduation rates of its students but save taxpayers huge amounts of money in both the short and long term.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To achieve this, VOYCE recommends a three-fold approach:

First, **CPS should re-write the Student Code of Conduct in a way that provides schools with clear guidelines for the appropriate use of disciplinary actions, prioritizing the importance of keeping students in the learning environment.** While the current Code of Conduct has been significantly improved in recent years, schools are still not provided with clear expectations and guidelines for how to maximize learning time for all students across the board by effectively preventing and responding to misconduct. CPS must put in place a graduated discipline system that clearly describes which punishments are too harsh for which offenses, offering instead a wide and flexible range of research-based behavioral interventions and taking harsh measures such as out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and arrests off the table for all but the most serious offenses. Under this system, teachers and administrators have the flexibility needed to tailor a range of research-based interventions to the individual student without resorting to excessively harsh punishment.

Secondly, **VOYCE recommends that CPS lay the foundation for effective learning through an investment in policies and programs that address the fundamental social, emotional and mental health needs of all students.**

And finally, as this report illustrates, too much information about how zero tolerance is implemented and paid for in Chicago is still kept from the public eye. **In order for community members, advocates and allies to work with CPS towards improvement, there must be transparent reporting made available on both the use of disciplinary actions and how these policies are paid for.**

These recommendations are modeled on the successful examples set by other urban school districts, such as Denver, Baltimore and Boston. In Baltimore, for example, since a 2008 re-write of the Code of Conduct, the number of suspensions has dropped from 26,000 to 10,000 per year and graduation rates are at a record high. It is time to recognize that zero tolerance has fundamentally failed to make our schools safer. Its emphasis on harsh punishment and removal from school disrupts the learning environment, decreases student achievement, and costs taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. CPS must stop “getting tough,” and instead get smart about spending our money on policies that support student learning.



# INTRODUCTION

In May 2010, Juan was in the second semester of his senior year at a high school on Chicago's north side.<sup>1</sup> He had been arrested outside of school two months ago for writing graffiti and, feeling that the police had been fair and given him a second chance, he was working hard to pull up his grades and graduate on time by requesting additional work from his teachers and spending less time with his friends. It was a surprise, then, when he was called into the security office for questioning:

*The security guards knew what name I used when I wrote graffiti, because the police computers in their office showed that I had been arrested. They told me that they were trying to get this tagger who had been destroying school property and that they were checking with all of the writers in the school if they know him to turn him in. I told them that if I knew him, I would turn him in, but I don't know him.*

*They said that since I didn't give them his name, they were going to punish me instead, for this one-inch-sized tag that I had made like two years ago, before even my first arrest. The assistant principal and the cops came in and I said, I know I did that damage but I'll clean it off, I know how to clean it off. I told him I already got*

*arrested before and I want to graduate, I'm doing better in school and I only got a few weeks left to graduation. But all he did was look me in the eye, he didn't answer me, he just left the room. So I asked the cops, what is his decision? And they said, we're sorry to tell you this but he decided to arrest you.*

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## Student stories and academic research show that harsh discipline does not actually lead to safer schools.

Juan was handcuffed and taken to the police station, where he was allowed to call his mother and girlfriend before spending six hours in an empty cell. What followed next was a series of escalating obstacles in his path to graduation. He returned to school after a three-day suspension, only to find that his suspension had been extended to two weeks, the maximum length before expulsion.

Although his girlfriend collected his make-up work for him, he saw grades that he had raised to A's and C's drop back to F's again. And as an undocumented student, he now has a record that will make it harder to apply for citizenship. In thinking back on his experience, Juan believes that no one at his school ever made him feel as bad about himself as the assistant principal did that one day. Juan described the questions that were going through his head when he was arrested: "How are you just going to walk away and not respond to me? You're telling me I'm going to be a criminal instead of seeing that I'm trying to do good now."

<sup>1</sup> All student names and identifying features have been changed. To read Juan's story in his own words, go to page 21.

## INTRODUCTION

As a result of Chicago Public School's overuse of harsh discipline policies and practices, stories like Juan's are all too common. In 2009 alone, police made 4,597 school-based arrests of students ages 16 and under, 78% of which were for misdemeanor offenses such as disorderly conduct, fighting or vandalism (Paul, 2010). As Juan's story shows, misdemeanor arrests—which are theoretically reserved for extremely serious offenses—are too often given to students even when there is no threat to student safety, or when more logical alternatives are clearly available, such as Juan's offer to clean off the marking himself.

Recent data also illustrates the frequency with which out-of-school suspensions are used to punish students. In the 2008-2009 school year, about 16% of 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders were suspended, causing them to miss, on average, a week of school over the course of the year (5.2 days). About 22% of high school students were suspended that year, missing an average of 6.6 days over the course of the year (Steinberg et al., 2011). The most recent

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**In the 2008-2009 school year, 25,470 high school students were suspended, missing an average of 6.6 days of school.**

suspension data, from the 2009-2010 school year, shows that 89,336 out-of-school suspensions were administered that year—almost four times as many as there were just eight years earlier (Illinois State Board of Education, 2010). Research has shown that Black and Latino students bear the brunt of these numbers, and are punished more harshly than their White peers for equivalent

offenses (Skiba, 2000). For example, a *Catalyst Chicago* report found that over the course of the 2008-2009 school year, one out of every four Black male students was suspended at least once, a rate twice as high as the district average (Anderson, 2009). These numbers are particularly troubling given the research showing that out-of-school suspensions do not make schools safer, and can in fact make schools less safe by damaging the trusting student-teacher relationships that are critical to establishing a calm and focused learning environment (Steinberg et al., 2011).

These numbers are the result of CPS's continued investment in zero tolerance policies and practices. As the American Psychological Association defined it in a 2008 report, "zero tolerance policies assume that removing students who engage in disruptive behavior will deter others from disruption and create an improved climate for those students who remain" (pp. 852).

Zero tolerance thus operates by mandating “the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context” (852).

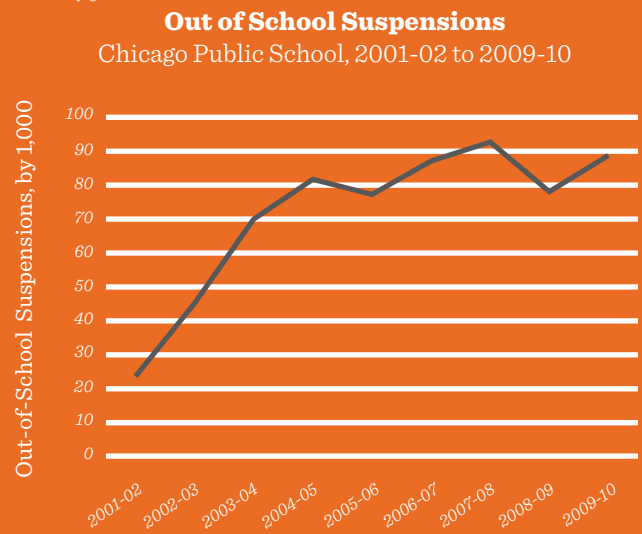
It is important to note that while an official endorsement of zero tolerance language was removed from the CPS Student Code of Conduct, the policy is both written and applied in a way that fits with the above definitions. By placing no limits on how harshly students can be punished for minor offenses and failing to prioritize due process, parent outreach, or research-based models of prevention and support, CPS policy has created a de facto zero tolerance system in which young people are punished far too harshly for small offenses, the application of disciplinary action is extremely inconsistent from student to student or day to day, and youth often have no way to defend themselves against accusations of misconduct. Findings from a 2011 study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research back up what parents and students have been saying for years—that this costly approach damages the student, teacher and parent relationships that are the cornerstone of safe and successful schools:

Inside the school building, the mutually supportive relationships that students and their parents have with teachers are the most critical elements defining school safety for both students and teachers. ... High rates of suspension do not show any benefit for either students’ or teachers’ feelings of safety at school, and they may even have adverse effects on school climate by aggravating distrust between students and adults. (Steinberg et al., 2011, p. 47)

The following section of this report, “The True Cost of Getting Tough,” draws on student stories, academic research, and an analysis of city and state budgets to examine in detail the impact of these policy decisions on student achievement, school climate, and the CPS budget. This is followed by “Making Smart Investments,” which describes the key steps that CPS must take to make our schools safe, raise graduation rates, and save taxpayers huge amounts of money in the process. Sidebars throughout the report showcase individual student stories, best practices from other big cities, and an analysis of the prevalent myths surrounding zero tolerance.

All cost-analysis research for this report was done by Jim Freeman and Daniel Farbman at Advancement Project. The

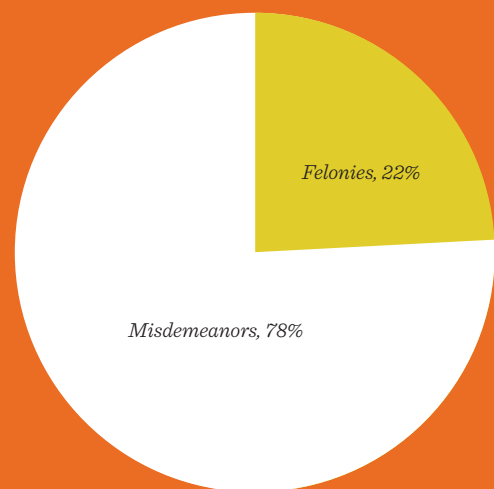
fig 1



Source: Illinois State Board of Education

fig 2

**4,597 Chicago School-Based Arrests**  
Ages 16 and Under, 2009



Source: WBEZ Chicago Public Radio

## INTRODUCTION

analysis relied on publicly-available data and research, as well as budgetary information provided by the Chicago Public Schools. The budget analysis was limited to central office spending, and did not include spending by individual schools or Area Offices. As a result, all of the expenditures described here (such as spending on security measures) are conservative. All city- and state-specific projections were made based on publicly available budgetary data and percentages published in peer-reviewed research.

Student stories were collected through a series of in-person interviews conducted by VOYCE Coordinator Emma Tai and through a youth forum hosted by VOYCE on April 15, 2011. All names and identifying details have been changed to protect the safety and anonymity of the students.







## KEY FINDINGS: THE COST OF “GETTING TOUGH”

Zero tolerance operates by assuming that the application of harsh punishments for both major and minor offenses deters students from misconduct, thus creating a safe and positive learning environment. Since the 1990s, Chicago Public Schools has spent tens of millions of dollars every year on the school security and administrative costs needed to implement the policies and practices that accompany this philosophy. Yet all the research suggests that, instead of improving school climate and increasing student achievement, harsh discipline policies have actually worsened the learning environment and resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars in long-term costs to the taxpayers.

### **Finding #1: Zero tolerance does not make schools safer or lead to improved student achievement.**

The goal of any effective discipline system—and, by extension, any effective school district—is to maximize student learning by

providing safe, supportive and engaging environments in which that learning can take place. An analysis of youth experiences with zero tolerance and academic research on its implementation shows that zero tolerance policies have consistently failed to deliver on this goal.

Last year, there was a fight going on between two girls. One of the police officers tried to get one of the girls off the other. When they finally separated them apart, the girl kept talking, so they tasered her. The girl was only about fifteen, all she was doing was talking and she undeservedly got tasered. What they did was wrong. What if I was the one who had gotten tasered?

Lalo  
sophomore

Zero tolerance is primarily enforced in Chicago through the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, which punish students for misconduct by removing them from school for anywhere from one day to multiple years. The justification for using these punishments is two-fold: for one, proponents of zero tolerance believe that removing “trouble-makers” from the classroom creates a better learning environment for the other students, and secondly,

they argue that the application of these harsh punishments makes schools safer by deterring students from future misbehavior.

Neither of these justifications, however, holds up under scrutiny. For one, there is no evidence to suggest that pushing disruptive students out of school ultimately improves the learning

environment of the school. A 2011 study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, for example, found that “high rates of suspensions do not sufficiently address the problems that schools face” (34). Even when schools serve similar students from similar neighborhoods and backgrounds, those that rely heavily on out-of-school suspension are significantly less safe than those with low rates of suspension. “At worst,” the researchers conclude, “this suggests that suspensions themselves may aggravate problems with safety” (34).

Additional research supports this conclusion. Schools with higher rates of suspension and expulsion have worse school climates and a decreased focus on instruction, in part as a result of spending a disproportionate amount of administrative time on school discipline (Scott & Barrett, 2004). It has also

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## **Suspensions themselves may aggravate problems with safety.**

been shown that the higher a school’s rate of suspension and expulsion, the lower the academic achievement of its students—even taking factors like race and class out of the equation (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Raffaele-Mendez, 2003; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). As the American Psychological Association’s Zero Tolerance Task Force concludes, we can’t “argue that zero tolerance creates

more positive school climates when its use is associated with more negative achievement outcomes” (854).

The research on suspensions also shows that they fail to prevent future misbehavior. In fact, researchers have found that the exact opposite happens: being suspended increases your likelihood of being suspended in the future (Tobin et al., 1996). Since suspensions do nothing to address the root causes of misconduct—and can in fact even aggravate student feelings of stress and alienation—it is no surprise that up to 40% of school suspensions are due to repeat offenders (Comer & Poussaint, 1992; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004; Skiba, 2000).

In addition to suspensions and expulsions, school districts such as Chicago enforce zero tolerance policies through spending on school security measures such as metal detectors and surveillance cameras, under the assumption that these tools are effective in catching offenders and deterring misbehavior. Again, there is no research to support the claim that these measures foster a safe and supportive learning environment for students. Two major national studies (Heaviside et al., 1998;

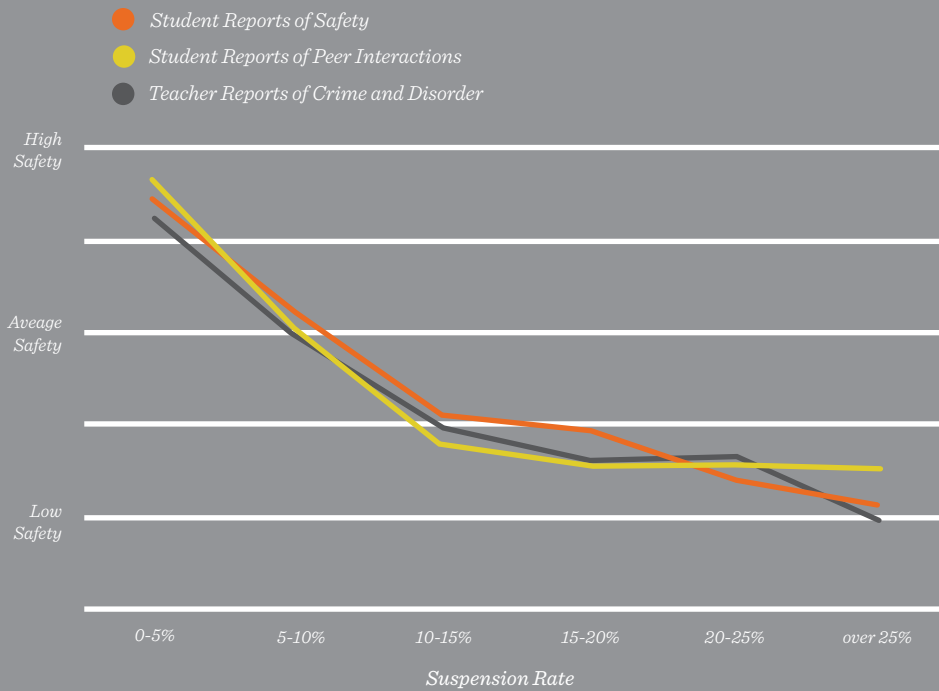
One thing I don’t like about my high school is the hall sweeps [where guards “sweep” the hallways for any students in the halls after the bell rings. Any student caught in a hall sweep automatically gets a detention, or worse]. It’s kind of hard to go to your locker and get your stuff and not get caught in the hall sweep, because you only have a limited amount of time to go to your locker and some of the floors with the lockers are really long. But they would put on the intercom, “Hall Sweep!” and then teachers will lock their doors and then they’ll sweep everyone on the floor and give them detention. I got caught when I was trying to get my books out of my locker. You just sit there and do random work and try not to get caught on the next sweep.

Alex  
sophomore

*Continued on page 15*

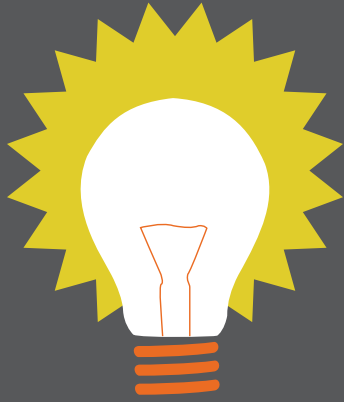
fig 3

**Schools With Higher Suspension Rates  
Are Less Safe, On Average**



Each node on the graph represents the average level of safety by the percent of students suspended for at least one day during the 2008-2009 school year (n=524 schools for student reports and 388 schools for teacher reports). “High Safety” is one standard deviation above the mean (about the 66th percentile). “Average Safety” is the 50th percentile; and “Low Safety” represents one standard deviation below the mean (about the 33rd percentile). The average suspension rate during the 2008-09 school year was 21.6 percent for high schools and 8.7 percent for K-8 schools.

Source: Steinberg, M.P., Allensworth, E. & Johnson, D.W. (2011). *Student and Teacher Safety in Chicago Public Schools: The Roles of Community Context and School Social Organization*. Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.



## MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

### **Myth #1:**

In truly chaotic schools, teachers and principals have no choice but to use out-of-school suspensions and expulsions.

### **Fact:**

The research suggests that the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions actually make schools less safe. This is due, in part, to the fact that harsh disciplinary actions damage the student-teacher relationships that are essential to building a safe school culture (Steinberg et al., 2011). The better alternative is the implementation of evidence-based models for effective prevention and intervention, which lay a foundation for student achievement by reducing violence and building a positive school climate. One of the strongest models is known as “primary prevention,” which uses a three-tiered approach: prevent misconduct through building a positive school climate and the teaching of appropriate behavior; intervening early with strong support systems for students who are at-risk of developing serious behavior problems; and the use of targeted, wraparound supports for those students who repeatedly disrupt learning (Walker & Shinn, 2002).

### **Myth #2:**

Harsh discipline teaches trouble-makers their lesson, deterring them from misbehaving again and creating a better learning environment for all students.

*Continued on page 16*

I don't really feel safe with security, because even though they're around there's still people getting jumped or hurt in the bathrooms or lunchrooms. I've seen people get into it with security guys. If you have some kind of outside relationship with them, they'll have your back, but if not, you get in trouble.

Jonathon  
junior

*Continued from page 12*

Mayor & Leone, 1999) found that the schools that spend more on security measures continue to be less safe than those who spend less. In some ways, this seems intuitive--schools that are struggling with higher rates of misconduct are likely to use more metal detectors and surveillance cameras to try to bring violence down. However, these studies also show that security measures do little to increase school safety, since significant spending on these measures has failed to create safer schools.

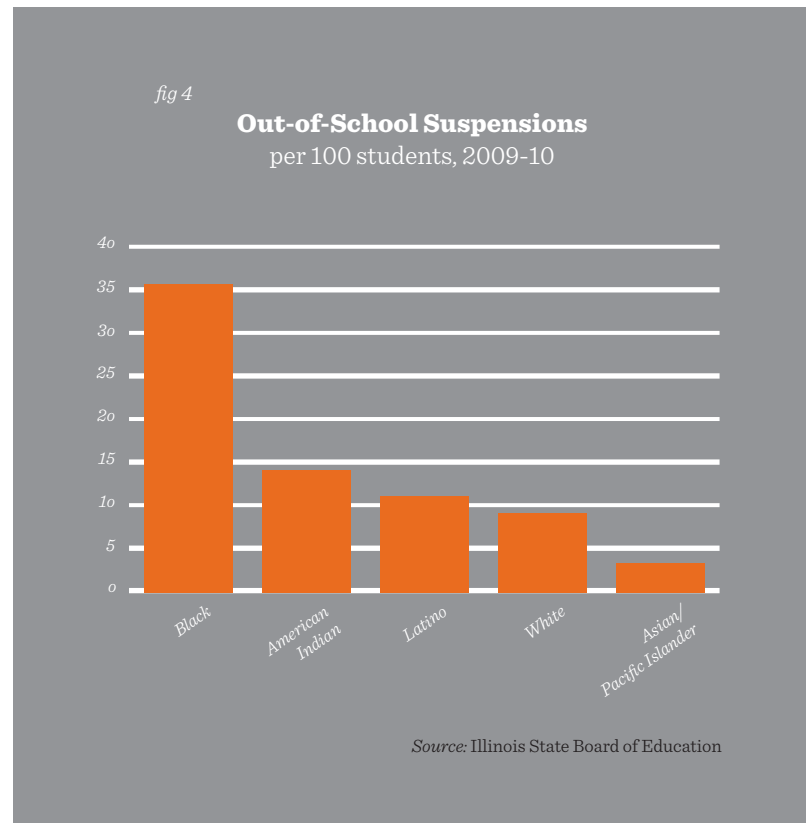
Not only do suspensions, expulsions, and school security fail to achieve their most basic objective—fostering school safety through the prevention of misbehavior and the removal of disruptive students—but they are also linked to a set of negative outcomes. For one, harsh punishments increase a young person’s sense of alienation, anxiety, and distrust of school staff, in many cases escalating rather than defusing school disruption (Shores et al., 1993; Comer & Poussaint, 1992; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). The atmosphere of punishment and intimidation fostered by zero tolerance thus prevents students and school staff from forming the trusting and supportive relationships that are critical to learning (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; APA, 2008; Steinberg et al., 2011).

The research also suggests that there is a strong relationship between receiving harsh punishments and dropping out. A recent study from Chicago found students who were arrested were much more likely to drop out of school than their non-arrested peers. Researchers found that out of 100 Chicago students who had been arrested, 71 would drop out and 29 would graduate. On the flip side, the study concluded that students who had not been arrested had a .46 probability of dropping out (46 out of 100). Thus, according to this study, students who have been arrested are 50% more likely than students who are not arrested to drop out (Kirk & Sampson, 2011). Two national studies have drawn similar conclusions, suggesting that experience with school discipline is one of the strongest predictors of whether or not a student will drop out (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). And while more long-term research is needed on the relationship between zero tolerance and incarceration, initial studies have shown that being suspended or expelled increases the likelihood that a student will enter the criminal justice system (Carmichael et al., 2005; Christle et al., n.d.).

Low-income students of color, particularly Black students, bear the brunt of these negative outcomes. While there is no research that suggests that Black students are more disruptive

*Continued on page 19*

**Significant spending on metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and other harsh security measures has failed to create safer schools.**



*Continued from page 14*

**Fact:**

Being suspended has not been shown to prevent future misconduct. In fact, researchers have found that the exact opposite happens: being suspended increases your likelihood of being suspended in the future (Tobin et al., 1996). This may be due in part to the very real psychological harm done by harsh punishments, which increase a young person’s sense of alienation, anxiety, and rejection, and decrease their trust and respect for school staff (Comer & Poussaint, 1992; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). There is also no evidence to suggest that pushing disruptive students out of school ultimately improves learning environments. In fact, a slew of recent studies suggest that schools with higher rates of suspension and expulsion have worse school climates and a decreased focus on instruction (APA, 2008). It has also been shown that the higher a school’s rate of suspension and expulsion, the lower the academic achievement of its students—even taking factors like race and class out of the equation (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Raffaele-Mendez, 2003; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

**Myth #3:**

In truly chaotic schools, teachers and principals have no choice but to use out-of-school suspensions and expulsions.

**Fact:**

The research suggests that the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions actually make schools less safe. This is due, in part, to the fact that harsh disciplinary actions damage the student-teacher relationships that are essential to building a safe school culture (Steinberg et al., 2011). The better alternative is the implementation of evidence-based models for effective prevention and intervention, which lay a foundation for student achievement by reducing violence and building a positive school climate. One of the strongest models is known as “primary prevention,” which uses a three-tiered approach: prevent misconduct through building a positive school climate and the teaching of appropriate behavior; intervening early with strong support systems for students who are at-risk of developing serious behavior problems; and the use of targeted, wraparound supports for those students who repeatedly disrupt learning (Walker & Shinn, 2002).

**Myth #4:**

Smaller cities like Denver are able to eliminate zero

*Continued on page 18*



# JAMAR'S STORY

*Jamar Robinson is a senior at a high school on Chicago's south side. He has attended this school since his sophomore year, when he was kicked out of his first high school. His experience illustrates how school administrators can boost their school's academic standing and avoid the due process associated with expulsions by simply "dropping" students from the school roster, even when the student has not seriously misbehaved.*

I remember when I first started high school, it was difficult for me. I didn't know what to expect or what to do. When the bell rang, I just sat there because I didn't know I was supposed to get up. I had a hard time finding my classes. I didn't know my counselor, and I had issues with teachers and principals. Like, the assistant principal would get on the intercom in the hallways [after the bell rang] saying, "Everybody get to class! Robinson, get out the hallway or I'm kicking you out!" And I'd be like, where is he at? I know he don't see me. Every time something bad happened, he'd think that me or my friends did it.

I had a friend who always used to cut class, and one day this friend influenced me to come with him. Security was just sitting there right next to us, they let us cut class. I started cutting every day, because I didn't think school was that important. Sometimes, we'd get in-school [suspensions] on purpose so we could just sit in there. We did it for two weeks straight. I think the point of in-school suspension is to try to get you to a breaking point where you think, "I can't do this, I can't sit in here like this, it's killing me." But there was nothing bad going on there. We could just talk all day and eat snacks and stuff.

My sophomore year, I cut class one day to see my girlfriend, but I got caught by a teacher and he sent me to the disciplinary office. I went to the office. They said they were gonna suspend me for two days. I had never been suspended before. But then the assistant principal came in and she asked what was going on. She saw my grades were low, my attendance was kind of bad. She said, "OK, let's drop him." So they dropped me and told my mom to come up the next morning.

When I left [that school], my mom tried getting me into a couple schools, but they told me that my grades were bad and they wouldn't let me in. So I was out of school between December 19 to January 26.

When I got to my new high school, I was trying to do my work and get back on task. I found out that my girlfriend was pregnant. So I knew I really had to step up. So I was making sure I was doing my work, going to classes. When my report card came out, I had A's and B's and a couple of C's. But because of those F's my freshman year, I've been going to summer school every year since I was a freshman. Last year I went to summer school and Saturday school in order for me to graduate on time.

When I see students around here playing around, cutting classes, like some of my freshman mentees, I like to share my story with them. I want to see them succeed. I don't want to see them have the same issues that I had. I have a beautiful 1 year old son and he's my inspiration to continue to help others.

*Continued from page 16*

tolerance because their problems with gang violence and crime are not as serious as Chicago's.

**Fact:**

As the Consortium on Chicago School Research has shown, the level of crime in a community is not the most important predictor of school violence, and is in fact “completely overcome by the quality of school-based relationships” (Steinberg et al., 2011, p.47). Zero tolerance measures can actually increase violence in schools and communities by damaging these relationships and putting young people on the street instead of in school. Through the anti-crime organization Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, over 5,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and violence survivors have acknowledged this reality, campaigning instead for investments in early childhood education, mentoring and student supports, and access to mental health services.

**Myth #5:**

The increase in suspensions and expulsions is just a response to increasingly violent and disruptive student behavior.

**Fact:**

There is little research to support this claim. In fact, one of the most comprehensive studies on suspensions showed that factors like teacher attitudes, school governance, and the racial composition of a school were more likely to predict a school's suspension rate than actual student behaviors and attitudes. In other words, the suspension rate is more a result of school policy and practice than actual student behavior (Wu et al., 1982). Moreover, as illustrated by the myths and facts above, it is clear that using suspensions and expulsions as a response to misconduct simply doesn't work, and can in fact worsen both the school environment and individual student behavior (Steinberg et al., 2011; Tobin et al., 1996; APA, 2008).



The metal detectors don't work. Students can still get through with pocket knives without security noticing. One time my friend brought a blade, and I kept asking, how can they not see it go through the machine? If students can sneak stuff in and out, then what's the point of metal detectors?

Stephanie  
sophomore



*Continued from page 15*

or violent than other students, there is extensive documentation suggesting that Black students are disciplined more severely for less serious offenses (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden et al., 1992; Skiba et al., 2002). Chicago Public Schools is no exception to this trend: in the 2009-2010 school year, Black students were nearly four times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than their White peers (Illinois State Board of Education, 2010). And in the year before that, one out of every four Black male students was suspended at least once, a rate twice as high as the district average (Anderson, 2009).

As noted in the beginning of this report, the current CPS Student Code of Conduct includes some language aimed at limiting the negative outcomes associated with zero tolerance. These steps include a list of mitigating circumstances (such as the age, health and attitude of the student) which administrators are asked to consider when making disciplinary decisions, an endorsement of restorative justice practices, and a refusal to endorse zero tolerance philosophy, stating instead that all disciplinary processes are “intended to be instructional and corrective, not punitive” (3).

In practice, however, this falls far short of what is needed to truly support student learning. For one, the Student Code of Conduct does not specify which punishments are too harsh for minor offenses. This leads to students being suspended for multiple days for small offenses, like bringing a cell phone to school or being caught one too many times in the hallway after the bell has rung. Similarly, the Code of Conduct empowers schools to notify police for relatively small infractions, such as disorderly conduct, without setting clear limits on when it is not appropriate to call police. And lastly, while the Code of Conduct pays lip service to restorative justice, due process, and academic supports during out-of-school suspensions, CPS has not committed to the staff training and program funding needed to successfully implement these kinds of best practices. District-wide, the cumulative effect of these policies is a dramatically uneven disciplinary system from school to school.

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## **In 2011, CPS allocated just \$3.5 million towards school-based college and career coaches, and \$51.4 million towards school-based security guards.**

Given that twenty years of zero tolerance have not made our schools safer, why is it still so popular? One possible answer comes from how effective zero tolerance has been at pushing students out of school. There is significant research to suggest that zero tolerance measures have been used to actually rid schools of their most troubled students:

In this high school, the practice of cleansing the school of ‘bad kids’ was quite widely acknowledged and equally appreciated by administrators, teachers and counselors. Criticisms of the practice were voiced rarely, quietly, and confidentially behind closed doors. (Fine, 1986, p. 403)

The rise of high-stakes testing has only increased the pressure on teachers and principals to push out the “bad kids” whose test scores bring down their averages. With their employment and salaries on the line, more and more educators feel pressured to boost test scores however they can—including getting rid of low-scoring students through suspension, expulsion, referrals to alternative schools, or, as in Jamar’s case (see page 17), simply dropping them from the school’s roster (Advancement Project, 2010).

## **Finding #2: Enforcing and administering zero tolerance costs taxpayers tens of millions of dollars in the short term.**

Despite the mounting evidence to suggest that CPS’s approach to school discipline is counterproductive, the school district continues to spend tens of millions of dollars every year to enforce and administer these failed policies. In the 2010-2011 school year alone, the CPS central office budget included a \$67 million allocation for “school security,” a category that includes security officers, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras (see figure 5 on page 21). CPS also pays to have Chicago Police Department officers in all 96 high schools, at a cost to taxpayers that goes unspecified in the 2011 CPS budget (CPS budgeted \$8 million for this expense in the year prior).

*Continued on page 21*

# JUAN'S STORY

*Juan graduated from his northside high school in 2010. This is the story of his arrest and suspension from the introduction to the report, as told in his own words.*

I was going through some tough times, and the only thing that was there for me was to go outside and be tagging. My senior year, one night I got arrested and the cops told me, "You shouldn't be doing this, you're already going to graduate." They basically gave me a chance and didn't charge me with a higher crime, so I got lucky that time. So I kind of learned my lesson and decided that getting arrested won't do me better. I decided to start passing my classes, because I was failing. I was doing make-up work and had given up hanging out with my friends, my girlfriend, my family just to do my school work.

So then two months [after my arrest] they called me into the security office and started asking me these questions. The security guards knew what name I used when I wrote graffiti, because the police computers in their office showed that I had been arrested. They told me that they were trying to get this tagger who had been destroying school property and that they were checking with all of the writers in the school if they know him to turn him in. I told them that if I knew him, I would turn him in, but I don't know him.

They said that since I didn't give them his name, they were going to punish me instead, for this one-inch-sized tag that I had made like two years ago, before even my first arrest. The assistant principal and the cops came in and I said, I know I did that damage but I'll clean it off, I know how to clean it off. I told him I already got arrested before and I want to graduate, I'm doing better in school and I only got a few weeks left to graduation. But all he did was look me in the eye, he didn't answer me, he just left the room.

So I asked the cops, what is his decision? And they said, we're sorry to tell you this but he decided to arrest you. So they handcuffed me and led me outside the security office, and then I had to wait for the other cops to take me to the station, and I was just thinking that I was going humiliation that I should have never had to gone through.

After three days of suspension I went back, and they told me that we have here in the discipline code book that you have to get suspended more than this because of what you did. They told me, you're supposed to be having two weeks for this. I even had the paper with me [that said I had a three-day suspension], and my mom got upset. My parents thought that wasn't fair because they knew I was limited on time to do my school work and get back on track. But I'm like, I'm not going to play games with you guys, so I just took the extra days. It affected me big time, I had to ask my girlfriend to get my school work every day and I had to stay up overnight working on essays because of all those days I was missing at school. I always had an A in art class, and from an A it went back to an F. And there was one class that I had been actually failing, but I had barely made it up to a C and then because of those missed days the teacher just put an F on [the gradebook].

The assistant principal showed me he didn't care. I never felt that bad from a staff a member from the school, you know. How are you just going to walk away and not respond to me? You're telling me I'm going to be a criminal instead of seeing that I'm trying to do good now. Instead, how about you tell me, "I'll take you to this art class to get your mind off that street, let's make the school better. Can you coordinate some murals inside or outside the school?" Luckily I had a mindset where today I am not committing any crimes, I'm working. But what they did made me feel like this is what you are going to do throughout your whole life. You're going to become a criminal. That's how they made me feel.

*Continued from page 19*

These numbers and further budget analysis suggest that CPS has prioritized the hiring of security staff over the hiring of support staff. For example, a closer look at the 2011 central office budget finds that CPS allocated just \$3.5 million towards college and career coaches based in the schools (included in the Office of College and Career Preparation allocation), and \$51.4 million towards school-based security guards (included in the Office of Safety and Security allocation).<sup>2</sup> Original research conducted by VOYCE in four neighborhood high schools across the city illustrates the on-the-ground consequences of these spending decisions. As shown in figure 6, each of the four schools had approximately twice as many security staff as guidance counselors. For example, at High School A on the southwest side, each counselor has an average caseload of 354 students, while the student-security guard ratio is 167:1. School A has just one full-time social worker at the school to address the needs of a student population of more than 3,100 students. Similarly, High School C, on Chicago’s northwest side, has one counselor for every 363 students, one security guard for every 161 students, and one full-time social worker for a student population of more than 1,400 students.

While the exact numbers are not publicly available, it is also safe to say that there are huge additional costs associated with enforcing CPS’s discipline code. It takes significant time and resources to process tens of thousands of suspensions, expulsions and referrals to alternative schools. For example, the majority of the \$1.4 million budget for the Office of Student Support and Engagement includes a \$1.1 million allocation for the hearings, appeals and officers associated with the expulsion process. The City of Chicago also pays the administrative costs associated with questioning, processing, charging and detaining the thousands of youth who are arrested in school every year. Moreover, because these policies contribute to Chicago’s high truancy and dropout rates, they result in a loss of state and federal funding for CPS, which are based on attendance and enrollment numbers. For example, in the 2009-2010 school year,

<sup>2</sup> The budget numbers included in this analysis and in figure 5 are taken directly from the Chicago Public Schools FY2011 budget, which describes all revenue and expenses by department. It is important to note that the 2011 Office of Safety and Security allocation includes central office spending on school-based security guards, but does not include school-level discretionary spending on security measures or central office spending on school-based police officers. The 2011 Office of Safety and Security budget does not include \$40 million in federal stimulus funds for “Violence Prevention Initiatives,” such as Culture of Calm and Safe Passage.

fig 5

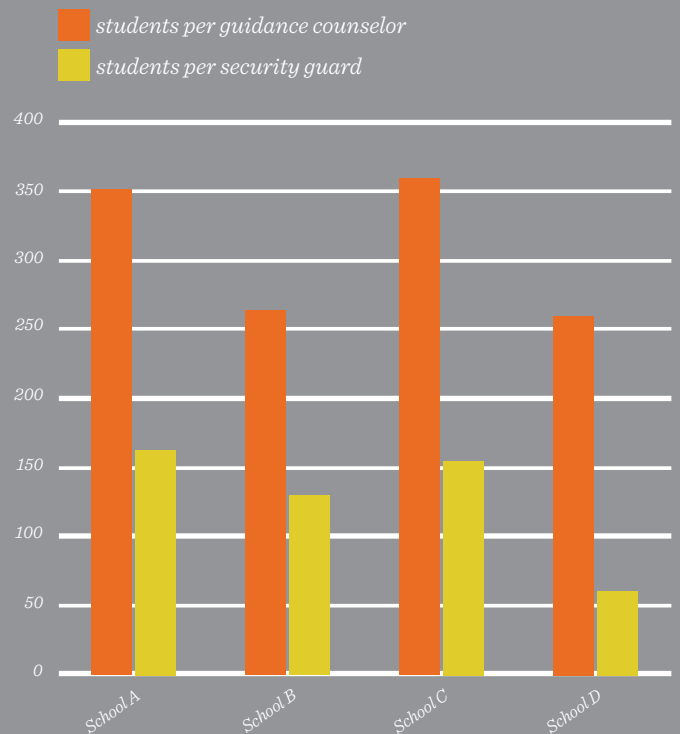
**Chicago Public Schools  
2011 Departmental Budgets**

Department	Budget	Full-Time Employees
Office of Safety and Security	\$67 Million	1,086
Office of College and Career Preparation	\$35 Million	137
Office of Language and Cultural Education	\$29 Million	261
Graduation Pathways	\$17 Million	19
After-School Learning	\$15 Million	16
Office of Arts Education	\$1.5 Million	5
Office of Student Support and Engagement	\$1.4 Million	7
Office of Teaching and Learning	\$0.8 Million	8

fig 6

**Student-Staff Ratios**

at Four Chicago Public Schools, 2011



## **KEY FINDINGS:** *The Cost of “Getting Tough”*

every student who was not enrolled or absent on “count day” cost CPS \$6,119 in lost state revenue. That year, the state counted 349,196 students throughout CPS, when CPS estimated that in fact 409,279 students were enrolled that year. This means that low attendance, caused in part by push-out and harsh discipline, cost the district \$370 million in lost revenue.

### **Finding #3: Over the long term, the negative outcomes of zero tolerance—including an increase in dropout and incarceration rates—cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.**

Zero tolerance is not only ineffective, but in fact counter-productive. As illustrated in Finding #1, experiences with harsh school discipline lead to a set of negative outcomes, including the increased likelihood of dropping out and entering the criminal justice system. By combining existing cost-analysis projections and publicly available city and state data suggests that in Chicago alone, we see that the public costs of these negative outcomes are incredibly costly to taxpayers over the long term, incurring hundreds of millions of dollars in indirect costs and losses of revenue.

For one, we know that it is much more cost-effective to educate students than to incarcerate them. The annual cost of educating a student in Chicago is approximately \$12,880, while the annual cost of incarcerating a young person is \$76,095—almost six times the cost of their education (Chicago Public Schools 2010; IL Department of Corrections 2010).

Over the long-term, these numbers add up. A 2007 study by Henry Levin et al. has shown that every young person who does not graduate from high school represents a financial loss to the public of \$209,000 over his or her lifetime. That price tag reflects factors such as lost tax revenue, higher public health costs, higher public assistance costs, and higher criminal justice costs. As stated above, students who have been arrested are 50% more likely to drop out (Kirk & Sampson, 2011); combined with the estimate for the cost of each lost graduate, we can predict that CPS’s school-based arrests in 2009 alone will cost Chicago tax payers around \$240 million over the long run.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This is based on the 4,597 arrests of students 16 and younger in 2009. While some students were likely arrested more than once, the estimate is still conservative, because it does not include school-based arrests of students who are 17 and older.

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**Every young person who does not graduate from high school represents a financial loss to the public of \$209,000 over his or her lifetime.**

At my old school there was a guard who would let students go into the bathroom and fight. You would tell him you want to go in the bathroom and fight this person and he’d actually let you go in to fight while he would look out. And there was another security guard who was actually in one of the gangs that was at the school, so he looked out for them and when stuff was going on, he’d let them know.

Jamar  
senior

# RECOMMENDATIONS: MAKING SMART INVESTMENTS

Instead of spending millions to punish and criminalize youth, Chicago should invest in the policy solutions that are less expensive right now and will more than pay for themselves over the long term. The first and most immediately cost-effective alternative to many of these policies is simply to stop implementing them. For example, assuming that one year of school-based arrests in Chicago adds up to \$240 million in long-term costs, as shown above, we see that simply cutting the annual number of arrests in half would result in \$120 million in economic benefits to the city per year. CPS could additionally save tens of millions of dollars by ending the use of harsh disciplinary practices and the over-use of security guards, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras, and instead investing in cost-effective strategies that actually improve school safety and high school graduation rates. Instead of harsh disciplinary measures and an over-reliance on law enforcement, CPS should follow the lead of districts like Denver Public Schools and Baltimore City Public Schools, which are limiting the role of law enforcement and improving school safety and academic outcomes through prevention strategies and non-punitive interventions (see sidebar on page 24).

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**Supportive relationships between students and teachers are the “most critical elements defining school safety for both students and teachers.”**

Zero tolerance has failed to make our schools safer and has contributed directly to the low graduation and high incarceration rates of Chicago’s students of color. It is time for CPS to stop investing in the enforcement of zero tolerance, and direct those funds toward policies and practices that promote positive relationships between students and teachers. As a recent study from the Consortium on Chicago School Research concluded, supportive relationships between students and teachers are the “most critical elements defining school safety for both students and teachers.” As a recent study from the consortium on Chicago School Research concluded, supportive relationships between students and teachers are the “most critical elements defining school safety for both students and teachers”:

Punitive measures are less likely to be effective than measures that build and foster respect and trust. ...The gap in safety between schools with middle and high levels of advantage (in terms of poverty, crime or achievement) is completely overcome by the quality of school-based relationships. CPS schools that serve typical students from

## RECOMMENDATIONS: *Making Smart Investments*

typical neighborhoods are as safe as schools serving the most advantaged students in the system if their schools have cultivated strong partnerships with parents, and between teachers and students. (p. 47)

By investing in student supports and instruction, CPS can not only increase safety and raise graduation rates, but save taxpayers huge amounts of money in both the short and long term. For example, Illinois's Center for Tax and Budget Accountability has demonstrated that school districts can improve their academic outcomes simply by investing in their per-pupil instructional costs (Martire et al., 2008). In "An Excellent Education for All America's Children," researchers from the Center for Cost-Benefit Studies of Education take this one step further, showing that

interventions that successfully increase graduation rates yield a 250% return on investment. Thus, re-allocating \$100 million of the city funds spent on harsh discipline and law enforcement towards research-based methods for strengthening supports, engagement and instruction would conservatively lead to \$250 million in increased tax revenues and reduced criminal justice and public health costs. Looking at these numbers another way, we see that if CPS cut the number of non-graduating ninth graders in half—or, in other words, graduated an additional 7,149 students every year—through investments in social-emotional supports and instruction, the long-term economic benefits for the city would be \$1.5 billion per year.<sup>4</sup>

In order to graduate all students ready for college and careers, Chicago must stop pushing youth out through harsh discipline

<sup>4</sup> In the same report, researchers from the Center for Cost-Benefit Studies in Education calculate that every young person who graduates from high school generates \$209,000 in benefits to the public sector through increased tax revenue, and decreased public health, safety and assistance costs. Using this figure, we see that if CPS produced an additional 7,149 high school graduates in one year, the long-term economic benefit of this increased graduation rate would be \$1.5 billion ( $7,149 \times \$209,000 = \$1,494,141,000$ ).

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**In order to graduate all students ready for college and careers, Chicago must stop pushing youth out through harsh discipline policies and instead invest in the supports and the instruction that they need to succeed.**

*Continued on page 27*

fig 7

**Students Report Feeling Safer in Schools With Strong Relationships**

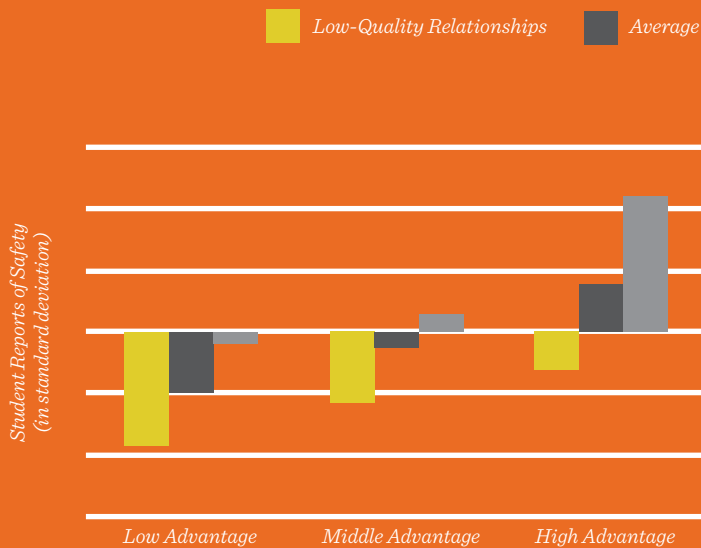
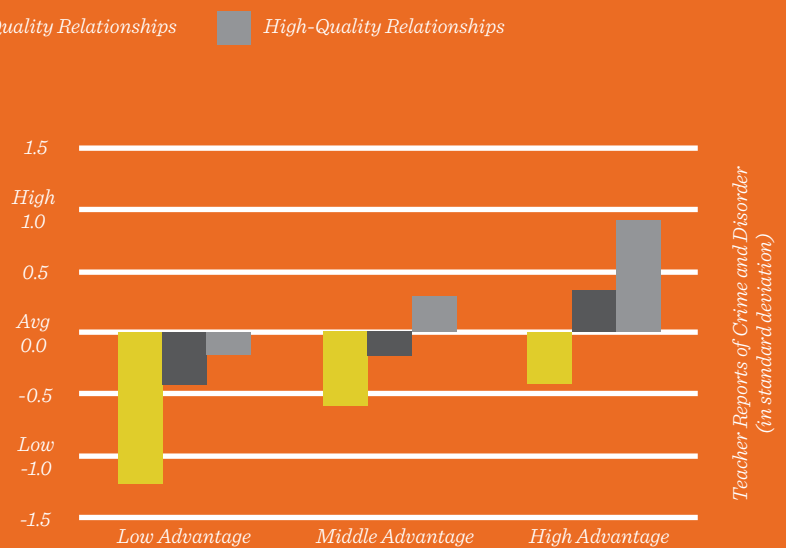


fig 8

**Teachers Report Less Crime and Disorder in Schools With Strong Relationships**



**Notes:** The values reported are the mean level of school safety as reported by students, in standard deviation units. A school's level of *Advantage* depends on the level of crime, poverty, and human and social resources in their students' home neighborhoods and the school academic achievement. A school's quality of *Relationships* depends on the quality of its *School-Family Interactions*, as perceived by teachers, and *Student-Teacher Relationships*, as perceived by students. Among *Low Advantage* schools, there are 95 schools with *Low-Quality Relationships*, 67 schools with *Average-Quality Relationships* and 17 schools with *High-Quality Relationships*. Among *Middle Advantage* schools, there are 59 schools with *Low-Quality Relationships*, 58 schools with *Average-Quality Relationships* and 36 schools with *High-Quality Relationships*. Among *High Advantage* schools, there are 15 schools with *Low-Quality Relationships*, 61 schools with *Average-Quality Relationships* and 128 schools with *High-Quality Relationships*.

**Notes:** The values reported are the mean level of crime and disorder as reported by teachers, in standard deviation units. A school's level of *Advantage* depends on the level of crime, poverty, and human and social resources in their students' home neighborhoods and the school academic achievement. A school's quality of *Relationships* depends on the quality of its *School-Family Interactions*, as perceived by teachers, and *Student-Teacher Relationships*, as perceived by students. Among *Low Advantage* schools, there are 59 schools with *Low-Quality Relationships*, 48 schools with *Average-Quality Relationships* and 13 schools with *High-Quality Relationships*. Among *Middle Advantage* schools, there are 45 schools with *Low-Quality Relationships*, 44 schools with *Average-Quality Relationships* and 31 schools with *High-Quality Relationships*. Among *High Advantage* schools, there are 12 schools with *Low-Quality Relationships*, 42 schools with *Average-Quality Relationships* and 93 schools with *High-Quality Relationships*.

Source: Steinberg, M.P., Allensworth, E. & Johnson, D.W. (2011). *Student and Teacher Safety in Chicago Public Schools: The Roles of Community Context and School Social Organization*.



## BEST PRACTICES FROM OTHER CITIES

Urban school districts around the country are beginning to recognize the harm done by expensive, counter-productive zero tolerance policies. Below are some examples of what these districts have done to foster greater student safety and achievement.

### **Denver Public Schools**

Thanks to strong organizing by *Padres y Jovenes Unidos*, Denver Public Schools re-wrote the Student Code of Conduct in 2006-2008. The new Code of Conduct included a number of key improvements:

The maximum out-of-school suspension period is three days, except for the most serious level of infractions.

School officials can only refer students to the police for truly serious infractions, most of which are required by state law to be reported.

Schools are required to submit annual reports on their intervention and prevention strategies, as well as on their use of disciplinary actions sorted by race, ethnicity, age, grade, disability, gender, and differences in referrals among staff members. The district is then required to “evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the school discipline plan” based on this data.

### **Baltimore City Public Schools**

In 2007, the Open Society Institute worked with Baltimore City Public Schools to commission a task force made up of teachers,

principals, parents and youth advocates aimed at re-writing the Code of Conduct. The new discipline code, which was finalized in 2008, emphasizes prevention and intervention and strongly discourages the use of suspensions and expulsions, except as a last resort. Inappropriate behaviors are divided into four levels, and out-of-school suspensions are not an option for the first two levels (the CPS Code of Conduct allows administrators to suspend students for 1-3 days for the even the most minor category of offenses—things like coming late to class, loitering, or using Facebook). School administrators were fully trained on the meaning of the new Code of Conduct, and the CEO has since ended the use of suspensions as a punishment for attendance infractions, and required principals to receive approval from district administrators before suspending a student for more than five days.

Since the changes were made, the number of suspensions has dropped from 26,000 to 10,000 per year, and graduation rates are at a record high.

### **Boston Public Schools**

Boston’s Code of Discipline provides an extensive description of the rights afforded to parents and students when a young person is facing possible suspension or expulsion. For one, except in the case of emergency, all students are given a hearing prior to their suspension. The policy also emphasizes that parents have to be notified of their student’s hearing in a timely manner and in their home language. Boston also prohibits administrators from suspending students aged 15 or younger for more than three days.



*Continued from page 24*



policies and instead invest in the supports and the instruction that they need to succeed. As this report has illustrated, by allocating the funds currently spent on zero tolerance into policies that promote positive relationships and student success, the city can not only build safe learning environments for all its students, but save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars over the long term. In order to do this, VOYCE recommends the following key policy changes:

**Recommendation #1:  
Re-write the Student Code of Conduct**

While the current Code of Conduct pays some lip service to evidence-based models of school discipline (including the removal of zero tolerance language and a stated commitment to an instructional, corrective approach to discipline), its failure to provide key protections for students and clear limitations on the overuse of harsh punishments continue to foster and encourage the use of zero tolerance practices at the school level. CPS should re-write the Student Code of Conduct with significant input from VOYCE and other key stakeholders in the community, with the goal of providing schools with the clear guidelines they need to maximize the amount of learning time that all students receive. Based on Advancement Project’s “Model School Discipline Policy,” youth leaders specifically recommend that CPS put in place a graduated discipline system that:

Ends suspensions for minor offenses that pose no threat to student safety (examples include bringing a cell phone to school, tardiness, violating the dress code, or loitering). Although suspensions and harsher punishments would be off-limits for these types of infractions, CPS should make a wide range of effective interventions and responses available to teachers and administrators, allowing them to be tailored to each individual student’s case.

Replaces extended out-of-school suspensions with in-school suspensions that provide high-quality academic and behavioral supports. Currently, schools can issue out-of-school suspensions for 1-10 days for a wide range of behaviors—anything from the repeated use of Facebook to getting in a fight. As a result, the application of these punishments is wildly uneven and often overly harsh. The new Code of Conduct should clearly articulate which punishments are too harsh for which infractions. This includes replacing extended out-of-school suspensions with briefer in-school suspensions (1 to 3 days) in which students

*Continued on page 29*



## **STUDENTS SPEAK OUT: VOYCE CROSS-CITY YOUTH FORUM**

The recommendations and findings in this report come in part from a youth forum hosted by VOYCE on April 15, 2011, in which students from nine schools across the city of Chicago met to share their experiences with harsh discipline and student supports.

The forum got started with a performance by the youth music group JaroChicanos, while a smaller delegation of VOYCE leaders from Albany Park, Brighton Park, Kenwood Oakland and Logan Square was meeting with acting Chief Education Officer Charles Payne to get his feedback on a working draft of the recommendations presented in this report. The youth leaders then spoke to the crowd and Dr. Payne expressed his support and feedback to the audience.

After the speakers, youth facilitated small table discussions on the use of harsh discipline policies for minor offenses and the availability of social-emotional supports for freshmen. In these discussions, young people shared stories of favoritism and inconsistency, being suspended from school for minor offenses such as bringing cell phones to school or being late to class, and having their schedules switched repeatedly within the first few weeks of high school.

## The Student Code of Conduct should provide schools with the clear guidelines needed to maximize learning time for all students.



*Continued from page 27*

receive high-quality academic supports, to ensure that students don't fall behind and are able to continue learning despite being removed from the classroom. Suspensions should only be used when multiple lower-level interventions have been unsuccessful.

Uses out-of-school suspensions, expulsions and arrests only for the most serious and ongoing offenses, such as bringing a firearm to school. To increase fairness and consistency across the board, principals would be required to get approval from the district for any suspension longer than five days, and the use of arrests, expulsions, or extended suspensions should be accompanied by a thorough system of due process (including providing written notice to parents/guardians and providing clear opportunities to appeal the decision). Expulsions and referrals to alternative schools should only be used when 10-day suspensions and/or other disciplinary actions have not worked and the student's continued presence in the school endangers the safety of other students or staff. Arrests should only be used as a last resort, and school officials should be strongly encouraged to consider mitigating factors such as the age and intention of the student and the severity of their infraction.

In the past, CPS's failure to strengthen due process systems or conduct meaningful parent outreach (including translation of all policies) has harmed the student, teacher and parent relationships that are most essential to school safety and improvement (Steinberg et al, 2011; Bryk et al., 2010). CPS must invest in the training and supports needed to make sure that students and families have a way to protect themselves from overly harsh punishments and/or wrongful accusations.

### Recommendation #2: Increase transparency in reporting

Relationships between students, parents and educators have also been harmed by a lack of transparent reporting on the use of school disciplinary actions. CPS does not make data on the use of school disciplinary actions publicly available, nor does CPS report on much of its safety and security spending (for example, the cost of having police officers in the school is not broken out in the 2011 budget). Chicago should make data on the use of suspensions, expulsions, arrests and other disciplinary actions publicly available, including data grouped by grade, age, gender, race/ethnicity, disability and previous record. This should be used to hold both schools and the district accountable to not pushing out students. Additionally, there should be a transparent, independent analysis of the budget of the Office of Safety and Security to identify ineffective expenditures and make recommendations on how CPS can spend those funds more effectively. This increased transparency will help community members, advocates and allies work with CPS to assess the impacts of school discipline policies and make improvements where needed.

### Recommendation #3: Invest in research-based models of prevention, intervention and support

Despite the broad base of research support for a "primary prevention model" (Shinn et al., 2002)—which focuses on preventing school violence by building a positive school culture, intervening before minor misconduct escalates, and responding

*Continued on page 31*



## **BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR LEARNING: SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SUPPORTS IN FRESHMAN YEAR**

Since 2008, VOYCE has been organizing at both the school and district level for social-emotional supports and early college planning for incoming ninth-graders. Based on research showing that freshman-year grades, attendance rates, and course passing rates are key predictors for high school graduation rates (Allensworth, 2007; VOYCE, 2008), VOYCE has created the Freshman Year Initiative, which works to improve relationships, attitudes, expectations and investment through a youth-led system of social-emotional supports and early college planning.

With funding from CPS and local principals, students at eight VOYCE partner schools launched this initiative in the 2009-2010 school year, driven by three key goals: First, VOYCE aims to create youth-driven peer support systems for freshmen through year-round peer mentoring (including regular group activities and individual meetings) to provide freshmen with a constant source of positive peer influence in their lives; VOYCE also coordinates two youth-led retreats that focus on relationship-building and college planning. Secondly, VOYCE aims to improve relationships between students and teachers and connect freshmen to supportive school staff through regular one-on-one meetings with teachers, counselors, and peer mentors. These meetings provide opportunities to assess student performance and identify resources for additional support and improvement. Lastly, VOYCE aims to build a youth-led, college-going culture of high expectations through student-developed personalized

*Continued on page 32*

*Continued from page 29*

to more serious offenses with research-based strategies such as counseling and wraparound services—CPS continues to prioritize the implementation of zero tolerance strategies, which after 20 years have still “not provided evidence that [they] can guarantee safe and productive school climates” (APA, 2008, p. 857).

VOYCE recommends that CPS re-allocate wasteful spending on zero tolerance, investing instead in policies and programs that address the fundamental social, emotional and mental health needs of all students. The research has shown that in order for learning to take place, key school-level conditions need to be in place, including trusting and supportive relationships with peers and school staff; the sense of purpose that comes from high expectations and academic engagement; and emotional and physical safety (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Bryk et al., 2010; Steinberg et al., 2011).

As described on page 30 in “Building a Foundation for Learning,” for the past two years VOYCE has been organizing for school culture change through an emphasis on social-emotional supports and high expectations for incoming freshmen. With funding from CPS and local principals, youth leaders at eight partner schools have successfully impacted qualitative outcomes, such as high expectations and “student-teacher trust” (an indicator shown by the Consortium on Chicago School Research to have the most impact on student achievement), as well as freshman attendance and course passing rates.

These are the kinds of initiatives that CPS must support in order to build a safe, supportive and engaging learning environment for all Chicago students. After all, the best discipline policy is one that prevents misconduct through the development of a positive school culture and an emphasis on learning appropriate behavior. When misconduct does take place, it must be addressed through fully-funded, evidence-based interventions, such as mental health services and counseling, peer mediation, and restorative justice practices.



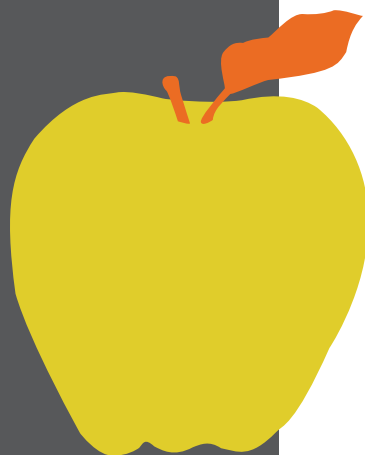
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**The best discipline policy is one that prevents misconduct through the development of a positive school culture and an emphasis on learning appropriate behavior.**

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graduation plans that help freshmen set ambitious goals for all four years of high school and identify peer-mentoring and teacher/counselor interventions that provide the support they need to meet their goals. Additionally, through partnerships with local colleges and universities, VOYCE co-hosts retreats, arranges for college visits, and connects freshmen to community members who have graduated from college.

In its first year, the Freshman Year Initiative engaged 313 high school freshmen, 104 10th-12th grade peer mentors, and 37 members of school staff (including teachers, principals, and guidance counselors) in the above activities. Surveys conducted at the beginning and end of the school year found that youth leaders successfully built a peer culture of high expectations and increased “teacher-student trust” in participating schools. This latter finding is significant in light of research (conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research) which demonstrates that when students and teachers have trusting relationships, schools demonstrate greater school attendance, fewer course failings, and improved GPAs. Indeed, based on student-level data collected at three of the pilot schools, VOYCE found that participating freshmen mentees attended school at a higher rate than their peers (11% more often) and that 62% of freshmen who had been identified for academic and attendance interventions on the Freshman Watch List became on-track to graduate. Moreover, at the schools where organizers engaged more than 25% of the freshman class, school-wide freshman on-track rates rose by 11 percentage points.



# CONCLUSION

As this report shows, for too long Chicago Public Schools has pursued a disastrous approach to discipline that is neither effective nor financially responsible. In these times of fiscal crisis, it is more important than ever that CPS bring these policies and practices to an end. VOYCE is calling on CPS to end the overuse of costly, ineffective harsh discipline policies, and instead make smart investments in the policies needed to build safe, supportive and engaging learning environments. It's the right thing for students, families and taxpayers alike.



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# REFERENCES

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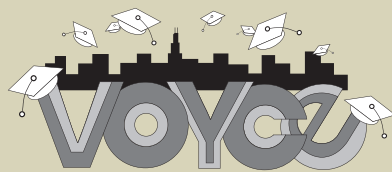


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