

2019-2020 Student Suspension Report

Background

The OCDSB reports annually on student suspension data. This year's suspension report marks the first opportunity to report on District-level identity-based data, collected during the 2019-2020 year, linked to a student outcome measure. This connection affords us the opportunity for deeper analysis of students' experiences based on other aspects of identity such as self-identified Indigenous identity, race, gender identity, and disability. In so doing, it allows us to focus our examination of suspension data through an equity lens, assisting in the identification of patterns and trends that may indicate racial inequity, and serving as a basis for discussions with the broader community to develop strategies to eliminate the barriers and biases that may be contributing to these outcomes. The reporting approach taken here reflects this focus and provides a foundation for conversations with stakeholders on equity by examining suspension data in a new light, and showcases some of the key work that has been underway to begin incorporating identity based data into regular reporting cycles.

What we are talking about

Schools use a progressive discipline approach in an effort to promote positive student behaviour. Despite varied efforts to promote a positive learning environment, there are occasions in which student behaviour is considered to be unacceptable or unsafe. In these cases, a range of options – including suspension or expulsion – are considered that take into account both the situation and individual circumstances that will allow the school to determine the most appropriate course of action and help students to learn from their choices. Given the extremely small number of expulsions issued in the OCDSB annually, the focus of this report is on suspensions only.

Board Policy P.020.SCO Student Suspensions requires that a summary report of student suspensions be submitted to the Board annually. This report provides an overview of student suspensions for the period 3 September 2019 to 13 March 2020 in an effort to help identify emerging trends in unacceptable or unsafe behaviour. Where there are fewer than 10 students, data has been suppressed in order to protect the privacy of individuals; this practice is consistent with EQAO reporting guidelines. It is important to note that while the information presented describes the general trends in suspensions over time, conclusions cannot be drawn as to what specifically is contributing to them. For example, while it is reasonable to believe that a reduction in suspensions suggests that there are fewer incidents or that schools are more effective in their use of prevention and early intervention strategies, this conclusion cannot be drawn based on the information available in this report alone.

What we know

Research has raised several concerns around the existence of unintended negative consequences of suspension policies, and questioned the effectiveness of suspensions as an agent for behavioural change. Students who receive a suspension in early years are more likely to be suspended again in later grades, and are less likely to complete high school as compared to students who never receive a suspension. In addition, suspensions that come as a consequence of violent behaviour do not appear to reduce students' likelihood to engage in similar behaviour in the future ([Huang & Cornell, 2018](#)).

Racial, socioeconomic, and gender disparities in disciplinary practices within the education system (i.e., suspensions and expulsions) have been well-documented in research literature, especially in the United States (e.g., [GAO, 2018](#)). While less research is available on suspensions in a Canadian context, the Ontario Human Rights Commission ([July 2003](#)) reported:

"In the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and other parts of Ontario there is a strong perception, which is supported by some independent evidence, that the Act and school board policies are having a disproportionate impact on racial minority students, particularly Black students, and students with disabilities."

A report published by York University in collaboration with the Toronto District School Board and other community partners, acknowledges there are racial disparities in disciplinary actions within the greater Toronto area, particularly for Black, Indigenous, Mixed, and Middle Eastern youth ([York University, April 2017](#)). Several recommendations were put forward in the report, including the establishment of a mandate from the Ministry for all Ontario school boards to be collecting this kind of data and publishing on an annual basis. This work began in earnest in 2017 through the Equity Secretariat following release of the Anti-Racism Act (2017) and accompanying Data Standards (2018).

An understanding of the impact of suspensions on students is crucial to ensuring caring and safe schools, and reducing unintended negative consequences of suspensions on students – especially those already experiencing academic or social barriers which place them at higher levels of risk. Within the OCDSB, higher suspension rates have been reported for specific groups of students based on demographic characteristics available through Trillium (ELL, special education needs excluding gifted, low-SES, male, Indigenous self-identification). Through the lens of the Anti-Racism Act (2017) and accompanying Data Standards, we are transitioning the way in which we examine issues of equity in educational outcomes for students in our District and are now able to shine a light on aspects of identity that have not been available to us before. The use of self-reported Identity Based data, collected for the first time through the *Valuing Voices – Identity Matters! Student Survey* in 2019-2020, also affords us a richer, more multi-dimensional investigation of some similar (previously explored) identity constructs than is currently offered through the Student Information System (Trillium).

What we have heard

Community partner organizations, parents, and students who have experienced barriers and biases in the school system have long voiced their concerns about disciplinary actions in the OCDSB, and the impact they are having on students. The following quotes were captured through the parent and student focus groups held in the Spring of 2019 as part of the work associated with the *Valuing Voices – Identity Matters! Student Survey (Valuing Voices)*:

“Black/Muslim community are being patrolled and suspended more-targeting these groups, the rules/policies need to be changed. Student suspended from being absent for two days because of a previous involvement in something at the school, even though they did nothing wrong.”

“Important for child now identity fits into systemic barriers, racialized child suspended for standing up against white admin.”

“Son suspended by white VP-need race-based data to understand who is being suspended or leaving schools. Leaving because they don’t feel supported in OCDSB. Need to collect data on who is leaving OCDSB.”

Key Findings: Suspension Data (2019-2020)

Overall Suspension Results

Results for 2019-2020 are comparable to those for the past few years, even for the partial year reporting. Specifically:

- Approximately 2% of OCDSB students were issued a suspension during the 2019-2020 school year, a rate that is consistent with the previous two years for the same time period (September to March);
- Suspensions rates continue to be higher in the secondary panel than they are in elementary;
- Nearly two-thirds of suspensions issued were single-day suspensions; and
- Close to three-quarters of students who were suspended last year received only one suspension.

For the first time, mandatory and discretionary suspensions were examined separately, yielding the following findings:

- Nearly 90% of suspensions issued to students in 2019-2020 were of a discretionary nature;
- Suspensions of a mandatory nature were predominantly issued to students in intermediate and senior grades; and
- The majority of suspensions lasting for six days or more were of a mandatory nature.

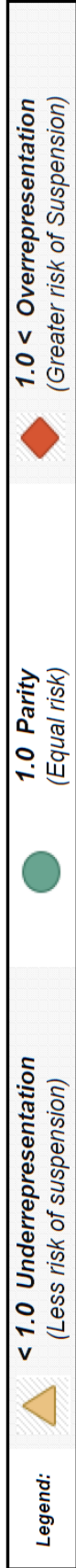
Measuring Equity: Overview of Findings

For many years, students, parents, and community partners have raised concerns that racialized students, students of diverse gender identities, and students with disabilities are disproportionately represented in the suspension data and often face increased risk of disciplinary action compared to other students. The data supports these concerns and indicates that some student populations are suspended at a disproportionate rate. The illustration on the following page provides an overview of the relative risk of being suspended for different groups of students based on their representation in the full student population, and on the subset of students who participated in *Valuing Voices* Survey¹. Values above 1.0 indicate overrepresentation in suspension data, and thus reflect higher risk of suspension. Note that while trends are similar across data sources, and *Valuing Voices* results tend to mirror those of the overall student population, values do vary.

¹ An infographic-style companion document is being prepared to showcase the results of analysis on four dimensions of identity (Indigenous identity, race, gender identity, and disability) for the subset of students who participated in the *Valuing Voices* Survey conducted in 2019-2020.

Overview of Disproportionality Indices for Suspensions by Reporting Group and Data Source

Compared to the overall population, how likely is it a student from THIS group will receive a suspension?



All Students (Trillium)	Indigenous Status			Elementary			Primary (K-3)		Junior (4-6)		Intermediate (7-8)	Secondary Senior (9-12)		Female	Male	Spec. Ed. Excluding Gifted	Low-SES	English Language Learners																																																					
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2.2	0.8	0.5	0.9	1.3	1.5	0.4	1.6	2.5	1.8	1.7																																																													
Valuing Voices (Subset)	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th rowspan="2">Indigenous Self-ID</th> <th colspan="3">Race</th> <th colspan="3">Gender Identity</th> <th colspan="4">Disability</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Does not identify as Indigenous</th> <th>First Nation</th> <th>Inuit</th> <th>South Asian</th> <th>Middle Eastern</th> <th>Latino/Latina/Latinx</th> <th>White</th> <th>Indigenous Race</th> <th>Another</th> <th>Gender Fluid</th> <th>Gender Non-Conforming</th> <th>Trans Boy or Man</th> <th>Trans Girl or Woman</th> <th>Not Sure</th> <th>Does not identify as having a disability</th> <th>Developmental</th> <th>Mental Health</th> <th>Autism Spectrum Disorder</th> <th>Learning</th> <th>Another</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1.0</td> <td>2.3</td> <td>No Data Available (Suppressed due to less than 10 student suspensions in each group)</td> <td>2.1</td> <td>0.3</td> <td>2.0</td> <td>1.8</td> <td>0.9</td> <td>3.5</td> <td>Another</td> <td>Gender Fluid</td> <td>Gender Non-Conforming</td> <td>Trans Boy or Man</td> <td>Trans Girl or Woman</td> <td>Not Sure</td> <td>0.6</td> <td>3.4</td> <td>3.8</td> <td>2.7</td> <td>2.7</td> <td>3.4</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>																			Indigenous Self-ID	Race			Gender Identity			Disability				Does not identify as Indigenous	First Nation	Inuit	South Asian	Middle Eastern	Latino/Latina/Latinx	White	Indigenous Race	Another	Gender Fluid	Gender Non-Conforming	Trans Boy or Man	Trans Girl or Woman	Not Sure	Does not identify as having a disability	Developmental	Mental Health	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Learning	Another	1.0	2.3	No Data Available (Suppressed due to less than 10 student suspensions in each group)	2.1	0.3	2.0	1.8	0.9	3.5	Another	Gender Fluid	Gender Non-Conforming	Trans Boy or Man	Trans Girl or Woman	Not Sure	0.6	3.4	3.8	2.7	2.7	3.4
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Overall Student Suspensions Results

The Ministry of Education collects suspension data for all publicly funded school districts in Ontario through the 30 June OnSIS submission. Suspension rates are calculated as a percentage of the October 31 enrolment and include suspensions issued over the full course of the year (i.e., between the first day of school in September and the last day of school in June). Due to the COVID-19 disruption in the 2019-2020 school year, suspensions were only reported from the beginning of September until March break. In an effort to ensure comparability, the overall, historical suspension data was reanalyzed to use figures for September to March.

Historical Trends

Table 1 provides the adjusted five-year historical overview of enrolment and suspension data, disaggregated for the elementary and secondary panels, using extracts from Trillium. For the 2019-2020 school year, the student suspension rate for the OCDSB was 2.2% (1,674), covering the period from beginning of September to March break.

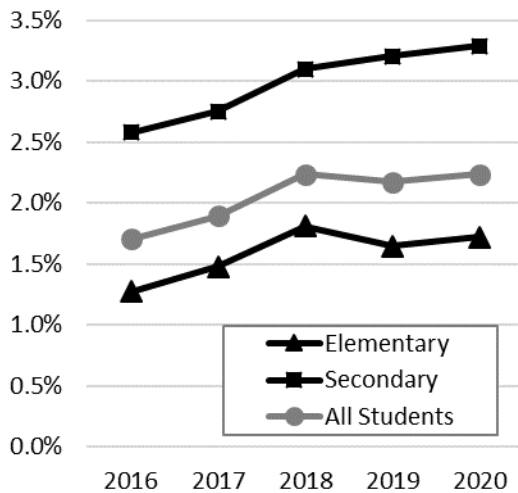
Table 1: Historical Overview of Enrolment and Suspension Data (September to March Break)

Student Enrolment	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<i>Elementary</i>	47,685	48,702	49,106	49,532	50,295
<i>Secondary</i>	23,886	23,790	24,465	25,440	24,559
Total	71,571	72,492	73,571	74,972	74,854
Number of Suspensions Issued by Panel					
<i>Elementary</i>	899	1,167	1,426	1,274	1,305
<i>Secondary</i>	854	917	935	1,102	1,069
Total	1,753	2,084	2,361	2,376	2,374
Number of Students Suspended by Panel					
<i>Elementary</i>	606	719	888	815	866
<i>Secondary</i>	616	655	759	815	808
Total	1,222	1,374	1,647	1,630	1,674

What we are seeing:

A total of 2,374 suspensions were issued in 2019-2020 – 1,305 at the elementary level, and 1,069 at the secondary level – which is almost the same from the previous year. The overall suspension rate based on a student population of 74,854 was 2.2% (similar to the previous two years).

Figure 1. Suspension Rates: 5-Year Trend by Panel



What we are seeing: Suspension rates in the secondary panel have been increasing over time, although their representation in the overall student population has remained stable (33-34% of all students). Despite representing only about one-third of the student population, suspensions at the secondary level accounted for 46% of all suspensions in the last two years. In 2019-2020, secondary students were 1.5 times more likely to receive a suspension than elementary students.

Discretionary vs. Mandatory Suspensions

Why it matters: Suspensions are classified as either discretionary or mandatory based on the nature of the incident/grounds for suspension. Section 306 of the Education Act outlines circumstances where principals must consider suspension (i.e. discretionary suspensions), while Section 310 outlines the circumstances where principals must suspend and consider expulsion (i.e. mandatory suspensions). Mandatory suspensions are ones of more significant safety concerns, including reasons such as: weapons related offenses, trafficking drugs, physical assaults that cause bodily harm requiring treatment by a medical practitioner, robbery, extortion, sexual assault, repeated bullying, and discretionary suspension reasons that are motivated by bias, prejudice, or hate. Examining the frequency with which discretionary and mandatory suspensions are issued can provide insight into where there is room for system-level change.

What we are seeing: Only 10% of suspensions issued in 2019-2020 were mandatory in nature (230 of 2,374). Further breakdown by Panel shows a slightly higher rate of mandatory suspensions in elementary (JK-8) as compared to secondary (grades 9-12) (see Table 2).

Figure 2. Suspension Rates by Panel (September 2019 – March 2020)

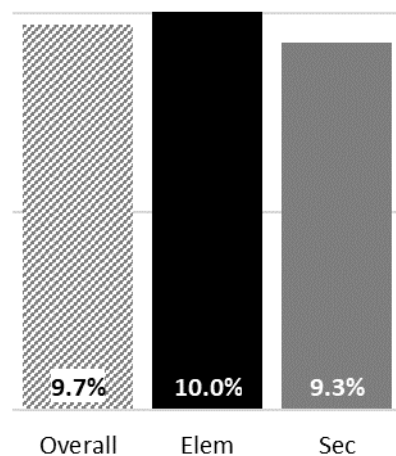


Table 2: Number of Suspensions by Type, 2019-2020

Number of Suspensions by Type	Elem	Sec	All
Mandatory	131	99	230
Discretionary	1,174	970	2,144
All Suspensions	1,305	1,069	2,374
Rate of mandatory suspensions	10.0%	9.3%	9.7%

Suspension Duration and Frequency

Why it matters: Absences have been shown to be detrimental to student outcomes. Suffering a prolonged or repeated absence from the classroom as a result of a suspension can contribute to even greater challenges for students who are already at a disadvantage due to other risk factors. Therefore, gaining insight into both the length of time and the frequency with which a student is removed from the learning environment is important. The information below pertains to 2019-2020 suspensions only.

Figure 3. Number of Suspensions by Duration and Type

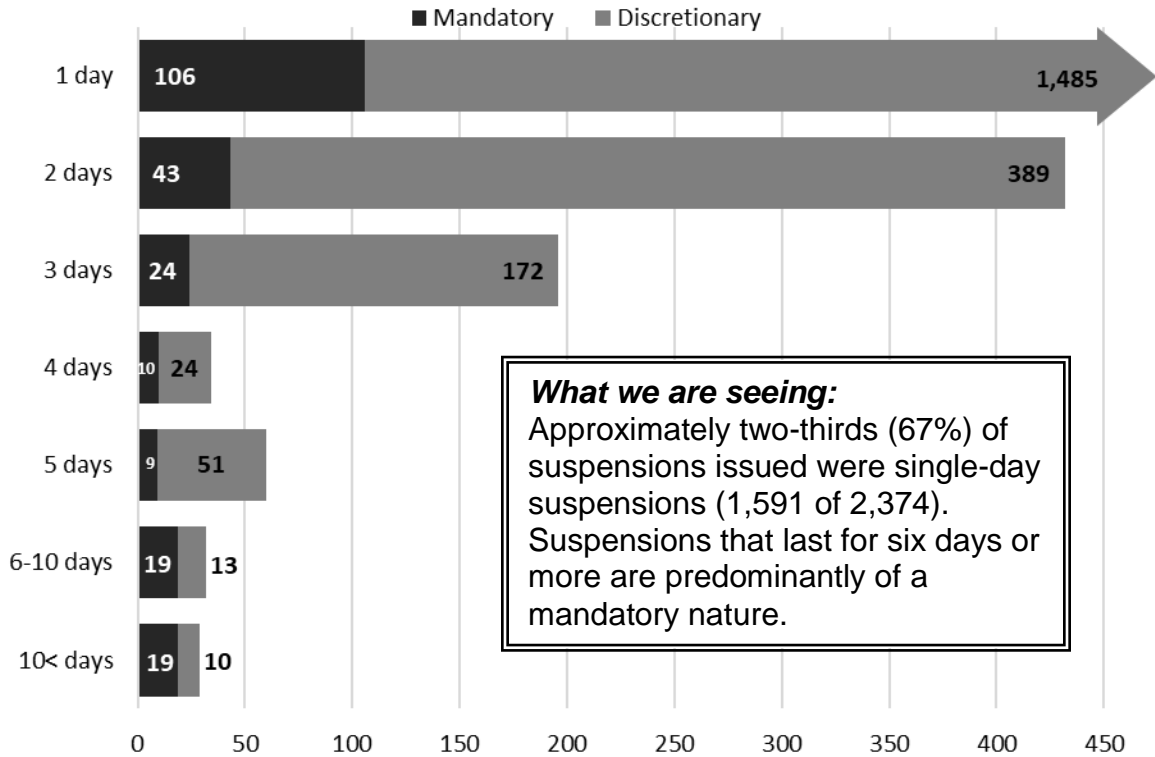
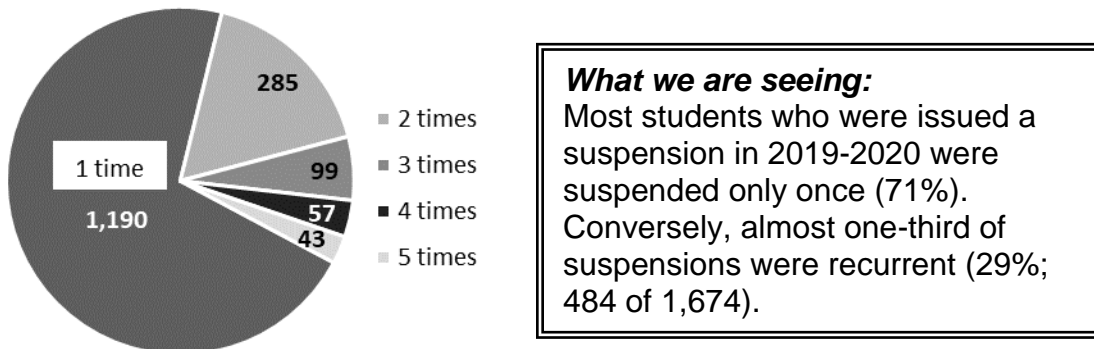


Figure 4. Number of Times a Student was Issued a Suspension During the School Year



Digging Deeper: ‘Divison’ in 2019-2020 Suspension Data

Why it matters: Given suspension data is reported at a District-level, there remain a lot of questions around which students might be most at risk. Providing this level of detail is important when considering school-level conversations. Given school structures vary throughout the District, exploring Suspension data at a Division-level may help in identifying where we can look to make changes that will have the greatest impact on students with the highest risk. The following analyses reflect the full student population.

Table 3: Student Suspensions by Division (All Students) in 2019-2020

	Primary (K-Gr.3)	Junior (Gr.4-6)	Intermediate (Gr.7-8)	Senior (Gr.9-12)	All
Student Enrolment	24,257	15,724	10,314	24,559	74,854
Number of Students Suspended	251	314	301	808	1,674
Suspension Rate	1.0%	2.0%	2.9%	3.3%	2.2%

What we are seeing:
 An analysis of suspensions at a Division-level shows a pattern of increasing risk of suspension as students progress into higher grades. *Intermediate* students show a similar pattern of overrepresentation as *Senior* students. Despite being a substantially smaller population, Intermediate students (Grades 7 & 8) show similar disproportionate rates of suspension to Senior students (Grades 9-12), and were almost equally as likely to be suspended (disproportionality 1.30 and 1.47, respectively).

Figure 5. Distribution of Students by Panel

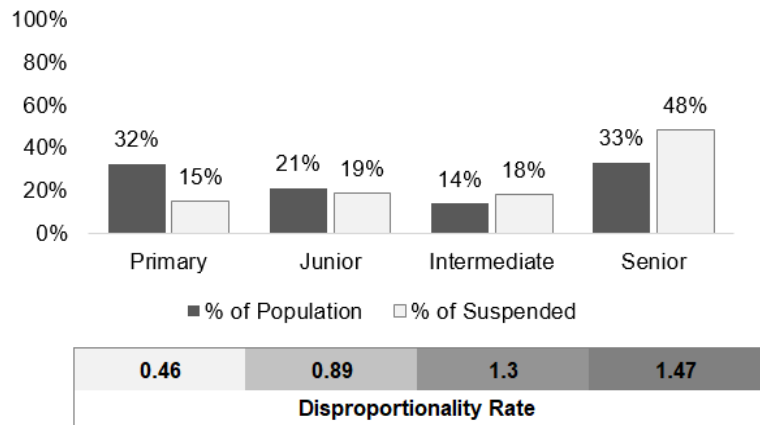
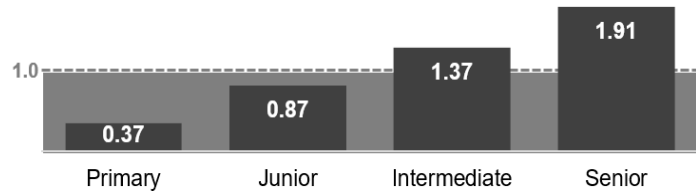


Figure 6. Disparity Ratio: Relative Risk of Suspension vs. All Other Students

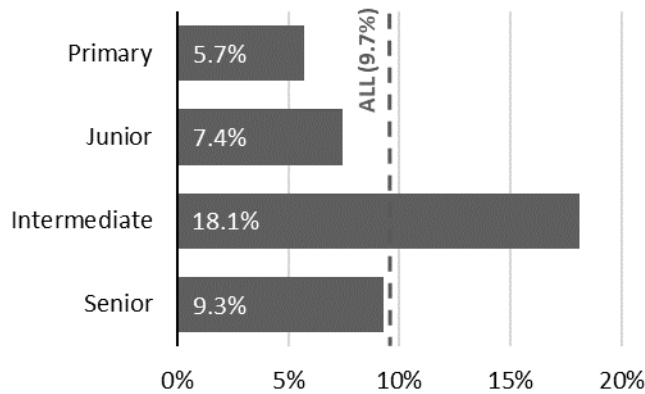


To think about: Grade 7 & 8 marks a transition between Elementary to Secondary. How might experiencing this transition contribute to students’ risk for suspension, either directly or indirectly?

Table 4: Type and Number of Suspensions Issued by Division (All Students) in 2019-2020

	Primary (K-Gr.3)	Junior (Gr.4-6)	Intermediate (Gr.7-8)	Senior (Gr.9-12)	All
Number of Suspensions Issued by Type					
<i>Mandatory</i>	26	34	71	99	230
<i>Discretionary</i>	429	424	321	970	2,144
Total	455	458	392	1,069	2,374
Suspension Rate by Type					
<i>Mandatory</i>	5.7%	7.4%	18.1%	9.3%	9.7%
<i>Discretionary</i>	94.3%	92.6%	81.9%	90.7%	90.3%

Figure 7. Rates of Mandatory Suspension by Division (2019-2020)



What we are seeing: While the previous overall analysis indicated mandatory suspensions occurred at a higher rate in the Elementary as compared to Secondary Panel, a closer look by Division revealed that the Intermediate rate is exceptionally high, and as a result the Elementary rate was overinflated.

Through a New Lens: Measuring Equity

For many years, students, parents, and community partners have raised concerns that racialized students, students of diverse gender identities, and students with disabilities are disproportionately represented in the suspension data and often face increased risk of disciplinary action compared to other students. The data supports these concerns and indicates that some student populations are suspended at a disproportionate rate.

Through the lens of the Anti-Racism Act (2017) and accompanying Data Standards, we are transitioning the way in which we examine issues of equity in educational outcomes for students in our District and are now able to shine a light on aspects of identity that have not been available to us before. Together, *disproportionality* and *disparity* indices help us to quantify the risk that students within each of these groups will experience a suspension.

- **Disproportionality** answers the question: *Compared to the all students, how likely is it that a student from this group will be issued a suspension?*
- **Disparity** answers the question: *Compared to other students, how likely is it that a student from this group will be issued a suspension?²*

With different points of reference, these two indices each offer unique insight in measuring equity. Therefore, they have both been reported where there are a minimum of ten students on which to report (i.e., suppression threshold has been met).

The analyses that follow provides an examination of the relative risk of being suspended for different groups of students based on various characteristics captured in Trillium, and on four dimensions of identity (Indigenous identity, race, gender identity, and disability) for the subset of students who participated in the *Valuing Voices* Survey conducted in 2019-2020.

Calculations based on information collected in the *Valuing Voices* survey reflect mutually exclusive groups of students (i.e., a student is only counted in one category) for Indigenous identity, race, and gender identity; and inclusive groups (i.e., a student may be counted in more than one category) for disability. For disparity calculations, groups have been compared to “all other” students (race, gender identity) or to a group of students who do not identify as Indigenous or as having a disability. As a result, while trends are similar across data sources, index values do vary. For the benefit of the reader, further details can be found in the Technical Considerations portion of this report.

² Depending on the nature of the analysis, another specific group serves as a benchmark group against which comparisons are made and disparity is measured.

Suspensions by Student Demographics

English Language Learners

In 2019-2020, approximately 16% of the OCDSB student population was identified as an English language learner (11,946 of 74,854), yet accounted for 27% (449) of students who were suspended. The suspension rate for English language learners was 1.7 times higher than expected given their representation in the overall student population, and were nearly two times as likely to receive a suspension as compared to all other students.

Figure 8. Distribution of English Language Learners (2019-2020)

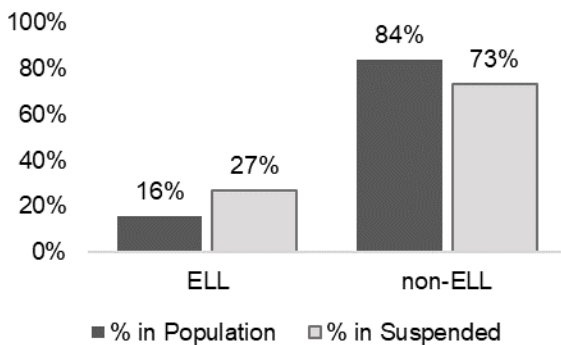
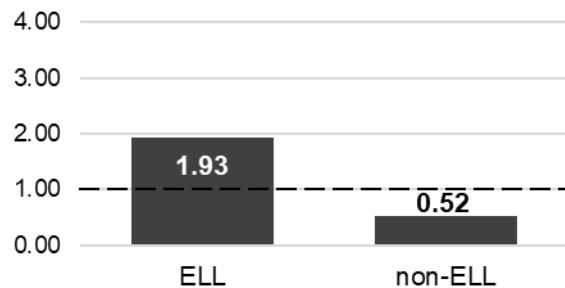


Figure 9. Disparity Ratio: Relative Risk of Suspension vs. All Other Students



Students Residing in Lower-income Neighbourhoods (LowSES)

In 2019-2020, 26% of the OCDSB student population lived in lower-income neighbourhoods (19,503 of 74,854), yet accounted for 46% (777) of students who were suspended. The suspension rate for these students was 1.8 times higher than expected given their representation in the overall student population, and they were 2.5 times more likely to receive a suspension compared to all other students.

Figure 10. Distribution of Students Residing in Lower-income Neighbourhoods (2019-2020)

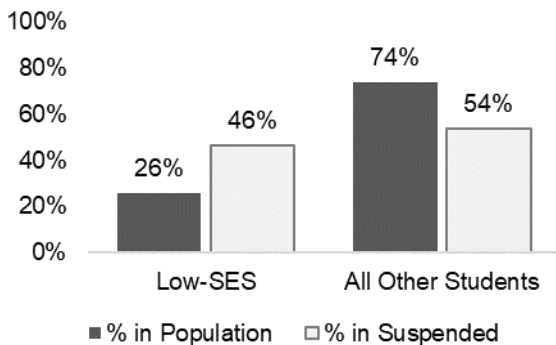
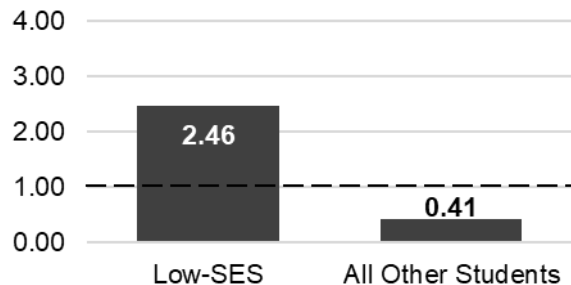


Figure 11. Disparity Ratio: Relative Risk of Suspension vs. All Other Students



Gender Identity

In 2019-2020, the OCDSB student population was relatively equally split across male (38,419) and female (36,435), yet males accounted for 81% (1,361) of students who were suspended compared to only 19% of females (313). This over-representation of boys by nearly 1.6 times, and the likelihood of suspension being 4 times higher than that for girls, has been a relatively stable trend over the past few years.

Figure 12. Distribution of Students by Gender (2019-2020)

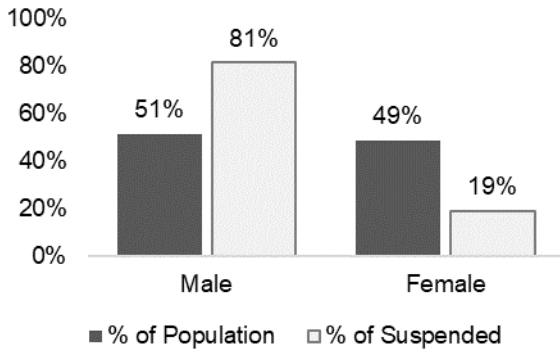
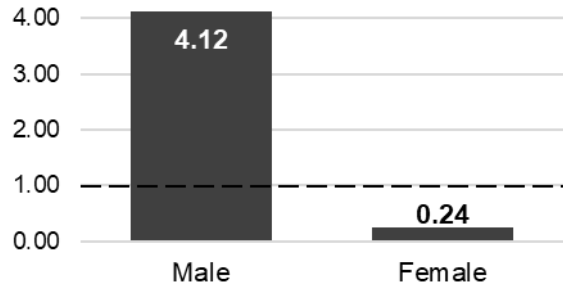


Figure 13. Disparity Ratio: Relative Risk of Suspension vs. All Other Students



Spotlight on Valuing Voices: Gender

Gender differences similar to those witnessed in the overall suspension report were also evident in the subset of suspended students who participated in the *Valuing Voices* survey.

Highlights include:

- 📌 Despite representation in the overall population being similar, Boys/Men and Girls/Women showed opposing trends;
- 📌 Boy/Men accounted for 76% of all suspensions issued, and were 3.4 times as likely to be suspended compared to their peers, whereas Girls/Women accounted for 18% of all suspensions and were 4 times less likely to be suspended.
- 📌 Additional response options for gender identity accounted for 1.9% of the overall student population, however additional reporting was suppressed due to the small number of suspensions witnessed within each of these groups. To provide some indication of overall trends in suspension data for remaining gender identities, a *Gender Diverse* group was fashioned for reporting purposes (including Another/Not Listed, excluding 'Not Sure'). This combined Gender Diverse group accounted for 3.7% of All Suspensions, and students therein were twice as likely to be suspended (both compared to All Students, 1.91, and All Others, 1.94, respectively)

Indigenous Identity

In 2019-2020, approximately 2% of the OCDSB student population self-identified as Indigenous (1,419 of 74,854), yet accounted for 4% (70) of students who were suspended. The suspension rate for Indigenous students was twice as high as would be expected based on the size of this group in the overall student population. Indigenous students were approximately 2.3 times as likely to receive a suspension as compared to all other students, while non-indigenous students were less than half as likely.

Figure 14. Distribution of Self-Identified Indigenous Students (2019-2020)

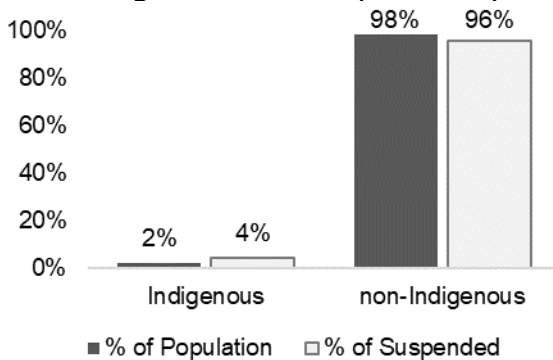
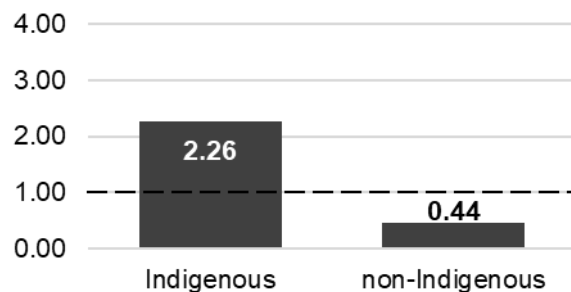


Figure 15. Disparity Ratio: Relative Risk of Suspension vs. All Other Students



Spotlight on Valuing Voices: Indigenous Self-Identification

For the subset of suspended students who self-identified as Indigenous on the *Valuing Voices* survey, the same patterns of disproportionate representation found in the full District level results was observed.

Specifically:

- 👤 Students self-identifying as Indigenous represented 3.3% of all survey respondents, but accounted for 7.3% of suspensions;
- 👤 The suspension rate for all students who self-identified as Indigenous was 4.2%, reflecting an overrepresentation by 2.3 times as compared to full population of students who responded to the *Valuing Voices* survey (suspension rate=1.9%).
- 👤 When compared to students who self-identified as non-Indigenous, Indigenous students were likewise 2.3 times as likely to experience a suspension.
- 👤 When disaggregated by Indigenous community, First Nation and Métis reflected disproportionality and disparity indices that were above 2.0; reliable estimates could not be calculated for the Inuit community due to small numbers.



Spotlight on Valuing Voices: Race

The following racial disproportionalities were evident in the subset of suspended students who responded to *Valuing Voices* survey:

- ✎ Both Middle Eastern and Black students had suspension rates almost 2 times higher than expected given their representation in the *Valuing Voices* subset, while Indigenous students were by far the most overrepresented group with rates almost 3.5 times that of the *Valuing Voices* population. Disparities were greatest for Indigenous students (3.5), followed by Middle Eastern students (2.3) and Black students (1.9), with likelihood of suspension between 2 and 3.5 times higher than other students.
- ✎ South Asian and East Asian students had the lowest suspension rates. South Asians were 3 times less likely to be suspended compared to other students, while East Asians were almost 4 times less likely to be suspended.
- ✎ White students were slightly underrepresented in suspension data but showed a similar pattern and suspension rate to the overall student population

Students with Special Education Needs

In 2019-2020, approximately 19% of the OCDSB student population was identified with special education needs (excluding gifted) (14,498 of 74,854), yet accounted for 49% (825) of students who were suspended. The suspension rate for students with special education needs was 2.5 times higher than expected given their representation in the overall student population, and were 4 times as likely to receive a suspension compared to all other students.

Figure 16. Distribution of Students with Special Education Needs (2019-2020)

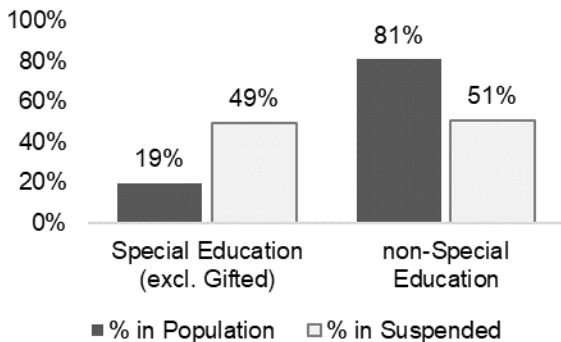
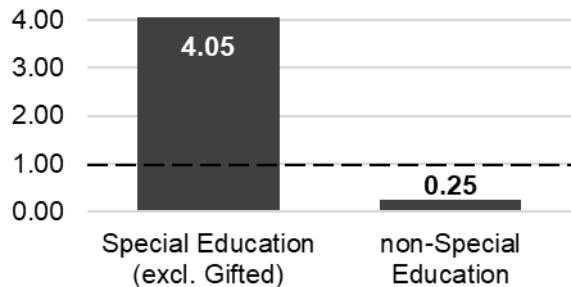


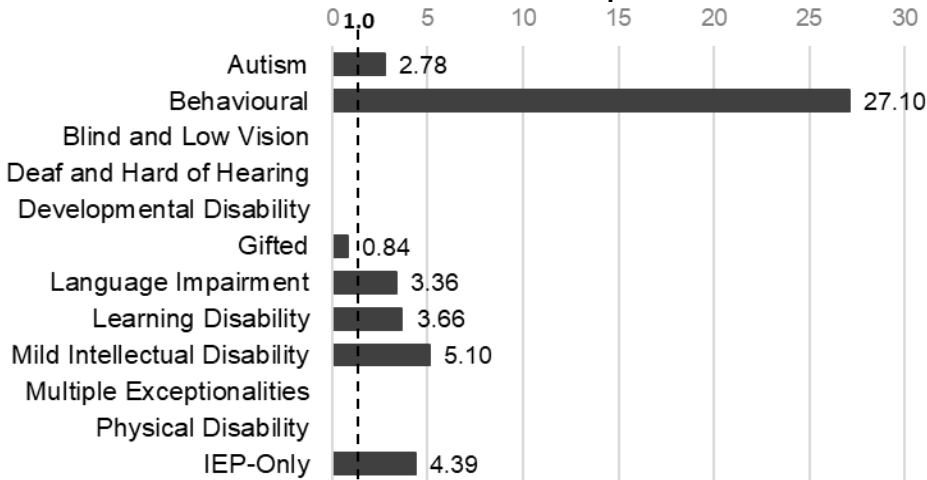
Figure 17. Disparity Ratio: Relative Risk of Suspension vs. All Other Students



Students who have not met or been formally identified with an exceptionality, but who have an IEP, make up about 13% of the overall student population (9,423 of 74,854). The remaining 6% of students with special education needs are distributed across eleven (11) exceptionalities with rates ranging from less than 1% to no more than 2% of the overall student population. Closer examination of suspension data shows suspension rates range from a low of 1.2% for students identified as Gifted to 38.1% for students with a behavioral exceptionality, and that the relative risk of suspension for students with specific exceptionalities compared to their peers without special education

needs are quite remarkable. For example, students identified with a behavioural exceptionality are 27 times as likely to receive a suspension compared to students who have not been identified with special education needs.

Figure 18. Disparity Ratio: Relative Risk of Suspension vs. Students Without Special Education Needs



Spotlight on Valuing Voices: Disability

Students who self-identified as having a disability(ies) in the *Valuing Voices* survey showed a strikingly similar pattern to the larger District-level group of students with special education needs (excluding gifted).

Findings include:

- ✎ Student who self-identified as having a disability(ies) only represented approximately 7% of all students suspended at the District-level, but accounted for 50% of suspended students who responded to the survey.
- ✎ Student who self-identified as having a disability(ies) had a suspension rate 2.5 times higher than the overall survey population, and were 4 times more likely to be suspended than students who self-identified as not having a disability(ies) on the survey.
- ✎ The largest disparities were recorded for students reporting Addiction(s) (10.5), followed by Mental Health (6.1), Another disability not listed (5.4) and Developmental (5.4).

Summary and Next Steps

The findings from this report shine a light on some of the inequities that exist in our system in relation to disciplinary policies and practices. This reinforces our call to action as a system to eliminate the systemic barriers and biases that prevent all students from reaching their full potential, particularly students who identify as Indigenous, Black, and who have been minoritized (a term which includes racialized, religious, 2SLGBTQ+ and people with a disability).

Creating Safe Spaces and Conditions for Learning

The rate at which discretionary suspensions are issued, particularly those that last for only one day, point to larger issues within the system, including lack of student engagement and threats to feelings of safety and sense of belonging (e.g., Duke University, 2010). Behaviour that is deemed to be inappropriate should be viewed as an opportunity to understand the underlying needs of the student. Rather than using suspensions to manage student behaviour, the focus of our work must shift towards creating learning environments for students where they: are comfortable expressing themselves without fear of retribution; are truly engaged in their learning; and see themselves reflected in the curriculum and in the staff who are responsible for supporting their learning and well-being while in school. It is through these actions and the use of a progressive discipline approach that we teach children the skills necessary to self-regulate and facilitate their understanding of the consequences of their actions.

Recognizing the importance of the early years in setting the foundation for positive learning experiences, the Ontario Ministry of Education recently introduced a new regulation (O. Reg.440/20) which removes the principal's discretion to suspend students enrolled in junior kindergarten to grade 3 for activities listed in subsection 306(1) of the Education Act. Funding has been allocated to school districts to help support the implementation of these changes. In the OCDSB, this work involves collaboration across multiple departments, including Learning Support Services (LSS), Program and Learning, and Safe Schools. As one example, the Early Learning Team in LSS is continuing to provide coaching and mentoring support to Kindergarten teachers, ECEs and EAs with the goal of promoting positive student behaviour. Professional learning sessions focused on factors that impact behaviour (e.g., implicit bias, traumatic experiences); specific programming (e.g., Mindmasters 2); and implementing the Third Path framework all provide opportunities to further promote sense of belonging, physical and emotional safety, and self-regulation amongst students.

In addition to targeted programming and professional learning, the *OCDSB Strategic Plan 2019-2023* and the *Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap* outline some of the key work being undertaken at a District-level to promote more safe and inclusive learning spaces for students. Some of these include:

- a review of the Safe Schools Policy, including policies and practices associated with police involvement in schools;
- the establishment of foundational mandatory professional learning for school and District staff in Indigenous knowledge, Diversity and Inclusion Fundamentals, Unconscious Bias, anti-racism/anti-oppression and human rights;
- implementation of a staff census to better understand the representativeness of the OCDSB workforce and identifying strategies to increase representation of minoritized groups in leadership roles and those directly impacting student learning and well-being;

- redesigning course content (e.g., Social Studies, History and Geography; Grade 9-12 English) to include and represent Indigenous, Black and minoritized histories perspectives and ways of knowing;
- introduction of Indigenous and Black Graduation coaches at specific sites to promote and support student success and pathways to graduation;
- expansion of leadership and networking opportunities for Indigenous, Black and minoritized youth.

Staff will also continue to work with the community and system to identify additional strategies and supports to help address issues of inequity.

Data Analysis and Reporting

As this was the first opportunity to collect and explore reporting of identity-based data using the Ministry's Data Standards, we still have a lot to learn and a long way to go. While the restricted subset of self-identifying constructs that were reported-on here in isolation may appear on the surface as a cursory glance, the various angles and viewpoints under which they can be explored remain under discussion as we look to reconcile our understanding of identity constructs, set meaningful District goals, as well as meet Ministry reporting requirements.

Additional analyses will need to be undertaken to explore suspension data for other dimensions of identity collected through the *Valuing Voices* survey (i.e., language, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and status in Canada). Intersectionality across different aspects of identity also require further investigation, as there are clearly meaningful connections that exist and remain to be explored (e.g., Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation; Ethnicity and Race). Deeper analyses that incorporate student perceptions as they relate to issues of school safety, engagement, and sense of belonging will also be an important consideration. Such analyses not only contribute to a more holistic understanding of our students' self-perceptions and experiences, but also help tease apart the unique contributions of various underlying factors linked to outcomes, as well as distinguish pathways and underlying root-causes. It is also important to recognize limitations to our understanding, as the *Valuing Voices* survey collected information on students but failed to capture the larger context/environment in which they exist/live (i.e., within circles of family, school, community). The complexity of this work, and our District's positioning as one of the first to pursue it with the IDB data/ leads in Ontario, along with our interest in continuing a dialogue/responding to the interests/needs of our various voices/ stakeholders/ community partners, makes this work ongoing.

While Disproportionality and Disparity offer us two ways of *measuring* relative group differences (versus All and versus Another group, respectively), these indices do not indicate whether observed differences are *meaningful*, nor do they tell us what *movement* might be reasonable to expect over time. To better contextualize these indices and make them useful, cut-points referred to as *thresholds* must first be established. As we continue to investigate identity-based data, District-level thresholds will need to be determined in consultation with community partners and other stakeholders in order to identify reasonable targets and monitor progress towards addressing existing inequities. This will form part of the core work in 2019-2020 for the recently established OCDSB Technical Advisory Group: Anti-Racism Data Standards. Once thresholds have been established, monitoring progress towards some of the goals cited in the [Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap](#) (2020) will be easier.

Technical Considerations

This phase of reporting requires the calculation of a racial disproportionality and/or racial disparity index for each unit of analysis (Standard 29). In the case of suspensions, both have been calculated where suppression thresholds have been met. Meaningful interpretation of disproportionality and disparity requires the selection of appropriate benchmarks and reference groups, respectively (Standards 30 and 31), as well as the establishment of thresholds (Standard 32) to support monitoring of progress over time. The following sections provide an overview of the considerations that were taken into account.

Units of Analysis. Most survey questions allowed for the selection of multiple responses, honouring the multidimensionality of identity. From an analysis and reporting perspective, this adds complexity. Analysis must be sensitive to commonalities and differences in experience and treatment among persons reporting multiple responses. For example, Standard 27 (Primary Unit of Analysis) of the Data Standards describes the following considerations in terms of multiple race categories:

“In some cases, it may make sense to count persons who report White and some other race according to the other race category selected. In other circumstances, it may be necessary and appropriate to aggregate or construct socially meaningful mixed-race categories. For example, a generic mixed-race category may be appropriate if there are insufficient or small numbers of individuals (fewer than 15) who select multiple race categories. If a generic mixed-race category might obscure significant differences, and sample sizes are sufficient, consider using specific combinations of race categories.”

As a result, three different approaches to assigning respondents to groups were examined to better understand the influence on disparity and disproportionality calculations:

- **exclusive groups** – no overlap across response categories; respondents selecting more than one response option were combined into a “mixed group” option
- **additive groups** – includes exclusive groups for those respondents who selected one response option only, but an additional group was created for each exclusive category that included respondents who selected that category and at least one other response option (e.g., black + white)
- **inclusive groups** – all groups overlap with one another (e.g., the black category includes respondents who selected black either as a single response or in combination with at least one other race category).

Given results did not yield substantive differences in the calculations, results are being reported based on exclusive groups. Not only should it facilitate greater clarity in understanding the results, but it will offer advantages for future analyses exploring intersectionality. The exception to this is disability, where inclusive groups were deemed to more accurately reflect the data due to the comorbid nature of disabilities.

Benchmarks and Reference Groups. For purposes of this report, calculations of disproportionality use the population of students who participated in the *Valuing Voices – Identity Matters! Student Survey* as a benchmark. After careful consideration, the most appropriate reference group for disparity calculations was deemed to be “all other” respondents (i.e., any respondent not included in the target group) yielding more stable comparisons over time.

Calculating Disproportionality and Disparity. Disproportionality is a measure of a specific group's overrepresentation or underrepresentation in an outcome relative to their representation in the overall population. A disproportionality index (or rate) reflects the likelihood/risk that someone from a specific group will experience a certain outcome, relative to the risk in the entire population. A value of 1.0 reflects no disproportionality. A value greater than 1.0 reflects overrepresentation. A value less than 1.0 reflects underrepresentation. Similar to Suspension Rate, scaled shading is used to indicate relative size.

Disparity is a measure of group differences that compares an outcome for a specific group against that of another (BENCHMARK) group. There are many ways of measuring disparities, however, the Data Standards describe calculating a disparity index (ratio) which compares the relative risk/rate in a specific group to the risk/rate in a BENCHMARK group. It measures whether a particular outcome is lower, similar, or higher in a specific group relative to a comparison group. A value of 1.0 reflects no disparity between the risk for the specific group and the benchmark group (same risk). A value greater than 1.0 reflects a higher risk for the specific group. A value less than 1.0 reflects a lower risk for the specific group.

Calculations of disproportionality and disparity are significantly impacted by small numbers. A general rule-of-thumb is to have minimum sample size of 10 and a population size of 30, otherwise estimates are not reliable. This rule has been applied to the reporting of suspension data and indicated with "NA" in the corresponding graphs.

Interpreting Disproportionality and Disparity. Meaningful interpretation of disproportionality rates and disparity ratios require the establishment of a threshold, which is an established cut-point used to identify meaningful disproportionality and disparity values. District-level thresholds will need to be determined in consultation with community partners and other stakeholders in order to identify targets and monitor progress towards addressing existing inequities/inequalities. This will be a key outcome for the OCDSB Technical Advisory Group: Anti-Racism Data by the end of June 2021.

Key Terms

Definition	What does it mean in <i>this</i> report?
<p>SUSPENSION RATES reflect the prevalence of suspensions within a specific group, by comparing the number of students within the group to receive a suspension to the total number of students in the group.</p>	<p>Higher suspension rates indicate a higher occurrence of suspensions over the course of the year within a specific group.</p>
<p>OUTCOMES can be programs, services, or functions.</p>	<p>In this report, our examination focuses on students who experienced a suspension at least once throughout the 2019-2020 school year.</p>
<p>DISPROPORTIONALITY is a measure of a specific group’s overrepresentation or underrepresentation in an outcome relative to their representation in the overall population.</p> <p>A DISPROPORTIONALITY RATE reflects the likelihood/risk that someone from a specific group will experience a certain outcome, relative to the risk in the entire population.</p>	<p>Disproportionality answers the question: <i>Compared to the overall student population, how likely is it that a student from this group will be issued a suspension?</i></p> <p>A value of 1.0 reflects equal risk of suspension (parity) relative to All Students. A value greater than 1.0 reflects greater risk (overrepresentation), while a value less than 1.0 reflects lower risk (underrepresentation).</p>
<p>DISPARITY is a measure of group differences that compares an outcome for a specific group against that of <u>another</u> group, which serves as a BENCHMARK. There are many ways of measuring disparities.</p> <p>A DISPARITY RATIO is a proportion comparing the relative risk/rate in a specific group to the risk/rate in a BENCHMARK group. It measures whether a particular outcome is lower, similar, or higher in a specific group relative to a comparison group.</p>	<p>Disparity answers the question: <i>Compared to other students, how likely is it that a student from this group will be issued a suspension?</i></p> <p>A value of 1.0 reflects equal likelihood of suspension (no disparity) compared to the “all other” or a benchmark group. A value greater than 1.0 reflects a higher likelihood of suspension, while a value less than 1.0 reflects a lower likelihood of suspension.</p>
<p>A BENCHMARK is a group used as a common reference point against which to measure disparities. Using the same point of reference for all specific group comparisons means the resulting disparities are comparable to each other.</p>	<p>Disparity calculations for the full student population make use of “all other students” as the benchmark group. When reporting on information collected from the subset of students who participated in the <i>Valuing Voices</i> survey, “all other students” was used for calculations on race and gender identity, while “does not identify as Indigenous” was used to report on Indigenous identity and “does not identify as having a disability” was used to report on disability.</p>
<p>A THRESHOLD is an established cut-point used to identify meaningful disproportionality and disparity values.</p>	<p>District-level thresholds will need to be determined in consultation with community partners and other stakeholders in order to identify targets and monitor progress towards addressing existing inequities.</p>

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