What can your state or district do?

Racial disparities in school discipline aren't inevitable. Policymakers, advocates, and school leaders can work together to address these disparities. This checklist is a start. Use it to assess existing systems and make changes to build a positive school climate — one where students can feel safe; have a supportive academic and physical environment; experience positive social and emotional growth; and have respectful, trusting, and caring relationships.

Each box represents a piece of the puzzle. These changes often must occur in stages, but **the goal is to eventually check every box** to ensure that all students — especially Black, Latina, and Native girls — attend a safe and inclusive school.
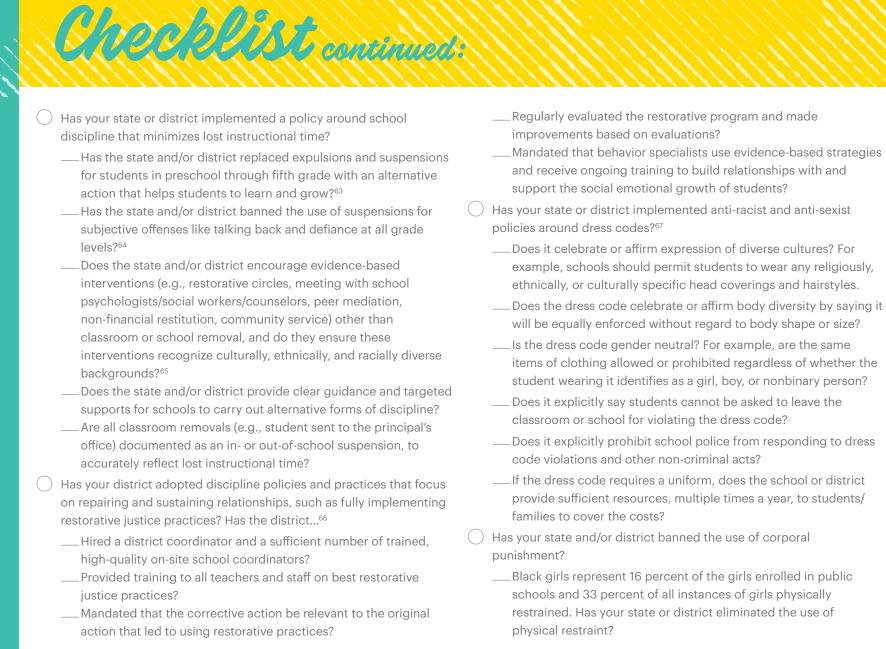
Checklist:

Data

◯ Does your district make discipline data publicly available in a way that breaks out race, gender, and disability status (i.e., data shows percentage of Black girls suspended)?

  ___ Does this data specify the type of offense for which students were suspended?

  ___ Does this data specify the length of suspensions?

  ___ Does this data include both the number of students suspended once and number of students suspended multiple times?

  ___ Is this data reported in a way that you can find info for students who fall into more than one category (e.g., instead of just reporting data for girls overall, does it also provide information for Black girls and Native girls)?

◯ Does your state or district use an evidence-based school climate survey[60] that allows you to break out results by race, gender, and disability status?

  ___ Has the state or district consulted students, parents, and other members of the community to make changes where necessary based on school climate data?

  ___ Has the state or district used school climate data to make changes to school policies?

Discipline Policies and Practices

◯ Does your district have a clear discipline policy that is...

  ___ Posted on the website and given to all families?

  ___ Available in diverse languages?[61]

  ___ Clear to students, families, and staff what students can and cannot be suspended, expelled, or miss class time for.[62]

  ___ Clear that students will not be suspended or expelled unless the district determines it's more likely than not the student violated the code of conduct?

Checklist *continued:*

○ Has your state or district implemented a policy around school discipline that minimizes lost instructional time?

— Has the state and/or district replaced expulsions and suspensions for students in preschool through fifth grade with an alternative action that helps students to learn and grow?[63]

— Has the state and/or district banned the use of suspensions for subjective offenses like talking back and defiance at all grade levels?[64]

— Does the state and/or district encourage evidence-based interventions (e.g., restorative circles, meeting with school psychologists/social workers/counselors, peer mediation, non-financial restitution, community service) other than classroom or school removal, and do they ensure these interventions recognize culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse backgrounds?[65]

— Does the state and/or district provide clear guidance and targeted supports for schools to carry out alternative forms of discipline?

— Are all classroom removals (e.g., student sent to the principal's office) documented as an in- or out-of-school suspension, to accurately reflect lost instructional time?

○ Has your district adopted discipline policies and practices that focus on repairing and sustaining relationships, such as fully implementing restorative justice practices? Has the district...[66]

— Hired a district coordinator and a sufficient number of trained, high-quality on-site school coordinators?

— Provided training to all teachers and staff on best restorative justice practices?

— Mandated that the corrective action be relevant to the original action that led to using restorative practices?

— Regularly evaluated the restorative program and made improvements based on evaluations?

— Mandated that behavior specialists use evidence-based strategies and receive ongoing training to build relationships with and support the social emotional growth of students?

○ Has your state or district implemented anti-racist and anti-sexist policies around dress codes?[67]

— Does it celebrate or affirm expression of diverse cultures? For example, schools should permit students to wear any religiously, ethnically, or culturally specific head coverings and hairstyles.

— Does the dress code celebrate or affirm body diversity by saying it will be equally enforced without regard to body shape or size?

— Is the dress code gender neutral? For example, are the same items of clothing allowed or prohibited regardless of whether the student wearing it identifies as a girl, boy, or nonbinary person?

— Does it explicitly say students cannot be asked to leave the classroom or school for violating the dress code?

— Does it explicitly prohibit school police from responding to dress code violations and other non-criminal acts?

— If the dress code requires a uniform, does the school or district provide sufficient resources, multiple times a year, to students/families to cover the costs?

○ Has your state and/or district banned the use of corporal punishment?

— Black girls represent 16 percent of the girls enrolled in public schools and 33 percent of all instances of girls physically restrained. Has your state or district eliminated the use of physical restraint?

Checklist continued:

Support for Systemwide Policy Change

○ The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a counselor to student ratio of 250 to 1.[68] Does the district ensure all schools have an adequate number of support staff, such as school counselors and school psychologists?

— Does the district or state track differences in school counselor to student ratios in schools with higher and lower concentrations of students of color or students from low-income backgrounds, and ensure that these historically underserved students are not being shortchanged?

○ Does your state or district encourage school climate self-audits to assess whether their policies are disproportionately affecting certain groups of students?

— Does the state or district offer targeted supports to schools that are disproportionately excluding certain groups of students from class?

○ According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), school-based mental health services are essential to creating and sustaining safe schools.[69] Does the state or district invest in school-based mental health services for students and families?

— Does the district partner with local health providers and community organizations to provide mental health services to students?

Culture and Communication

A crucial component of school climate is having an inclusive curriculum where students can see themselves reflected.

○ Does your district celebrate and encourage cultural diversity in meaningful ways?

— Does your district provide on-going professional development and coaching on culturally sustaining practices and reducing implicit bias?

— Has your district or state adopted curriculum procurement policies that emphasize cultural relevancy and diversity alongside academic rigor?[70] If so, has the district provided support and professional development to successfully implement the curriculum?

— Does the district provide educator and staff training on culturally sustaining pedagogy and on addressing race- and gender-based bias?

○ Does your state or district policy ensure purposeful and consistent communication with families and the community — not just when there is a problem?

— Does the district provide translators to all families who need them?

— Does the school code of conduct, harassment policy, and dress code require community engagement? For example, are students and families an integral process of writing the code of conduct, harassment policies, and dress codes?

◯ Has the state or district invested in the recruitment, training, and retention of teachers of color?

  — Has the district or school improved working conditions for teachers of color by developing programming to meaningfully engage, empower, and reward teachers for their efforts?

  — Has the school created cultures that are inclusive and culturally affirming for teachers of color?

◯ Does the district policy make clear that stopping harassment is key to building a positive school culture and a climate of respect?

  — Does the policy state that students have the right to be free from harassment (which includes verbal and physical conduct) based on race, color, national origin, disability or sex (which includes sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, and conditions related to pregnancy)?

  — Does the policy require educating students on consent and healthy relationships in all grade levels on an ongoing basis?

  — Does the harassment policy include prohibitions on retaliation?

  — Does the harassment policy make clear that students will not be punished for reporting they have been the victim of sexual violence, even if the code of conduct prohibits sexual conduct generally?

  — Does the policy offer restorative practices as an option that survivors can pursue to resolve their complaints, in addition to informal or formal disciplinary proceedings?

  — Does the district provide educator and staff training on how to prevent harassment and assault and how to support students who experience it?

◯ Police do not belong in schools. Has your district committed to ending the criminalization of Black and Brown students in schools?

  — Has the district committed to investing in support services for families, restorative justice programs, school counselors, restorative justice coordinators, and psychologists and divesting in school police or similar structures that criminalize students?

  — Has the district set a clear goal to eliminate law enforcement in schools to the greatest extent possible?

◯ Has the district entered into an MOU with the local police department that?

  — Prohibits educators from calling the police for minor/subjective offenses?

  — Prohibits the police from engaging with students for typical youth behavior, ensuring trained educators and school staff to play this role instead?

  — Specifies that in instances of sexual assault, schools will not contact law enforcement without the consent of the alleged victim, unless otherwise required by law?

  — Specifies that any responding police officer will have received training on implicit bias, youth behavior, deescalation techniques, and trauma-informed communication?