



# *Tilling the Field*

Lessons About Philanthropy's Role  
in School Discipline Reform

Leila Fiester for  
**atlas** LEARNING  
PROJECT

*The*  
**ATLANTIC**  
*Philanthropies*

*Cover image: Students attend a circle session at restorative justice class at the Augustus F. Hawkins High School in Los Angeles. Associated Press/Photo: Damian Dovarganes*

## **THE ATLANTIC PHILANTHROPIES**

For more than 30 years, Atlantic has made grants to advance opportunity and lasting change for those who are unfairly disadvantaged or vulnerable to life's circumstances. As a limited life foundation, Atlantic makes grants through Ageing, Children & Youth, Population Health, Reconciliation & Human Rights, and Founding Chairman Programs. It is active in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the United States; and made its final grants in Australia in 2011, and in Bermuda, South Africa and Viet Nam in 2013, and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in 2014. To learn more, please visit: [www.atlanticphilanthropies.org](http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org).

## **ABOUT THE ATLAS LEARNING PROJECT**

The Atlas Learning Project is a three-year effort coordinated by the Center for Evaluation Innovation to synthesize and strategically communicate lessons from the advocacy and policy change efforts that The Atlantic Philanthropies and other funders have supported in the U.S. The project's goal is to help push philanthropy and advocacy in bolder and more effective directions. To learn more, go to [atlaslearning.org](http://atlaslearning.org).

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Leila Fiester is an independent writer, researcher, and editor based in Frederick, MD, who specializes in social issues, initiatives, policies, and philanthropic practice. She helps foundations and organizations plan, assess, and describe their strategies; synthesize and explain research findings; frame concepts in an actionable context; analyze and improve practices and outcomes; distill lessons and implications; and share their stories.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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# Foreword

This is a story about how transformative social change can happen. About how an alliance developed among public school students and parents, civil rights advocates, academics, policymakers and government. How they brought attention to the millions of children being disciplined through exclusion from U.S. public schools and catalyzed action to stop it. And how philanthropy worked alongside them—as partner, facilitator, and investor—in advancing reform.

Every year, almost 3.5 million school children are suspended from school in the United States, putting them at greater risk of dropout and involvement with the juvenile justice system. Put in perspective, one in 14 public school students are sent home for increasingly longer suspensions of five to 10 days, often for minor offenses and with few supports to re-enter school successfully. Even more alarming, these harsh disciplinary actions most often target children of color. In 2012, 20 percent of black males nationally were suspended, more than three times the rate of their white counterparts.

These negative outcomes have come at enormous financial cost to society, from both lost future earning potential of these students and increased prison expenditures. More importantly, each represents a huge social cost—the lost potential of millions of young people to bring their talents and ideas to bear on our society.

For more than 30 years, Atlantic has made grants to advance opportunity and lasting change for those who are unfairly disadvantaged or vulnerable to life's circumstances. At the heart of our work is the belief that all people have the right to opportunity, equity and dignity. Our involvement in promoting school discipline reform stems from this core mission—to improve the opportunities and life trajectory of vulnerable, marginalised people and communities.

The urgency of school disciplinary exclusion led us to launch a four-year, \$47 million initiative to promote reform of policy and practice, aimed at keeping vulnerable children in school and on track to high school graduation and college, rather than on the path to prison. Now, as our grantmaking draws to a close, we are sharing our story to inform and perhaps inspire others to continue this still-unfinished work. Why invest in school discipline reform? What strategies and tactics were employed? Which worked and which didn't? What is the next generation of challenges facing the participants and funders in this field?

We hope this report will be useful to all who might benefit from our experience:

- **For funders**—to inform strategic choices going forward, to anticipate future challenges, and to consider potentially powerful responses.
- **For grantee and government partners**—to celebrate successes as well as to consider options for refining strategies and tactics going forward.
- **For students of movements that protect the vulnerable**—to understand the complex arc of advocacy as shaped by intentional strategies and tactics as well as history and on-the-ground realities.

With deep gratitude,

**Christopher G. Oechsli**  
President and CEO  
The Atlantic Philanthropies

**Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot**  
Deputy Chair, Board of Directors  
The Atlantic Philanthropies

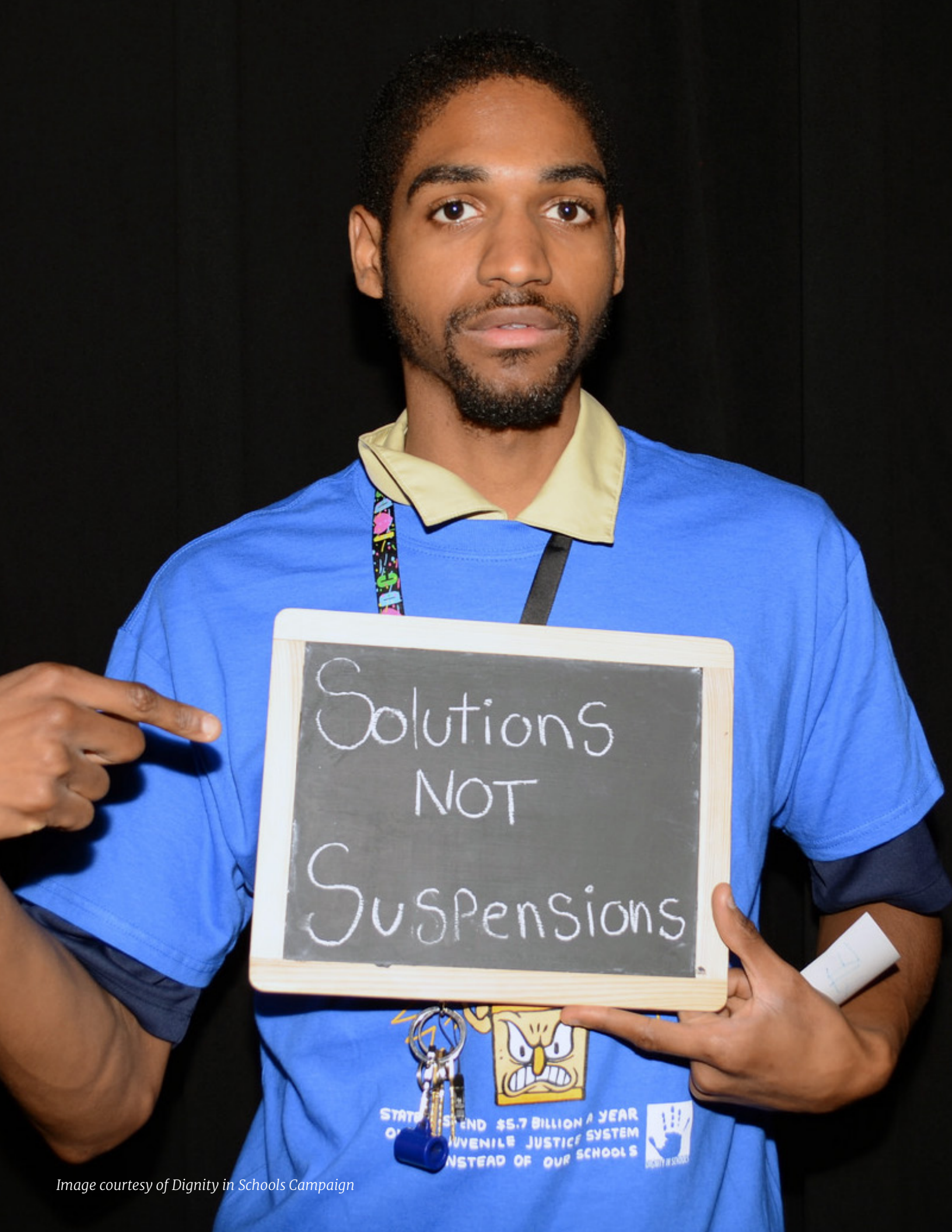


Image courtesy of Dignity in Schools Campaign

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*Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Attorney General Eric Holder.  
Getty Images/Photo by Scott Olson*

# Introduction

Two men stood before a small audience at a Baltimore high school on January 8, 2014, waiting for the room to settle so they could speak. In some respects, the event was mundane: an announcement of guidelines for school administrators and staff. In many more ways, however, it was deeply significant.

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan had come to The Academies at Frederick Douglass High School, an inner-city public school that was turning around its learning environment, to promote a shift in federal policy designed to eliminate excessive, inappropriate, and discriminatory school disciplinary practices. “We must tackle these brutal truths head on,” Duncan announced, after noting the disproportionate use of school suspensions and expulsions on students of color and describing the practice’s negative effects. “That is the only way to change the reality that our children face every day.”

The joint guidance released that wintry day represented an unusual degree of collaboration between federal departments, and Secretary Duncan and Attorney General Holder’s presence highlighted the top-level interest accorded to it. Their audience, which included leaders from government, education, juvenile justice, advocacy, local communities, and philanthropy, demonstrated the breadth of alignment needed across multiple sectors with competing interests to reform school discipline policy. The presence of students illustrated the important role young people and grassroots organizing had played. And the quiet presence of several philanthropic leaders underscored the unusual and pivotal role that private funders had played behind the scenes to coordinate, align, frame, support, and encourage the effort.

**The joint guidance, which was years in the making, stood as a marker both of progress made and work yet to be done** to address an issue with serious educational, social, economic, and civil rights implications. Out-of-school suspensions, often for minor offenses, have increased dramatically in the United States over nearly four decades, despite evidence that suspensions do not improve student behavior or school climate and, instead, have serious long-term negative effects that include increased risk of dropping out of school and exposure to the juvenile justice system.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, zero-tolerance school discipline—the use of suspension and expulsion to address a wide spectrum of school code violations, from minor infractions to violent offenses—and its effects are disproportionately experienced by students of color. Black and Native American students, and in some cases Latino students, are more likely than white students to be referred to the principal’s office, suspended, and expelled.<sup>2</sup>

Because educational opportunity is the strongest predictor of academic achievement, suspension from school carries significant risks. Students who spend more time in school learn and achieve more, while those who are excluded learn less. Suspension can alienate young people from school, which increases the risk of delinquency and can begin a path to incarceration. And when racial disparities exist in how discipline is applied, students of color often perceive that school is not a fair or supportive environment, leading to more alienation and undermining long-term success in their lives.<sup>3</sup> For these reasons, reforming school discipline policies and eliminating disparities in their use are essential to improving the educational and employment prospects of millions of U.S. youth.

**From 2010 through 2014, The Atlantic Philanthropies invested \$47 million** to raise awareness of the need for school discipline reform, test and disseminate alternatives, and build pressure for policy change through grassroots advocacy in states and local jurisdictions nationally. That high level of investment, coupled with an activist implementation strategy, put Atlantic at the forefront of the effort and enabled foundation leaders and partners to learn valuable lessons about cross-sector alignment.

This report captures those lessons, using the school discipline reform experience to illustrate how an aligned cross-sector effort to change systems and policies can be designed and implemented, how it adds value to a shared endeavor, and what it can accomplish. Our intended audiences are philanthropic and government leaders, with the dual purpose of (1) encouraging and guiding other philanthropies to align with government and diverse stakeholders to address similar issues and (2) helping potential partners within federal agencies appreciate the value of this type of collaboration with philanthropy and the field of reform players.

Much of this story is filtered through the lens of Atlantic’s experience, and we do not assume that all stakeholders will share our conclusions. That said, however, this is more than Atlantic’s story. It has taken the concerted effort of numerous strong-willed and like-minded people in several sectors to lay the groundwork for reform, forge new partnerships, change the way business is done, and monitor and sustain the improvements. This report incorporates the viewpoints of 20 interviewees who were involved in the effort, representing an array of roles and interests: government, philanthropy, education, justice, policy advocacy, community and parent organizing, and research. Their insights suggest these themes:

- **An aligned cross-sector effort that involves philanthropy and the public sector requires more than merely co-funding** a project or arranging for philanthropy to pay for something initiated by the government. Philanthropic leaders who help to define a shared goal and develop a structure for ongoing dialogue among a broad array of key actors can redirect energy and resources on both sides in highly effective ways, while government leaders who partner with philanthropy and other stakeholders can sometimes make progress faster and farther than when working alone.
- **Philanthropy can help create a window for policy change through a strategic combination of investments** designed to (re)frame the problem, identify and lift up viable policy alternatives, and apply pressure for change. The interplay of approaches matters; any one funding tactic is unlikely to achieve reform on its own.



- **Action by diverse actors, including grassroots organizing by parents and young people, is vital to stimulating local and national policy change in the educational arena.** Moreover, philanthropic involvement in grassroots organizing and advocacy is not dichotomous with philanthropy's efforts to engage government; in fact, the top-down, bottom-up, inside-outside approach is a powerful strategy for achieving policy change.

We explore these themes in the rest of this report. *The Starting Point* provides a brief history and context for the school discipline reform effort and describes the key players, initial design choices, and strategies. *Evolution of Alignment on the Issue* outlines the activities, events, and developments that shaped the work and its outcomes.

*Results of the Public-Private Effort* describes in broad terms the achievements that interviewees attribute to the partnerships and alignment, in order to gauge the value added by this type of approach. (Atlantic has funded an evaluation of its work in this area to be released in 2016 that will examine results more thoroughly and systematically.) This section also summarizes interviewees' thoughts about missed opportunities, unresolved challenges, and unfinished business.

*Lessons and Insights* offers advice about implementing and supporting this type of public/private and multi-stakeholder partnership, including observations about the factors necessary for success.

We end in *Conclusions* with big-picture reflections on how the lessons from cross-sector collaboration on school discipline reform can be applied to other important social issues.



Image courtesy of Dignity in Schools Campaign

## Timeline of Major Developments in Zero-Tolerance School Discipline Reform

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**2000** The Advancement Project and the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University publish *Opportunity Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline*, which examines policies, practices, and impacts. Funders include the Ford, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur, Charles Stewart Mott, Open Society, and Rockefeller foundations.

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**2003** **American Academy of Pediatrics** publishes an article critical of zero-tolerance policies, calling instead for a more developmentally appropriate form of discipline.

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**2006** **American Psychological Association** issues a report calling for reforms or alternatives to zero-tolerance policies that will not remove so many children “from the opportunity to learn.”

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**2007** **Dignity in Schools Campaign** forms as a national umbrella organization uniting local grassroots groups, civil rights advocates, and educators to call attention to the role of zero tolerance policies in pushing vulnerable children and youth out of school.

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**2009** U.S. Department of Education authorizes **expansion of categories for the Civil Rights Data Collection** to disaggregate data on expulsion, retention, suspension, and detention rates in 85 percent of U.S. schools.

The **Alliance for Educational Justice** (AEJ) forms to provide a national platform for young people to express their views on national education policy. Composed of 30 youth organizations across the country, AEJ includes some of the first groups to organize against zero-tolerance policies nationally, such as *Padres y Jovenes Unidos*, as well as others newer to the issue, like *Voices of Youth in Chicago Education* (VOYCE).

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**2010** Southern Poverty Law Center publishes *Suspended Education: Urban Middle Schools in Crisis*, by Daniel J. Losen of UCLA's Civil Rights Project and Russell J. Skiba of Indiana University's Equity Project, highlighting research that shows an increase in the use of suspensions and in racial disparities among suspended students. Funders are the Poverty and Race Research Action Council and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

**U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** speaks in Selma, AL, about the need to enforce civil rights in education, including racial disparities in the use of suspensions and expulsions.

Civil rights divisions of the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice collaboratively convene two conferences on school discipline.

U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights announces plans to **enforce civil rights more vigorously in school discipline investigations**, using a disparate impact analysis.

The **Just and Fair Schools Fund** (later renamed Communities for Just Schools Fund) is launched by Atlantic to support grassroots organizing to reform discipline policies and improve the climate for learning in schools.

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**2011** U.S. Department of Education convenes Voices in Action, a **national youth summit** on attending college, at which school discipline reform emerges as a major theme.

The **Discipline Disparities Research-to-Practice Collaborative**, a group of 26 expert researchers, advocates and educators convened by Russell J. Skiba, is launched to identify causes and remedies to disparities in exclusionary discipline in schools, with funding from Atlantic, Open Society Foundations and an anonymous donor.

Council of State Governments' Justice Center publishes *Breaking School Rules, a study of school discipline and juvenile justice involvement in Texas* that fosters urgency by providing data on high rates of suspension for minor offenses and the disproportionate use of suspensions for students of color. The report, funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies and Open Society Foundations, shows that being suspended significantly increases the risk of dropping out and having contact with the juvenile justice system. Authors called for a convening of experts, policymakers, and advocates to develop consensus on better approaches.

U.S. Departments of Education and Justice create the **Supportive School Discipline Initiative**, which aims to build consensus for action at the federal, state, and local levels; collaborate on research and data collection; develop guidance to ensure that school discipline complies with civil rights laws; and promote knowledge of effective policies and practices for school discipline. The initiative kicks off a collaboration among the two federal agencies and foundations to promote school discipline reform.

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**2012** A **National Leadership Summit on School Justice Partnerships** is convened in New York City by former New York State Chief Judge Judith Kaye. State justices and school officials from 45 states discuss strategies for keeping children in school and out of the courts. Funders include The Atlantic Philanthropies, The California Endowment, MacArthur Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Casey Family Programs, and the law firm, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom.

U.S. Department of Education releases the first report on **expanded data from Civil Rights Data Collection** that includes rates for disciplinary practices. Data underscore racial disparities in suspension, expulsion, arrests in school, and referrals to law enforcement. The U.S. Department of Education subsequently includes addressing discipline disparities as a program requirement for districts in its Race to the Top competition grants program.

U.S. Department of Justice files a **lawsuit against Meridian, MS**, and its juvenile justice system, charging that city officials have violated children's rights through arrests for minor school-based offenses.

Foundations ramp up **communications about school discipline**, including sponsoring a journalism beat at Education Week and media relations through The Hatcher Group, leading to articles and essays exploring zero-tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline in major media. Funders include Atlantic, The California Endowment, the NoVo Foundation, and the Raikes Foundation.

The Gay-Straight Alliance Network, Advancement Project, and Alliance for Educational Justice publish **Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right: Why Zero Tolerance is Not the Solution to Bullying**, connecting bullying to the school-to-prison pipeline and exposing the double jeopardy for LGBT students.

U.S. Senate's **Judiciary Committee holds a hearing** on the school-to-prison pipeline that features recommendations for behavioral interventions and restorative justice rather than suspension and incarceration. The Advancement Project, Dignity in Schools, and other Atlantic grantees and allies provide testimony.

Shooting deaths of 20 children and six staff at **Sandy Hook Elementary School** prompt nation-wide call for stronger policing in schools and further mobilize the school discipline reform movement to advocate for strategies to build trust and community as an alternative to armed police in schools.

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**2013** The Center for Civil Rights Remedies publishes **Out of School and Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools**, further illustrating racial disparities in school discipline. The report, funded by Atlantic and The California Endowment, is featured at a **national symposium on racial and gender disparities in school discipline**, funded by Atlantic and co-convened by the Discipline Disparities Collaborative, which also features a Gallup, Inc. poll and a survey by Education Week. The symposium catapults the issue to new visibility among education audiences and the general public.

Speaking to the American Bar Association, **U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder** reiterates the need to reform zero-tolerance policies.

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**2014** U.S. Departments of Education and Justice issue **joint guidance on school discipline** to help public elementary and middle schools administer discipline and improve school climate in non-discriminatory ways.

The Discipline Disparities Collaborative issues a series of **briefs cataloguing research on the impact of disparities** in school discipline and early evidence of effectiveness of reform innovations emerging in the field.

The American Federation of Teachers hosts the first **national summit for school-based practitioners** on school discipline and restorative practices and collaborates with the Schott Foundation for Public Education, Advancement Project, National Education Association, and several prominent education organizations to produce a **guide for practitioners on restorative practices**.

The Council of State Governments' Justice Center publishes *The School Discipline Consensus Report*, which offers practical strategies for school discipline from education, health, law enforcement, and juvenile justice. The report, funded by Atlantic, The California Endowment, NoVo Foundation, and Open Society Foundations, advocates a positive school climate; tiered levels of behavioral interventions; and partnerships among education, police, and court officials to prevent referrals to juvenile justice for minor school-based offenses.

U.S. Departments of Education and Justice convene a **National Leadership Summit on School Discipline and Climate** in Washington, D.C., where teams of education and justice leaders from 22 states increase their knowledge, leverage resources and relationships, review data, and develop a draft action plan. Atlantic, Kellogg, Edward W. Hazen, Schott, and Open Society foundations sponsor the event.

The American Institutes for Research unveils a new **website for school practitioners** as a clearinghouse to access to research, data, and tools to assist in reforming discipline policy and practice.

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Image courtesy of Dignity in Schools Campaign

# *The Starting Point*

To fully appreciate what the alignment among government, philanthropy, advocacy, and community organizing accomplished, the challenges collaborators faced, and the lessons that this form of partnership produced, it helps to understand how the participants approached the issue of school discipline reform.

## History and Context

**Every year for more than 30 years, a large and growing number of children and youth has been excluded from school for disciplinary reasons.** By 2006, more than 3.3 million elementary and secondary school students nationally<sup>4</sup> (out of a total of 49.3 million)<sup>5</sup> were suspended annually—double the rate suspended 30 years earlier. By 2007, about one-fourth of public school students in grades 9 through 12 had ever been suspended, and 3 percent had ever been expelled.<sup>6</sup> Within some states, the percentages were even higher: For instance, almost 60 percent of all public secondary school students in Texas who were seventh graders in 2000, 2001, or 2002 had been suspended or expelled by the time they reached twelfth grade.<sup>7</sup> A large proportion of these suspensions and expulsions occurred in response to relatively minor infractions (such as the use of profanity in the classroom, dress code violations, or disrespectful behavior) that teachers and school administrators have discretion to treat through other procedures.

**Several factors fueled the growth of suspension and expulsion** as a method for school discipline. In the mid-1980s, judicial policy in general began shifting from the rehabilitation of people convicted of criminal offenses to the punishment of offenders and the deterrence of crime through harsher sentencing, even for nonviolent crimes. This change, codified by the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984, the Anti-Drug Abuse Bill of 1986, and the Crime Bill of 1991, established a zero-tolerance approach toward adult lawbreakers.<sup>8</sup> The zero-tolerance approach, which mandates specific punishments for specific offenses, emphasizes “a swift and severe response”<sup>9</sup> to any type of rule breaking.

Over the next decade, that get-tough response trickled down to the school setting, fueled by public concerns about safety after the Columbine High School shooting tragedy. Schools adopted law enforcement protections, stationing metal detectors and police officers onsite to enforce safety. Two federal laws, the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1986 and the Safe and Gun Free Schools Act of 1994, further supported disciplinary responses by mandating the expulsion of students who brought firearms, explosives, or drugs onto school grounds.<sup>10</sup> Perversely, however, the growing reliance on law enforcement in schools exacerbated the situation. The presence of police on campuses, advocates noted, “can create flashpoints for conflict with students and encourage police involvement in minor [issues]” that, instead of being resolved by school staff, become conflated with criminal offenses.<sup>11</sup>

Exclusionary methods of school discipline also spread in response to the pressure schools faced to boost students’ scores on standardized tests, which intensified under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The focus on test scores incentivized teachers and administrators to remove low-performing students from the classroom—especially those whose behavior required extra attention.<sup>12</sup>

**Just as troubling as the general growth of school exclusion has been the disproportionate application of zero-tolerance school discipline** to specific populations. In 2007, almost half (49 percent) of all African-American high school students had ever been suspended, a much larger percentage than that of Hispanic (26 percent), white (18 percent), or Asian/Pacific Islander (13 percent)<sup>13</sup> students. African-American and Latino students are more likely than white students to receive harsher punishment for the same disciplinary referral, especially for minor misbehavior.<sup>14</sup> And gay and lesbian adolescents particular to those of color are up to three times more likely than their heterosexual peers to face punishments in school that are “disproportionate to their rates of transgressive behavior.”<sup>15</sup> Some students face a double or triple jeopardy, as the disproportionality is also related to students’ economic status; although suspension rates are highest in urban schools, the disparity between black and other students is highest in suburban schools.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the excessive use of school discipline, especially for black male students, has grown over time (from 41 percent in 1999 to 57 percent just eight years later).<sup>17</sup>

Adding insult to injury, the rate of disciplinary action is higher for African-American students than for other students *despite* a lack of evidence that black students are more likely to misbehave. In fact, studies have found that: (a) black students may be treated more severely for the same offenses;<sup>18</sup> and (b) black students are more often referred for discipline on the basis of a teacher’s subjective judgments of their behavior (e.g., disrespectful behavior, threat, excessive noise) while white students are more often referred on the basis of behavior judged objectively (e.g., smoking, vandalism, leaving without permission).<sup>19</sup>

**And, adding injury to insult, students who are suspended or expelled risk a lifetime of negative outcomes.** Suspended students tend to have lower educational achievement. Instead of improving student behavior, experts note “rigidly punitive disciplinary approaches” can have the opposite effect, making students angry and distrustful and prompting them to pull away or drop out of school.<sup>20</sup> High school dropouts are three and a half times more likely than high school graduates to become incarcerated,<sup>21</sup> and they typically earn \$10,000 less annually.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, zero-tolerance punishment does not improve student behavior. Between 30 percent and 50 percent of suspended students are repeat offenders, leading researchers to conclude that suspension operates more as a reinforcement or reward for misbehavior.<sup>23</sup>



**Concern about these inequities and their long-term impact prompted several efforts to reform school discipline policy**, beginning 10 years before The Atlantic Philanthropies became involved:<sup>24</sup>

- **Civil rights and legal advocacy organizations**, including the Harvard Civil Rights Project, the Advancement Project,<sup>25</sup> the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the NAACP’s Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF), and Southern Poverty Law Center, drew an explicit connection between zero-tolerance school discipline and inequitable educational opportunities for children of color. A national summit convened by several of these organizations in 2000, with funding from the Ford, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur, Charles Stewart Mott, Open Society, and Rockefeller foundations, scrutinized the impact of zero-tolerance school disciplinary practices on children.
- **Grassroots advocates, particularly youth and public-school parents, existed across the country.** These groups coalesced into **national advocacy coalitions** to oppose the “school-to-prison pipeline” fueled by school suspensions and expulsions, including the Dignity in Schools Campaign<sup>26</sup> (DSC) and the Alliance for Educational Justice,<sup>27</sup> which gave young people and parents a vehicle for voicing their opposition. These coalitions provided “formal structures for collective action, enabling local community organizations to insert their views into federal policy discussions on a consistent and ongoing basis” through national summits, retreats, and events on Capitol Hill.<sup>28</sup>
- **Well-regarded researchers** across the country, including Skiba, Anne Gregory, Pedro Noguera, Losen, and Tia Elena Martinez began to analyze trends in school discipline disparities and connect them to diminished academic outcomes for children of color.
- **Private foundations** began supporting efforts to build awareness of the issue and influence policy change. The Edward W. Hazen and Surdna foundations were early supporters of the work through their investments in grassroots youth organizations, which were building local campaigns to confront zero-tolerance discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline. The Charles Stewart Mott, Open Society, Levi Strauss, and JEHT foundations also were early supporters, beginning around 2003. In 2007, Mott joined the Edward W. Hazen Foundation, Ford Foundation, and the Schott Foundation for Public Education to launch a funders’ collaborative called Communities for Public Education Reform (CPER) at Public Interest Projects. CPER’s mission was to help grassroots organizations scale up their efforts to influence state and federal policy, and school discipline was a focal issue for a number of these grantees.<sup>29</sup>

Despite these efforts, school discipline remained under the radar screen, largely subsumed by other reform efforts and not resourced on its own. The efforts of grassroots groups and civil rights advocates suffered from insufficient support, while the rates of out-of-school suspension—and their disparate impact on students of color—continued to grow. In 2009, however, the topic of school discipline reform surfaced when leaders of The Atlantic Philanthropies, having reached the decision to spend down the foundation’s resources within half a dozen years, sought to identify an issue on which they could reasonably expect to make an impact. In December of that year, Atlantic’s Board of Directors signed off on a plan that soon would influence school discipline policy at an unprecedented scale.

## Atlantic’s Perspective and Approach

**The responsibility for crafting Atlantic’s approach fell to its U.S. Children & Youth Programme**, then headed by Donna Lawrence. She had previously worked for the Children’s Defense Fund, a nonprofit child advocacy organization, and she carried with her that organization’s cradle-to-col-

lege perspective on child development. A longtime children’s advocate and poverty expert, Lawrence had managed Atlantic’s work in both K-12 education and out-of-school opportunities for youth, and she was familiar with the foundation’s more limited work in juvenile justice. Those qualities translated well to an issue that Atlantic, and others, then framed as a problem feeding the school-to-prison pipeline.

**In January 2010, Lawrence hired consultant Tanya Coke** to draft a strategy for the new school discipline grants portfolio. Coke was a criminal and racial justice expert who had managed the U.S. Human Rights Fund and directed criminal justice programs for the Open Society Foundations (OSF). A lawyer and experienced program developer, Coke had been a consultant to many of the entities already working in the school discipline reform arena, including the ACLU, NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (LDF), and Southern Poverty Law Center.

“I was told Atlantic had \$10 to \$17 million available to spend per year, and I was to use that as the ballpark in crafting a strategy,” Coke recalls. Over the next 10 weeks, she conducted in-depth interviews with about 50 experts in the school discipline field, from advocates and researchers to leaders of professional organizations, to collect their thoughts on the potential to move policy on the issue and what actions would be most likely to produce real reform. One of those interviewees was Kavitha Mediratta, then a program officer in education for the New York Community Trust. Like Coke, Mediratta’s career had focused on racial equity and human justice, but where Coke had approached issues from a legal track, Mediratta came from an education perspective.

Coke synthesized the ideas from her interviews into a 40-page memorandum that framed school discipline reform as “a means of improving educational opportunities for the nation’s most vulnerable children and avoiding their unnecessary placement in the juvenile and criminal justice systems.”<sup>30</sup> Lawrence sought to hire Coke full-time to head the work. But Coke preferred consulting, and she recommended Mediratta instead. Mediratta, who was completing a doctorate, was reluctant to make a commitment that would distract from finishing her degree, so they negotiated a job-sharing arrangement, with Mediratta serving as program officer and Coke as a long-term consultant to the effort.

**In addition to sharing a job, Mediratta and Coke shared the belief that community organizing should be a key element** and driver of policy reform. A former teacher, researcher, and program developer, Mediratta had led the Annenberg Institute for School Reform’s research on community organizing; published a book on the topic through Harvard Education Press; and, over more than a decade at New York University’s Institute for Education and Social Policy, led citywide coalitions to reform education policy. Community organizing in service of an advocacy campaign was something that also resonated with Atlantic’s president and CEO at the time, Gara LaMarche, whose background included leadership positions at Human Rights Watch and the ACLU. Thus, community organizing would become a powerful theme of Atlantic’s work on school discipline reform.

**With those qualities and experiences as a backdrop, it is not surprising that Coke and Mediratta embraced a theory of public policy agenda-setting** popularized in the 1990s by political scientist John Kingdon and informed by lessons learned from social movements.<sup>31</sup> As Mediratta later explained in an essay:

*[This theory] asserts that policy windows open at moments of alignment among the problem stream (issues recognized as significant problems that need to be addressed), the policy stream (what is regarded as a good and actionable idea), and the political stream (dynamics in the larger political environment that facilitate action). Alignment across these streams creates the opportunity for new ideas to enter into the policy-making discourse.<sup>32</sup>*

Accordingly, Mediratta and Coke set out to “open the window” for reform within the education and justice systems through investments and partnerships that would: (a) reframe the practice of zero-tolerance school suspension as a dysfunctional and racially discriminatory practice that threatens educational attainment; (b) cultivate awareness and knowledge among policymakers and practitioners of the harms of zero tolerance and of alternative policies and practices that keep children in school; and (c) create a national movement of grassroots and legal advocates, educators, and justice leaders that would simultaneously build pressure and offer support for change. Mediratta and Coke were later joined by Tasha Tucker, who served as an associate program officer on the team.

**The short-term goal of Atlantic’s school discipline reform effort was to reduce school suspension and expulsion rates nationally** by 30 percent by 2016 (as measured against rates in 2010, the year Atlantic began its investments) and to reduce disparities in school discipline by 15 percent.<sup>33</sup> Looking beyond Atlantic’s investment period, the goal was to decrease suspension rates to their level before zero-tolerance enforcement began, a rate of about 6 percent, and to eliminate racial disparities in disciplinary actions.<sup>34</sup> In setting these goals, staff knew they were aspirational. But they wanted to establish targets that would be sufficiently large and ambitious to communicate the scale of change they hoped to set in motion.

**Atlantic’s strategy was driven by the theory that a single philanthropy could not directly influence disciplinary practice in every school,**<sup>35</sup> given the nation’s decentralized system of 13,600 school districts, each with authority to determine its own disciplinary policies. When Atlantic entered the field, a few reform-oriented districts were already demonstrating the positive impact of zero-tolerance alternatives on student achievement, dropout rates, and juvenile justice involvement, with support from advocates and private funders. Atlantic sought to leverage the success of those districts to drive reform in a larger set of geographically diverse and influential jurisdictions, while creating the regulatory pressure and capacity-building support needed for other jurisdictions to follow suit. Thus, the four strands of Atlantic’s funding strategy were to:

1. Build public demand and political support for reform in local school districts and key states through vigorous advocacy by parents, students, and legal advocates
2. Create federal policy and funding to strengthen mandates and incentives for school discipline reform by localities
3. Engage diverse allies as partners in promoting positive discipline, especially among teachers’ unions, school district superintendents and judges, in order to provide leadership and support for reform
4. Develop and share knowledge about reducing disparities in school discipline by lifting up examples of effective alternatives; filling gaps in data, research, and analysis; and linking and coordinating grantee organizations.

Several guiding principles shaped Atlantic’s approach to each of these strands, as follows:

- **Base the approach on evidence of successful solutions** that can be replicated or scaled up.
- **Work at multiple levels**—in cities, states, and nationally—to increase demand for reform, leverage action, and build momentum from the bottom up and top down.
- **Work within and outside education, judicial, and governmental systems** simultaneously, combining pressure *on* them with support *for* them.
- **Frame the debate and the message** in ways that define a specific problem and unify stakeholders around a set of solutions, but leave room for allies’ individual priorities to coexist.

- **Position philanthropy as government’s thought partner** rather than its funder.
- **Pursue both legal reforms and changes to institutional practices**, rather than one or the other.
- **Create a web of relationships** that connect players across sectors and roles, using the Foundation’s influence to broker introductions and negotiate collaborations.

## Partnership on School Discipline Reform Among Foundations

**From the beginning, Atlantic staff viewed its role as using the Foundation’s resources and influence to advance, accelerate, and amplify the collective efforts** of other donors working in the same space. Although no donor had taken on this issue at the scale Atlantic aimed to do, investments and leadership by several funders had laid the ground for a national effort. These included the Open Society Foundations; Open Society Institute–Baltimore (OSI), OSF’s field office, which was also an Atlantic grantee; The California Endowment (TCE); the Edward W. Hazen Foundation; and the Schott Foundation for Public Education (also a grantee).

OSF became interested in school discipline reform after its founder and living donor, George Soros, heard Baltimore schoolchildren describe their experiences with zero-tolerance suspensions. He asked OSF staff to explore the issue, and Anne Beeson, then-director of OSF’s U.S. Programs, allocated about \$1 million in grants to organizations working on school discipline policy reform, including the Advancement Project and NAACP LDF.

OSI–Baltimore was already investing in alternatives to the school-to-prison pipeline and had led a successful effort to reform the Baltimore City Public Schools’ code of conduct. This work was driven by the foundation’s “basic social justice orientation and our theory that democracies become less stable when large portions of the population are excluded,” says Jane Sundius, OSI–Baltimore’s director of education and youth development. She and foundation President Diana Morris were raising money to do similar work at the state level when Atlantic staff reached out, through multiple site visits, to learn more about its local work on school discipline. Atlantic and OSF had close ties: Coke was on the staff of both foundations at different times, and LaMarche had previously been OSF’s vice president and director of U.S. Programs. A close relationship developed among Coke, Mediratta, and Sundius that led, three years later, to the development of a national strategy for OSF’s U.S. Programs’ investments to promote discipline reform, developed jointly by Mediratta and Sundius.

The California Endowment connected with Atlantic in 2011. TCE became a funder of and participant in several key activities and products described later in this report, including a cross-sector effort to develop consensus recommendations for federal policy, a National Leadership Summit on School-Justice Partnerships, research on the overuse of school suspension, development of the federal Supportive School Discipline Initiative, and targeted coverage of school discipline by *Education Week*. TCE and Atlantic also funded some of the same exemplary programs, organizations, and campaigns.

**Importantly, the philanthropic colleagues were not just co-funders: they describe each other as thought partners.** OSF and California Endowment leaders share Atlantic’s top-down, bottom-up, inside-outside strategy. All three foundations support advocacy and grassroots organizing and seek to connect it to policy and systems reforms. And all three aim to drive policy change by build-

ing political will, rather than merely through funding programs and services.

Between 2010 and 2014, several other funders joined the loose philanthropic partnership. The Schott Foundation had focused on the achievement gap between children of color and their white counterparts for several years; and its staff began to explore with Atlantic ways to leverage each other's efforts to help local, state, and federal education agencies improve disciplinary practices. The Foundation supports work by young people and communities of color to dismantle structural racism, and it has supported youth and parent organizing on education issues for 20 years. Other collaborators included the Robert Wood Johnson and NoVo foundations and an anonymous donor.

*“Because of our foundation’s size and grantee list, the door to federal government might have been closed to us—but Atlantic is viewed as a more significant partner for the government. It’s really about sitting down and mapping out the different relationships and who needs to move where in order for us to collectively move this issue.”*

—**John Jackson** President, Schott Foundation for Public Education

**The foundations each played slightly different roles**, with the combined effort

adding up to something more than any one foundation could achieve on its own. For instance, OSI-Baltimore and TCE built momentum at the local and state levels. Hazen fostered youth organizing to the point at which other national foundations could build it into a movement around school discipline reform. Schott, whose president had longstanding relationships with the teachers’ unions from his previous position at the NAACP, facilitated partnerships with the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association. Meanwhile, Mediratta and Coke worked their relation-

ships with longstanding colleagues who now held leadership positions in the federal government.

**Collaboration also informed how funders understood** the impact of the school discipline issue. In 2010, for example, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) released expectations and guidance for school districts to establish policies on bullying. Advocates of zero-tolerance school discipline were concerned that this could have an unintended backlash, especially for students of color and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) students, by sanctioning high suspension rates for offenses that teachers judge subjectively. Luna Yasui, then-manager of the Open Society Foundations’ portfolio on gender justice and LGBT rights,<sup>36</sup> reached out to Atlantic and an anonymous donor to discuss ways to link justice, education, and LGBT communities to address school discipline.

“One of the ‘aha’ moments for us was the realization of just how deeply LGBT students were being affected by zero-tolerance discipline, and therefore that we needed to expand our focus on disparities beyond race to include sexual orientation and gender expression,” Mediratta explains. Atlantic, OSF, and the anonymous donor jointly supported grantees to delve into the issues, resulting in *Two Wrongs Don’t Make a Right*, the first significant report on the double bind that race and sexual orientation or gender identity create for students, written jointly by the Alliance for Educational Justice (AEJ), Advancement Project and the Gay-Straight Alliance Network. The three foundations also provided support to the Discipline Disparities Research-to-Practice Collaborative (p. 30) to make LGBT disparities a substantial focus of its work.

To help coordinate and align the foundations investing in school discipline reform, Atlantic created an informal table of funders. The small group, which met monthly by phone, co-funded some projects but more importantly helped each other strategize. Participants shared both information and social capital. Occasionally, they met in Washington and spent the day visiting federal partners as a group to push for action.

“It was very helpful to be able to talk” with other funders, says Castle Redmond, program manager for schools at The California Endowment. “I’m accountable for policy and systems change in California, not at the federal level. But it’s very useful when pushing change in California to have influence and input into federal policy change. And we don’t have as much influence alone as when we’re part of a group of funders.”

*“We looked for what was missing or redundant and who we needed to contact, where we needed to push.”*

—**Lori Bezahler** President, Edward W. Hazen Foundation

**The history, strategy, principles, and partnerships described here—and the interplay among them—would determine how alignment, collaboration, and partnership evolved** on the issue of school discipline reform. We turn now to that story.



END THE

# SCHOOL 2 PRISON

PIPELINE

Image courtesy of Dignity in Schools Campaign

# *Evolution of Alignment on the Issue*

A closer look at a sample of philanthropic activities and investments from 2010 through 2014<sup>37</sup> illustrates how cross-sector alignment and collaboration unfolded within each strand of the funding strategy articulated by Atlantic: building demand and support for local reforms, creating federal policy and funding to strengthen mandates and incentives, engaging diverse allies as partners and champions, and developing and sharing knowledge.

**First, however, it's important to note that within each strand of work the collaborators made a deliberate effort to reframe the issue** of school discipline reform. In 2010, proponents of zero tolerance were framing it as a way to keep well-behaving children safe in school. Many educators, in particular, thought of school discipline as “a criminal justice issue playing out in schools,” rather than an issue that was fundamentally about “who gets to be in the classroom and how their development and growth is supported.” Opponents of zero-tolerance discipline, meanwhile, positioned it as a racially biased, unjust practice that fed the school-to-prison pipeline.<sup>38</sup>

To broaden the frame, funders supported the Dignity in Schools Campaign, which views school discipline as a process for deliberately pushing unwanted populations of students out of school, and the Alliance for Educational Justice, which “links school discipline and push-out to inequitable funding of public education, an overreliance on high-stakes testing, and low levels of academic rigor and expectations in schools” that serve low-income students of color.<sup>39</sup> The Advancement Project called for replacing extreme discipline with a common-sense approach that supports students in attending, achieving, and succeeding in school. “Being able to put common sense into the equation was important to getting people to realize that a lot of what was being done was outside the bounds,” observes Advancement Project Co-Director Judith Browne Dianis.

Another grantee, the New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children, sees school discipline as a factor in how young people come to view equity, discrimination, and the ad-



ministration of justice. And staff from Atlantic, the Open Society Foundations, and an anonymous philanthropic organization aligned on efforts to link the justice, education, and LGBT communities after learning that discriminatory school discipline was also applied disproportionately to gender-nonconforming students whose behavior challenged adults' views.

The attention to framing reflected how collaborating funders thought about alignment. "When people think about public/private partnership, they assume it's a lock-step arrangement," Mediratta observes. "But we were operating from a movement frame. We needed lots of different voices and roles that were headed in the same direction. That's what we were trying to galvanize and support."

## Strand 1: Build Demand and Support for Reform in Local Districts

**Private funders cultivated public demand for local reform by supporting vigorous advocacy** by parents, students, and legal advocates. Examples include the Advancement Project, the Alliance for Educational Justice, the Dignity in Schools Campaign, the Just and Fair Schools Fund<sup>40</sup> and the School-to-Prison Pipeline Legal Strategies Collaborative (LSC):

- The **Just and Fair Schools Fund** was created in 2010 with a \$3.5 million grant from Atlantic to Public Interest Projects to support local and state-based community groups working to eliminate harsh school discipline policies and practices, especially those that disproportionately impact students of color and those who are LGBT immigrants, in foster care, or with disabilities. The Fund, which in 2015 transitioned and changed its name to the **Communities for Just Schools Fund** at New Venture Fund, attracted funding from a dozen other philanthropies<sup>41</sup> to support organizations and programs in more than 15 states working at the local, state, and national levels.
- **The School-to-Prison Pipeline Legal Strategies Collaborative** was created in 2011 through a \$3.3 million grant to the NAACP LDF. Its mission was to provide resources and "connective tissue" for Atlantic's legal and civil rights advocacy grantees and "to explore gaps in knowledge, assess the needs of the field, and share ideas among advocates who use litigation strategies to address key school discipline issues." By convening grantees for discussion and peer learning, the LSC created a national table for collective strategy development.
- The **Dignity in Schools Campaign** is an umbrella organization of local youth, parents, educators, grassroots groups, and policy and legal advocacy groups (many of which are funded through the Just and Fair Schools Fund). DSC works to ensure that the people most affected by the education system and school pushout are at the center of the reform process. Grants to DSC institutionalized the coalition in 2010 and supported communications and national convenings

*"It's critical to anchor the work in deep community partnerships. For resource reasons, however, you can't partner with every individual group, so to get to the in-depth understanding of what happens at the very local level, what the challenges and opportunities are, how groups operate, you need an organization like DSC."*

—**Catherine Albisa** Executive Director,  
National Economic and Social Rights  
Initiative

to coordinate and amplify local demands for reform and provide direct lobbying for federal legislative change.

- The **Advancement Project** is a civil rights organization that aims to dismantle structural racism through multi-racial grassroots organizing, communications, and legal strategies. Nationally, the Advancement Project provides training, networking, tools and resources, media outreach, and public education on issues of race, democracy, and justice. In more than 15 localities and states, the organization provides direct legal and communications support for campaigns to influence public opinion. The Advancement Project was particularly helpful in reframing the discourse on school discipline and creating an infrastructure for communication among advocates and between advocates and policymakers.
- The **Alliance for Educational Justice** is a national collective of about 30 youth organizing groups. Grants to AEJ helped ensure that federal decision makers involved in school discipline reform heard high school students' perspectives. Among other activities, AEJ staff participated in a summit in Washington, DC organized by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice to hear from young people about the role of school discipline issues in creating obstacles to educational achievement and college attainment (p. 18).

*“What we were able to do, because we work nationally, is connect the dots to see what was happening in different places and then tell a story that was bigger than each district.”*

—**Judith Browne Dianis** Co-Director,  
Advancement Project

## Strand 2: Create Federal Policy and Funding to Strengthen Mandates and Incentives

**Because the private funders sought to build a movement that could influence public policy**, it was natural to seek partnership with the federal government. The strategy relied heavily on the foundations' national grantees—organizations like the Dignity in Schools Campaign, Advancement Project, and Alliance for Educational Justice—that helped local advocates exercise their voice in Washington, D.C., and apply pressure on Congressional and agency leaders. The funders also supported communications to help connect local stories to a larger national narrative about the issue. Foundation staffs then tried to use their voice and influence “to come behind our grantees and back them up,” one observes, providing added legitimacy to advocates' calls for reform.

Despite the careful attention paid to alignment with federal government, few of the funders expected these partnerships to play as prominent a role as they did. At first, most thought that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (also known as No Child Left Behind) would soon be reauthorized, so advocates put most of their energy into making sure the new law included school discipline and allocated money to local districts for alternatives to suspension and expulsion. By early 2011, however, it was clear that reauthorization would not come quickly. Attention shifted to actions the administration could take without Congressional approval, and funders cultivated relationships with leaders in the justice and education departments.

**Atlantic staff began with outreach to the U.S. Department of Justice** (DOJ). A contact in DOJ's Office of Justice Programs with whom Coke had worked while at the Open Society Foundations urged her to contact Robin Delany-Shabazz, DOJ's associate administrator for state and community development. The funders' approach resonated immediately with Delany-Shabazz, a leader shaped

by the civil rights movement; she shared the commitment to grassroots leadership and community voices. She would become a key partner on school discipline reform for the collaborating foundations and advocacy groups. Other important allies within DOJ would include Melody Hanes, then deputy administrator for policy at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP); Robert Listenbee, administrator of the OJJDP; Anurima Bharghava, chief of educational opportunities in DOJ's civil rights division; and Jaime Koppel, an Atlantic-funded School Discipline Fellow at DOJ who worked on the Supportive School Discipline Initiative.

In general, however, at the beginning of philanthropy's outreach to the federal government, many outside observers were concerned that school discipline did not appear to be a deep concern of the agencies. Although the civil rights divisions of DOJ and ED had held joint national conferences in 2010 on school discipline, the issue did not seem to have permeated other divisions of either agency. (A leader from one of Atlantic's partner philanthropies recalls being told by administration staff that there was "little national demand" for school discipline reforms, despite the fact that almost every state had some kind of educational equity movement underway.)

**Everything changed after the release of a study** on school discipline in Texas and its relationship to students' academic success and juvenile justice involvement, funded by the Open Society Foundations. The project was summarized in *Breaking Schools' Rules*, a report published in 2011 by the Council of State Governments' (CSG) Justice Center and the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University (with dissemination supported by The Atlantic Philanthropies). The researchers analyzed individual student records for every public-school seventh grader in the state for three graduating classes—more than 1 million students—and tracked them for at least six years, matching education data with juvenile justice records.

*Breaking Schools' Rules* revealed these stunning facts:<sup>42</sup>

- The majority of students (almost 60 percent) were suspended or expelled at some point between 7th and 12th grade.
- Only three percent of disciplinary actions was for conduct for which state law mandates suspensions and expulsions (e.g., violence); 97 percent was for behavior punished at the discretion of teachers and principals (e.g., disrespect and insubordination).
- Nearly three-quarters of students who qualified for special education were suspended or expelled at least once.
- African-American students were 31 percent more likely to receive a discretionary discipline action, compared to otherwise identical white and Hispanic students.
- Students who were suspended or expelled for discretionary violations were twice as likely to repeat a grade and three times as likely to be in contact with the juvenile justice system; about 10 percent of disciplined students dropped out of school.

*“What did you say—60 percent of students are suspended during their middle- or high-school careers? We’ve got to do something about that.”*

—**Eric Holder** U.S. Attorney General

Because the Texas study was more extensive than any previous research, and because Texas has the second-largest public school system in the nation (with a large proportion of children of color), the findings in *Breaking Schools' Rules* had widespread significance. Michael Thompson, a co-author of the report, presented preliminary findings to Delany-Shabazz, with whom he had worked on other projects. She asked Thompson to repeat the presentation to Attorney General Eric Holder's Coordinating Council on Juvenile Jus-

tice and Delinquency Prevention, which she managed. The Attorney General was astounded by the data, recalls an observer at the meeting. “What did you say—60 percent of students are suspended during their middle- or high-school careers?” Attorney General Holder asked. “We’ve got to do something about that.”

Newly energized, Holder was eager to connect with Secretary Duncan to address the problem. Suddenly, says Lori Bezahler, president of the Hazen Foundation, “You had the attention of the Attorney General and the Secretary of Education. It was remarkable.”

**Private funders already were connecting with leaders at the Department of Education.** One was Kevin Jennings, whom Secretary Duncan had appointed assistant deputy secretary for the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools. Before joining the government, Jennings had founded the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, and he was determined to address school-based bullying and school climate—a good fit with discipline reform. Jennings introduced Atlantic staff to his policy assistant, Kristen Harper, who was interested in issues of racial disparities and had recently participated in listening sessions around the country to hear what young people wanted to change about public education. Harper, who later became a special assistant to the assistant secretary of education, would be one of philanthropy’s allies within ED.

Another important partner was Russlynn Ali, assistant secretary for civil rights until the end of 2012. Atlantic staff began meeting regularly with Ali to discuss the Office of Civil Rights’ (OCR) investigations and enforcement of Title VI complaints in local school districts (see box on page 21). The philanthropic partners wanted to identify grantee organizations in the affected communities that could help investigated school districts “raise their game.” Although Ali declined to identify districts for confidentiality reasons, the dialogue opened the door to greater alignment.

Other federal education partners included: Catherine Lhamon, who succeeded Ali as assistant secretary for civil rights in 2013 and was formerly an Atlantic grantee at Public Counsel in Los Angeles; Christopher Scott, an OSF-funded fellow within the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans; and Alberto Retana, then ED’s director of community outreach. Retana had worked to raise awareness of the school-to-prison pipeline before coming to Washington, and he was looking for ways for young people’s voices to inform federal policy on the issue. Retana and Mediratta were longtime friends through their community organizing work, and they often discussed school discipline reform.

“There were lots of good people within the Department of Education working on different pieces of school climate, discipline, and racial disparities, but we did not know each other at first. Alberto helped us to build relationships with these staff,” Mediratta observes. “And then when CSG’s Texas study came out, we were able to reach these staff to underscore the urgency of the problem and offer partnership to make change happen.”

**Attorney General Holder and Secretary Duncan responded in 2011 by creating the Supportive School Discipline Initiative (SSDI),** which aimed to: (a) build consensus for action at the federal, state, and local levels of education and justice; (b) collaborate on research and data collection; (c)

*“I always found the inside/outside strategy incredibly useful. The federal government isn’t going to initiate change unless they’re backed into a corner. It’s the advocates who can push.”*

—**Allison Brown** U.S. Department of Justice (2006-12) and Open Society Foundations (current)

promote awareness among state education and judicial leaders of evidence-based and promising policies and practices for school discipline; and (d) develop guidance to ensure that school discipline policies and practices comply with federal civil rights laws and promote disciplinary options that keep students in school and improve the climate for learning. The SSDI marked a major step forward by the federal agencies, both in collaborating with each other and in taking a stand on the importance of school discipline reform.

**In early 2012, however, while the federal guidance on school discipline was still being developed, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, an unarmed African-American youth, was fatally shot** by George Zimmerman, an Hispanic adult, in Sanford, FL. As the nation erupted with tense debates about race, violence, and discrimination, the funders began meeting with senior administration officials to discuss ways to accelerate action on the school-to-prison pipeline. A positive step, these funders suggested, would be to release the school discipline guidance and lift up disciplinary reforms as a way to address some of the racial disparities that young people face. Attorney General Holder, who already was focused on disciplinary reform, also began to discuss it with President Obama, according to staff. This brought a new level of legitimacy to the issue and attracted interest from even more private funders.

Momentum to release the school discipline guidance gained steam over the next year, first when Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye of New York convened the National Leadership Summit on School Justice Partnerships in March 2012 and then when the Department of Education released new data from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) that showed racial disparities in suspension, expulsion, arrests in school, and referrals to law enforcement (p. 25).

As with earlier milestones, including the Council of State Governments' report and the creation of the Supportive School Discipline Initiative, the funders and grantees used the data release to applaud the administration's leadership and to encourage faster action on the school discipline guidance. Advocacy grantees held press events and issued media advisories. Communications grantees conducted outreach to journalists to publicize stories about school discipline. And the philanthropic partners worked behind the scenes to articulate the need for strong action to protect districts that were taking strides in the right direction. "[Government allies] have to feel there is demand for change and that they have something to say," a private funder explains. "We had to tee them up to take bold action but also make sure they knew—because they could see it in the press—that all of our grantees were carrying water for them."

**And then, in August 2013, Zimmerman was acquitted of murder in Martin's death, prompting remarks by President Obama that would become the impetus for a second and more sweeping federal initiative.** *My Brother's Keeper* (MBK) aimed to help "identify and promote programs that work...to connect boys and young men [of color] to mentoring, support networks, and skills they need to find a good job or go to college and work their way up into the middle class."<sup>43</sup>

As before, the funders mobilized. On one track, philanthropic leaders met with senior officials in the White House to explore ways that the public and private sectors might align efforts to address the needs of boys and young men of color. A second track (with overlapping membership) kept up the pressure to release the guidance.

**The Departments of Justice and Education issued the joint guidance on school discipline** in the first weeks of 2014 and a month later leaders from 10 national foundations—including Atlantic, TCE, Ford, OSF, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, all funders of the school discipline reform movement—stood with President Obama as he issued *My Brother's Keeper's* call to action. They and other philanthropies committed to investing at least \$200 million over the next five years to support key areas of intervention, including "educational opportunity and school disci-

pline reform.” Mediratta and Allison Brown, now a program officer at OSF, served on a foundation task force created in parallel to the President’s initiative; Damon Hewitt—who had been a grantee partner of Atlantic’s while at the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, and a philanthropic partner while at OSF—was named coordinator of philanthropic effort; and Robert Ross, president and CEO of The California Endowment, served as the philanthropic effort’s executive-level leader. From these vantage points, Hewitt, Mediratta, Brown and Ross ensured that MBK’s key points included the use of alternative discipline practices to help keep more students of color on track to graduate from high school.

In parallel with these federal actions, funders helped their grantees promote the guidance and develop tools to assist localities with implementing discipline reform. The Dignity in Schools Campaign conducted a series of informational webinars, while the American Institutes for Research developed a website to support education practitioners. The Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) at the University of Virginia developed a module on culturally responsive school discipline for teachers’ professional development, and the National Education Policy Center at Colorado University provided advocates with technical assistance on monitoring disciplinary practices in charter schools. And funders continued to lift up exemplary approaches, such as a protocol for bringing school and judicial leaders together developed in Clayton County, GA.

**The cumulative effect, Mediratta notes, “was not the invisible hand of one philanthropy moving players across a field.** It was a vibrant movement for change, fueled by the synergy between the actions of diverse actors and guided by a shared understanding that exclusionary school discipline harms children and that we can do better. Creating the context in which synergistic action can happen is what strategic philanthropy is all about.”

## Senate Hearing Builds Momentum for Federal Policy Change

In December 2012, the Senate Committee on the Judiciary’s Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights held a public hearing on the school-to-prison pipeline. The hearing, convened by Judiciary Committee Chair Senator Dick Durbin, came a few weeks after DOJ filed a lawsuit against Meridian, MS, and its juvenile justice court system, “charging that city officials have violated students’ rights as they ‘routinely and systematically arrest and incarcerate children’ for [minor] offenses.”\*

The Just and Fair Schools Fund paid for students and parents to travel to Washington to speak at the event, and philanthropy funded a report on Mississippi’s school discipline crisis by the ACLU, NAACP, and Advancement Project. Speakers included administration officials, reform advocates, and criminal justice leaders. Two stood out in particular: Edward Ward, a graduate of the Chicago Public Schools who worked with the Dignity in Schools Campaign, and Steve Teske, chief judge of the Clayton County Juvenile Court in Georgia.

Ward, an honors student, spoke eloquently about watching while many of his friends were repeatedly suspended, until they gave up and dropped out. Judge Teske described his effort to “engage all of the systems intended to serve young people...in developing protocols and strategies designed to reduce referrals by schools to the courts and to offer treatment services not available in the schools to families in need of support.”

\* Hing, J. (December 13, 2012). “The School-to-Prison Pipeline Gets Its First-Ever Airing in the Senate.” Colorlines.

## Advocacy, Government, and the Inside/Outside Approach

**Funders devised an inside/outside strategy that relied on grassroots stakeholders and legal advocacy to build pressure on policymakers while simultaneously “enhancing readiness for change”** by cultivating educators’ leadership and supporting government officials and policymakers with data, solutions, and political cover on tough issues. The rollout of this strategy was sequential. First, the funders supported advocacy efforts to exert grassroots pressure on school systems and to raise awareness of the issue among key constituencies: school superintendents and administrators, and juvenile and family court judges. Next, while continuing to fund advocacy, they began to cultivate allies both within the federal departments of justice and education and in key stakeholder associations.

**An important part of the inside/outside approach involved helping grantees and grassroots stakeholders meet with federal decision makers**, adding the philanthropies’ weight to their activities and concerns. For example, Dignity in Schools engaged grassroots groups around the country in developing recommendations for federal policy changes and brought local stakeholders to Washington to meet with government leaders, for several years leading up to the development of the Department of Justice and Department of Education’s joint guidance on school discipline. One meeting in particular stands out: the Alliance for Educational Justice’s session at the Voices in Action National Youth Summit, during which young people talked directly to high-level representatives of the Departments of Justice and Education about school discipline issues.

The young people’s powerful stories touched staff within the federal agencies. “Up until that point, we were so focused on school climate and bullying,” one says. “But the students said in no uncertain terms that we were not doing enough. It changed how I viewed the entire issue, because I was hearing it first-hand from the students.” Responses like that “tilled the soil,” Mediratta believes, for a positive reception to CSG’s report on school discipline disparities, which was released soon after the summit.

Foundation staff also introduced grantees to government officials and used their personal and professional connections to help open doors. And they repeatedly nudged federal leaders to include the voices of students, parents, and advocates in policy discussions and decisions. The Open Society Foundations and Atlantic convened a listening session for leaders and staff from the Departments of Justice and Education so they could hear directly from stakeholders in the field about school discipline concerns and possible solutions. These activities broadened the conversation and cultivated knowledge and trust among the players within and outside government.

**The School-to-Prison Pipeline Legal Strategies Collaborative (p. 19) also became a vehicle for applying pressure** on the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR) to investigate claims of disparate impact on students caused by discriminatory practices. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, schools (and other recipients of federal support) cannot discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin; OCR is charged with investigating Title VI complaints and requiring schools to use practices that do not have a disparate impact on protected populations. During most of the 2000s, OCR did not aggressively pursue this function. In 2009, however, President Obama appointed Russlynn Ali, an experienced advocate for equitable education, to be the Department of Education’s assistant secretary for civil

rights. Legal advocates found Ali more receptive to Title VI complaints, and she encouraged them to refer claims to OCR. Ali was concerned, however, that her office couldn't require districts to adopt alternative school discipline practices because the evidence on positive school discipline showed only that alternatives reduce suspensions—not racial disparities. Members of the Legal Strategies Collaborative decided to open the floodgates on Title VI filings “to force the feds to get their feet wet,” as one recalls. They also began writing legal briefs exploring the legal basis of Title VI complaints and the implications for school districts in terms of school discipline reform.

Allison Brown is a former trial attorney for the educational opportunities section of the Department of Justice's civil rights division, which pursues similar claims under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act (which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race or national origin in public schools). Brown's position was that racial disparities in school discipline were manifestations of unconstitutional dual school systems; soon her office was pushing litigation efforts on school discipline, too. The pressure exerted and the information provided by the Legal Strategies Collaborative were very useful, Brown recalls. “I knew I couldn't move a complaint or a case unless I had anecdotal evidence that accompanied the data I had on paper. The realities that students are facing really propelled people forward,” she says.

## Strand 3: Engage Diverse Allies as Partners and Champions

**To increase the receptivity to demands for reform, private funders used their credentials and connections in education, justice, philanthropy, and government to attract allies who could serve as champions and leaders** of school discipline reform among their peers. One such alliance was with Chief Judge Kaye, who had served on the New York State high court for 25 years (15 of them as the chief judge) before reaching the age of mandatory retirement. She continued to chair the New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children, and in 2009 she and the commission's executive director, Kathleen De-

Cataldo, organized a symposium in New York City on the need to “keep kids in school and out of court.” The Judge's interest captured Atlantic's attention as a means of galvanizing action not only by other judges but potentially of educators, many of whom were reluctant to acknowledge the seriousness of the school discipline issue.

In 2010, Atlantic staff approached Judge Kaye to organize an event that became the **National Leadership Summit on School Justice Partnerships**. Held in March 2012 with support from six philanthropies<sup>44</sup> and the DOJ's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the summit convened teams of chief state justices and chief state school officers from 45 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands to discuss ways to improve school discipline practices and reduce student entry into the juvenile justice system. It was the first national gathering

*“We saw young adolescence as the last clear chance to keep kids who are in the shadow population—kids who are being pushed out and expelled from school—out of a lifetime of violent crime and incarceration. Our determination was to bring that population into very sharp focus.”*

— Former New York State Chief Judge  
**Judith S. Kaye**



of states' top education and judicial leaders to address the connection between schools and courts, and it gave participants a chance to strengthen partnership on the issue. Judge Kaye wielded her personal relationships to bring these leaders to the table to discuss a crisis that, until then, most had known nothing about. By showcasing research and examples of success, she and her colleagues opened their eyes to the growing threat posed by excessive suspensions and put resources in the hands of state leaders to mobilize systems at home.

**After Judge Kaye and DeCataldo set a date for the National Leadership Summit, advocates used the upcoming event to press for release** of the first set of federally collected school discipline data and to feature these data prominently in the agency's public messaging. The data were from the Civil Rights Data Collection, administered by the ED's Office of Civil Rights, which collects information from selected districts in every state and the District of Columbia. In 2009, driven by Russlynn Ali's experience addressing disparities in California, OCR staff expanded the CRDC to include data related to school discipline, including rates of suspension, expulsion, arrests, and referrals to law enforcement by students' age, race/ethnicity, gender, disability, and English learner status. These data bolstered the case for school discipline reform on educational equity and civil rights grounds. But proponents of school discipline reform wanted to make sure that data relevant to their cause wasn't lost in messaging that emphasized the CRDC's other educational indicators. Featuring the CRDC data at the summit raised up school discipline as a core indicator of educational equity, giving it new visibility in education circles. At the same time, having so many national experts and stakeholders attend the summit gave the Department of Education political cover to highlight discipline data so prominently, and the opportunity to show its commitment to address the discipline disparities revealed in the data.

**With judges now firmly engaged, philanthropy turned its attention to cultivating champions in the education system, beginning with the national teachers' unions.** This effort began with outreach by the Schott Foundation, Dignity in Schools Campaign, and National Opportunity to Learn Campaign (funded by the Schott Foundation and 12 other funders) to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), seeking to involve the unions in a campaign calling for a moratorium on out-of-school suspensions. Neither union formally joined the campaign, but their leaders issued statements supporting school discipline reform in the summer of 2012, which represented a huge leap forward for teachers on this issue. Those actions opened the door for a grant from Atlantic to the AFT in December 2012 that supported professional development for local affiliates and communications favoring school discipline reform. As the union representing 1.5 million members in largely urban districts where the number of suspensions often are highest, the AFT was particularly important to engage.

Under AFT President Randi Weingarten, an interdepartmental team worked to examine school discipline policy not just as an education issue but in terms of legislation, communications, civil rights, and community engagement. Through AFT's affiliates, they began to inform local leaders of legislative reforms across the country; they used social media to alert members to articles and reports on discipline disparities; and they made strategic connections to stakeholders in faith and advocacy organizations.

These steps brought the unions up against the competing priorities that teachers face, including the desire to keep disruptive behavior out of the classroom and the need to ensure that students score well on high-stakes tests. But when AFT and its affiliates examined data on how the policies are disparately applied and the adverse effect they have on students of color, they found "an epidemic of school cultures in which children and youth are suspended for non-criminal offenses."

"Teachers want to make a difference in children's lives, and we know the first step is getting kids to school and ensuring school is both a place that meets their needs and a place they want to be,"

says Weingarten. “That’s why we want to address the fact that African-American boys and girls, Latino boys, students with disabilities, and LGBT students are disproportionately affected by suspensions.” Consequently, the AFT developed a statement on school discipline that called for training of all school staff in positive school discipline, conflict resolution, cultural relevancy and responsiveness, behavior management, social justice, and equity and for schools to use alternatives to suspension and expulsion to manage student behavior, among other changes.<sup>45</sup>

*“Highlighting the problem is important, but we also must address it in a meaningful way through viable solutions and supports that create a positive school environment for our students and their educators.”*

—**Randi Weingarten** President, American Federation of Teachers

With the presidents of both unions on board, the landscape suddenly started to shift. Atlantic then supported the National Association of State Boards of Education and the American Association of School Administrators to survey their memberships on disciplinary policies and launch similar reform initiatives among school board representatives and school administrators. OSF, Schott and The California Endowment similarly supported prominent professional organizations to increase awareness and action among their members.

The Departments of Justice and Education collaborated with foundations to convene a follow-up **National Leadership Summit on School Discipline and Climate** in October 2014, involving many of the same participants in cross-sector teams from 20 states, the District of Columbia, and the City of Baltimore. The second summit helped to continue the idea sharing, networking, and momentum started at the first summit; and, once again, the presence of top federal administrators emphasized the value placed on this work. And, because private foundations covered the costs for diverse teams of stakeholders to attend the summit from each state (including youth, parents and advocates in addition to judicial and educational representatives), it broadened participation in the reform movement.

## Strand 4: Develop and Share Knowledge

**To support the three other strands of strategy** (building public demand and political support through advocacy, strengthening federal mandates and incentives, and engaging diverse allies as partners and champions), private funders also invested in improving and disseminating knowledge about school discipline policies, practices, and disparities. They did this by aligning and coordinating three areas of work: lifting up examples of effective alternatives, filling gaps in data and research, and linking and coordinating grantees so they could learn from each other.

### LIFTING UP EXEMPLARS

**Atlantic staff initially considered giving large grants to a set of school districts** to promote local policy change. Because the average tenure of a school district superintendent is only three years, however, they were reluctant to place a large bet on district-level investment. Instead, in collaboration with other funders, including OSI-Baltimore and The California Endowment, Atlantic supported places that had already taken significant steps to reduce suspensions so they could deepen the work, demonstrate that positive alternatives could produce substantial results, and leverage the local reforms’ influence on state- and federal-level change.

The funders hoped that elevating a few successful examples would encourage the federal government to take action to incentivize—and help—more states and localities adopt reforms. “Top-down policy change won’t have real impact unless we get buy-in from folks doing the leading from the classrooms to the schools to the districts,” notes TCE’s Castle Redmond.

Atlantic’s funding took several forms: in some places, advocacy was the primary strategy to leverage change, while in other places, the foundation directly supported systems reform. In Los Angeles, for example, a parent group known as Community Asset Development Re-defining Education (CADRE) had led a campaign with support from Public Counsel Law Center (PC), a pro bono law firm, that persuaded the district in 2007 to adopt School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (SWPBIS) as a framework for school discipline, in an effort to reduce suspensions in South LA. “Taking on race and exclusion was a difficult thing to organize around because we were really calling schools out. We were talking about the treatment of students, not just about equitable access and resources,” recalls CADRE Co-Founder and Executive Director Maisie Chin. But CADRE helped parents gain leadership skills, collect individual stories of discriminatory treatment, and analyze the patterns. “We did a lot of documentation, putting stuff out that previously only a few research papers had identified,” Chin says.

The 2007 reforms were just the beginning of a host of changes that foundation support helped accelerate. With funding from TCE and Atlantic, a coalition of groups, spearheaded by the Community Rights Campaign (CRC) of the Labor Community Strategy Center and involving Public Counsel, ACLU-Southern California, CADRE, Youth Justice Coalition, and Children’s Defense Fund (together comprising the L.A. chapter of the Dignity in Schools Campaign) secured a package of reforms to reduce arrests, citations and ticketing of students for truancy in the LA public schools. The allies later joined with Brothers, Sons, Selves—a coalition focused on boys and men of color—to win passage of new policy ending suspensions for willful defiance and requiring the use of alternative disciplinary practices, including restorative justice, to improve school climate and help all students achieve academic goals.

In Baltimore, the Open Society Institute-Baltimore had partnered with Andres Alonso, then the CEO of Baltimore City Public Schools,<sup>46</sup> to reduce school suspensions and expulsions for nonviolent offenses. With hands-on support and advocacy provided by OSI-Baltimore, some with funding from Atlantic, the district revised its code of conduct to create a graduated sequence of specific consequences for specific infractions, distinguished by the student’s age, including options other than suspension. The new code also contained guidance on the rights and responsibilities of students, parents, and teachers regarding school discipline; and it reduced the authority of individual teachers and principals to determine consequences.

With its own resources and support from Atlantic, OSI leveraged the progress in Baltimore to persuade the state board and department of education to develop new statewide regulations governing school discipline. OSI-Baltimore staff testified alongside advocates, including the Maryland Disability Law Center, ACLU, Advocates for Children and Youth, and the Advancement Project, in favor of new regulations, facilitated a committee to draft the regulations, and formed a work group to examine a narrow set of contested issues more closely. After two years of work, in 2014 the groundbreaking regulations were approved shortly after the release of the federal guidance, propelled again by the interplay of the top-down, bottom-up and inside-outside strategy and dynamics.

By connecting the dots between places like Los Angeles and Baltimore, Atlantic and its partners were able to tell a story that was bigger than any one district. To spread the word, Advancement Project convened “action camps” where grassroots organizers learned from each other how to collect data, work with school boards, and change local codes of conduct. “It’s about building wins

to get momentum and shift the frame,” says the Advancement Project’s Browne Dianis. “That’s how we take it to scale.”

## FILLING KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH RESEARCH, DATA, AND DISSEMINATION

**Research and data played a crucial role in facilitating, advancing, and empowering public/private alignment and cross-sector collaboration to address school discipline reform**, in part because philanthropy-supported data analyses and research showing that disparities existed and also provided funding to develop and disseminate findings on solutions.

One key investment was in the CSG study of school discipline in Texas (p. 21). Before the report was released, Atlantic gave a communications grant to the Council of State Governments to ensure widespread dissemination and to help advocates figure out how to use the findings most effectively. This was intended to underscore the public demand for reforms and amplify the report’s effect, on the theory that “the bigger the ripple, the more likely a federal response would be,” Mediratta explains. After Attorney General Holder and Secretary Duncan responded by announcing the Supportive School Discipline Initiative, advocacy grantees issued public messages and launched an email campaign applauding the federal government’s response. Federal leaders noticed the applause, opening the door to a follow-up meeting with groups representing students, parents, and legal advocates; this brought an assortment of stakeholders into conversation with the government that was broader than usual.

*“Data and research have been incredibly important to this work. The findings [reinforced] things people on the ground knew and gave them extra ammunition—proof of the impact. Also, the research on racial disparities showing that [the issue is] how the system is treating young people frames it for the public.”*

—**Liz Sullivan-Yuknis** Human Right to Education Program Director, NESRI & Dignity in Schools

The Texas report launched a three-year, cross-sector project led by CSG and supported by foundations and the federal government to: (a) catalogue promising strategies for reforming school discipline from the fields of education, health, law enforcement, and juvenile justice; (b) offer a consensus framework for reforming school discipline practices; and (c) provide evidence of how positive strategies have affected school districts. After eliciting input from more than 100 advisors and 600 other stakeholders—young people, parents, educators, advocates, funders, leaders from justice and law enforcement, health experts—the project culminated in 2014 with publication of *The School Discipline Consensus Report: Strategies from the Field to Keep Students Engaged in School and Out of the Juvenile Justice System*, a practical guide containing sample policies and practices. The process of developing the consensus report was as important as the recommendations it generated, because it engaged a broad array of stakeholders and fostered new relationships among them. “There was a ripple effect; soon everyone was talking about the data, the challenges, what they’d learned from working together to make change,” says Robin Delany-Shabazz, DOJ’s associate administrator for state and community development.

**Other important findings and data emanated from the Discipline Disparities Research-to-Practice Collaborative**, convened by Russell Skiba, director of Indiana University’s Equity Project at the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy. The collaborative, which aimed specifically to draw attention to the challenge of discipline disparities, was initially modeled after the John D. and

Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation’s Research Network on Law and Neuroscience. But Skiba and other leaders of the collaborative wanted to ensure that the information generated by the project informed and advanced reform efforts in the field, and so they expanded the group to include not only nationally known researchers but also advocates, educators, and policy analysts.

The collaborative provided small grants for new studies of disciplinary disparities, first awarded to some of its 26 members and later to other researchers and research/practitioner teams across the country. This produced 11 projects—none of which would have happened otherwise—including one that re-examined data on school violence prevention and threat assessment to analyze its implications for suspensions and expulsions. The group also issued a set of five briefing papers on school discipline interventions, policies, and new research targeted to practitioners, researchers, and policymakers, including one on the importance of acknowledging race when addressing racial disparities.

During the collaborative’s work, its members looked for ways to build an audience for the findings. In January 2013, with funding from Atlantic and The California Endowment, Skiba and his fellow-researcher Losen, director of the Center for Civil Rights Remedies at UCLA’s Civil Rights Project and a member of the discipline disparities collaborative, partnered with another Atlantic grantee, *Education Week*, to convene a one-day symposium at the offices of Gallup, Inc. in Washington, D.C. The event featured the results of *Education Week*’s first national survey of educators on school climate and discipline (a component of its school climate beat sponsored by Atlantic), 16 research papers funded by the collaborative and an analysis of discipline disparities at more than 26,000 U.S. schools called *Out of School and Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools*. Guests at the symposium were purposefully diverse, and Losen followed the event with a press briefing.

Accompanied by the release of *Out of School and Off Track*, the symposium gave high visibility to some dramatic findings, such as:<sup>47</sup>

- More than 2 million students—one out of every nine secondary school students—was suspended at least once during the 2009-10 school year, mostly for minor infractions
- High suspension rates in middle and high schools have increased over time, especially for black students, so that about one in four black secondary school students—and one in three black males in middle school—were suspended at least once in 2009-10
- The risk of being suspended increases between elementary and middle school by 18 percent for black students and only 5 percent for white students
- Being suspended even once in ninth grade is associated with a twofold increase in the likelihood of dropping out of school.

The symposium was pivotal because it took information that had the imprimatur of academia and connected it with a media vehicle, giving the findings real visibility. Holding the event at Gallup’s Washington, D.C., headquarters gave the event additional credibility. And the partnership with *Education Week* resulted not only in broader coverage of discipline disparities in the national bi-weekly newsmagazine, but also in a special issue devoted to educators’ perceptions of school discipline and the need for reform.

*“The Discipline Disparities Research-to-Practice Collaborative started to spread the gospel to a broader constituency. The drumbeat and the emergence of new research has had an important aggregate impact.”*

—**Damon Hewitt** Senior Fellow, Open Society Foundations

But the collaborative's work was not finished: members continued investigating discipline disproportionality, resulting in five briefing papers with guidance to the field on what could be done by schools, policymakers, researchers and advocates to remedy the problem. Funders arranged for a communications firm to help the researchers prepare for release of the papers by writing talking points and press releases. The collaborative also arranged two days of meetings, about six weeks before the papers' release, with representatives of professional associations, advocacy organizations, policy groups, and federal agencies so that the writers could give key audiences a preview of what the papers would say and request their help in promoting the release. "That earned a lot of buy-in from the groups and ensured some of their involvement post-release," Skiba says.

Other philanthropic investments in dissemination included:

- The creation of the reporting beat at *Education Week*, co-funded in 2012 by Atlantic, The California Endowment, the NoVo Foundation, and the Raikes Foundation, which turned information from advocacy projects and research into a flow of coverage so steady it could not be ignored
- Grants to The Hatcher Group, a media relations firm, to ensure that stories generated by grassroots organizations percolated up into the national policy conversation
- Grants to the Center for Public Integrity, to support investigative reporting on discipline disparities and to Anna Deavere Smith to develop a play on these issues.
- A grant to Columbia University's School of Journalism, in partnership with the Southern Education Foundation, for an institute to build journalists' awareness of the need to help teachers learn classroom management practices.

## LINKING AND COORDINATING GRANTEE ORGANIZATIONS

**To maximize what grantees were doing and learning, establish a network of allies, and further align their efforts, Atlantic set up a process for convening national grantees quarterly** for facilitated discussion. Staff were especially eager to provide some connective infrastructure for grantees because, although everyone knew that Atlantic's funding would end eventually, the exact termination point was unknown. To avoid creating competition among equals, Mediratta asked Dignity in Schools, the Advancement Project, and Alliance for Educational Justice to co-convene the network. It didn't work well at first; the group of grantees assembled represented a wide range of constituencies and perspectives, and it was difficult for some in the group to see the others' points of view. The network slowly drifted apart.

Then, in December 2012, a young man fatally shot 20 children and six staff members at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT. The tragedy prompted a nation-wide call for stronger policing in schools, with the National Rifle Association (among others) suggesting that all schools should have armed security guards.<sup>48</sup> Concerned that this would further institutionalize zero-tolerance school discipline policies, the NAACP LDF, Advancement Project, Dignity in Schools Campaign, and Alliance for Educational Justice re-activated the peer network as a way to understand what was happening around the country and to craft an immediate,

*"Communication by itself can't fix all challenges, but creating spaces where people are aware and informed of what others are doing helps us build on each other's work rather than compete."*

—**Liz Sullivan-Yuknis** Human Right to Education Program Director, NESRI & Dignity in Schools

forceful response. In January 2013, they released an issue brief urging the government to consider other options, highlighting the negative effects of over-zealous enforcement, and proposing alternatives. Network members also worked together to send a letter to Vice President Biden, who had been tasked with drafting a response to the Newtown shootings, and they conducted media outreach to push the message that positive school climate and discipline strategies would do more than armed police to improve students' safety and learning. In response, the administration agreed to provide school districts the flexibility to use new federal resources to support counselors in place of police.

The group of about 20 grantees continued meeting quarterly, now facilitated by the Dignity in Schools Campaign in a way that feels more authentic to members. Liz Sullivan-Yuknis, a Coordinating Committee member of DSC, said the space now brings in researchers, local advocates, and leaders of national organizations outside the grantee network to help participants explore issues and find ways to work together. The key, she says, is to: (a) encourage rather than command people to work collectively, and (b) have clear expectations for what will come out of the discussions. "We use meetings to figure out the needs of groups working on the ground and to see how we can all create tools, resources, and strategies to support that work," Sullivan-Yuknis says.





# Results of the Public–Private Effort

The partners interviewed for this report claim several positive effects of their collaboration and also recognize some missed opportunities and unmet challenges.

**Leaders, participants, and observers of the movement to reform school discipline policy attribute the following accomplishments** to cross-sector alignment and partnership:

## **1. Greater public awareness of the issue and deeper knowledge based on research and data**

From President Obama speaking about school discipline at the launch of *My Brother's Keeper* to the 60 urban school districts that pledged to reduce the disproportionate number of young males of color who are inappropriately suspended and expelled as part of an initiative by the Council of Great City Schools, awareness of the need for change has spread throughout cities, states, and the federal government.

## **2. A new frame for the national conversation on school discipline**

A debate that once focused on outrageous cases of individual punishment has shifted to a discussion of suspensions' more systemic counter-productiveness—for individual students' long-term outcomes and for the nation's overall high school graduation rate. The discussion now is part of the mainstream, linked to concerns about school climate and educational effectiveness.

The new frame has changed how local and national media cover school discipline. Previously, Castle Redmond observes, "It was a local issue for schools to handle. The idea was that this is just part of running a school. Now there's a whole dynamic around equity and race and disparities; it's about who gets suspended and whether or not the practice is truly color-blind and race-neutral, and whether or not it is just." Adds Skiba, "One thing these initiatives have done is to say: 'What are the central issues that we as schools and juvenile justice systems have control over? And how do we encourage self-reflection to create change in those systems, rather than saying that the problem is the kids?'"

### **3. Increased federal support for school discipline policy reform**

A federal education official says that the education department's focus on school discipline "is a given now, and five years ago it wasn't." In addition to the Supportive School Discipline Initiative, joint guidance on school discipline, and inclusion of school discipline as a priority in *My Brother's Keeper*, examples of the federal government's increased support include: (a) a \$1.9 million effort by DOJ's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to continue and institutionalize the school-justice project initiated by the National Council of Family and Juvenile Court Judges (with funds from Atlantic, OSF, and Public Welfare); (b) the Department of Education's new School Climate Transformation Grants program, which aims to help more than 1,000 schools train teachers and other school staff to implement evidence-based strategies with multi-tier behavioral frameworks to improve school climate and culture; (c) an effort by the Department of Justice, in partnership with the Southern District of Ohio, to convene more than 175 cross-system stakeholders—judges, magistrates, teachers, principals, probation officers, and police—to discuss ways of keeping children in school and out of court; and (d) \$45 million in funding from the Department of Justice for school safety, including research replicating the Council of State Governments' Texas Study in New York City, and a randomized control trial evaluation of restorative practices in Pittsburgh.

### **4. A growing culture of cross-agency collaboration on the issue**

Federal agency leaders attribute several examples of collaboration to their partnership with philanthropy, including the two national leadership summits and a new joint initiative by the Department of Justice, the Department of Education, and the Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to help communities and school districts improve school climate and school discipline. Now, says a senior staffer at the Department of Education, "We've almost reached the point on this issue where collaboration has been institutionalized enough to outlast any one political administration. It's not yet completely embedded in everyone's brain that we need to keep bringing [counterparts at other agencies] into our work, but it is happening."

Recognition of the importance of cross-agency collaboration is clearly visible at the local level. Oakland Unified School District, a longtime grantee of Atlantic for its work to build full-service community schools, pioneered efforts to link school-based health services with positive school discipline models, such as restorative practices, to improve outcomes for African-American males. Similarly, New York City launched an effort to reform climate and discipline that includes a systematic review of cross-agency collaboration to reduce suspensions across the system.

### **5. Increased comfort at the federal level in partnering with philanthropy**

Alliances have begun to take root that run deeper than simply having foundations pay for intervention models designed by government. People like OSF's Allison Brown, who has experienced these partnerships from both sides, call collaborations like the ED-DOJ National Leadership Summit on School Climate evidence of the "huge movement forward" when compared with the summit held by Judge Kaye just two years earlier, because government and philanthropic leaders are more comfortable working together and with grassroots advocates.

Others in government caution that the relationship with philanthropy has not fully evolved, however. Collaboration on school discipline laid the groundwork for a different kind of partnership, but "when my colleagues think about philanthropy, they're still thinking about whether philanthropy will pay for something. They're not thinking about a 'thought partnership,'" an agency representative says. "I'm not hearing about them pulling philanthropy to the table and working overtime to

get a joint goal accomplished in collaborative fashion. A few colleagues do it, but I've not yet seen a sea change."

## **6. More state- and local-level disciplinary reforms**

States and localities are changing policies on school discipline and collecting data that captures the rate of students pushed out of school through disciplinary practices. Since 2010, 14 states have passed legislation or regulations regarding improving school discipline practices. Of these, six (Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, and Maryland) require the analysis and reporting of school discipline data to the state (often, the Board of Education). At least three states have passed comprehensive reforms (California, Colorado, Maryland), and the federal guidelines are expected to accelerate similar changes in several more states (Massachusetts, New York, Oregon, Virginia, Texas).

## **7. More professional education organizations joining the movement**

The American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, National Association of School Board Executives, and Consortium on Chicago School Research have all declared that suspension, expulsion, and school-based arrests for minor infractions are undesirable and have urged their constituencies to work together to reform disciplinary policies and practices. The AFT hosted a national summit on school discipline for practitioners in 2014, and with the NEA, Advancement Project, and the Opportunity to Learn Campaign produced a guide on the topic.

A philanthropic partner notes that most of these organizations considered school discipline too narrow an issue to warrant their involvement just a few years ago. AFT's Lisa Thomas responds, "There has been a pivot on messaging to our members that we will not support policies that are harmful to children and that we will be more diligent about ensuring a healthy school climate. It's the gesture that advocates have been looking for from us, and it's helping philanthropies have a different perspective on their relationships with AFT."

## **8. More funders investing in school discipline reform and understanding it in new ways**

The cadre of private funders collaborating on school discipline reform continues to grow; examples include the Kellogg, Hyams, and Robert Wood Johnson foundations. Of special interest is the increase in funders who see value in grassroots organizing as a way to influence policy and systems change—a shift that at least one participant attributes to the cross-sector collaboration around school discipline reform. "I didn't know anything about community organizing or even really respect it in the beginning," says TCE's Redmond. "It was only through working with our partners and seeing the silencing of community voice that I really started to understand. Now I believe that community organizing is core to making change."

## **9. Expanded leadership and partnership across sectors**

Five years ago, notes researcher Russell Skiba, just a handful of leaders were pushing the issue of school discipline reform. Now the issue has been incorporated into the policy agenda of many more public agencies, legislators, and researchers. Young people and parents also are playing a bigger role in policy advocacy and development.

Many of the leaders in this movement believe that their alignment and collaboration have created a platform for further partnership on any number of other issues. "If we finish this particular battle,

there is an infrastructure that we can take on to the next fight to improve the educational system,” says advocate Catherine Albisa. “The relationships run very deep and are grounded in a broader vision of education, in which this is just one problem to be addressed.”

**Despite their successes, collaborators on school discipline reform haven’t gotten everything right**—at least, not yet. Mediratta regrets the slow progress made on some key fronts, including the need to address school-based policing. “There is a lot of work to be done to help superintendents and principals understand and assess the role police officers are playing in their schools and to think through what training they need, and how we right-size their roles,” she says. “I wish we had moved more quickly to engage that constituency.”

**Some funders and advocates believe they haven’t paid enough attention yet to charter schools,** a growing segment of the education sector—especially in communities of color. Data suggest that some charter schools use suspension to push out high-need students.<sup>49</sup> Atlantic supported an investigation of the issue by *Education Week* and the Center for Public Integrity, and has funded an expert at the University of Colorado–Boulder to assist grantees to develop charter-school accountability campaigns. Still, Mediratta says, “Had we engaged more proactively with the charter school industry itself and created exemplary projects from within, we might have accelerated awareness and effort. Had we had more time, we would have done much more in this space.”

**Another unsolved challenge involves engaging educators,** by incorporating knowledge and training on school discipline into higher-education programs for teachers and principals and by expanding support for in-service professional development. Two decades of standards-based testing and accountability has produced many teachers who are focused on test scores and not on the social context of schools and classrooms. Now, interest in alternatives is growing but people need examples of what to do differently. Work by the Center for Advanced Teaching and Learning at the University of Virginia to develop discipline modules for its *My Teaching Partner* program is one example of efforts to integrate school discipline into the instructional core of schools, but much more needs to be done.

**Federal policy reform, while picking up speed, still lags behind the progress made at the state level.** “We’ve not done the strongest job of coming up with policy that we think is strong and holding it up for states to adopt,” concedes a government staffer. “We’ve come up with principles, with parameters, but not actual examples of strong policy.”

**Several dimensions of school discipline require further research and data collection.** Now that racial disparities are well-documented, it is important to document the consequences of disparate punishment more fully, including the relationship between the discipline and academic achievement gaps between students of color and their white peers. “Because policymakers are so invested in achievement and instruction...we need to highlight the data that show that kids are suffering instructionally and can’t meet educational goals when they are removed from school,” Skiba says. In addition, there is an urgent need for more data to understand the disciplinary experiences of LGBT students, who are not currently included as a group that can be disaggregated in the Civil Rights Data Collection. And more data are needed on suspension and expulsion practices at the local level, disaggregated by school so that the low rates of a few schools don’t mask the high rates of many others, suggests Kathleen DeCataldo of the New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children.

Finally, the school discipline reform movement needs to begin incorporating new knowledge about brain development and its effects on children’s behavior. “The evolution of neuroscience is very important, and we have not yet figured out how to get maximum use of it,” says Judge Kaye. “There’s so much more that lies ahead.”

There is, indeed—not just for the school discipline reform movement, but for cross-sector partnerships involving philanthropy and other sectors to address any number of issues. We turn now to some advice and insights about doing or investing in this kind of cross-sector alignment and collaboration, culled from the interviews conducted for this report.



Associated Press/Photo: Damian Dovarganes

# *Lessons and Insights*

The advice gleaned from interviews with public- and private-sector collaborators clustered around five broad lessons.

**LESSON 1: Foundations can bring more to the table than their money by serving as “activist grantmakers” in partnership with grantees and other stakeholders.**

Activist foundations push public-sector partners to become agents of change—a useful role in relation to bureaucracies that aren’t inherently nimble, don’t have in-house research and development capacities, and often define victory in political terms. Funders who serve as activist partners find it useful to:

- Support advocacy organizations and efforts, particularly those by constituencies who can bring insights borne of their direct experience to bear on solutions.
- Take a hands-on, highly engaged approach. Serving as the “connective tissue” between sectors, co-developing strategies and products that advance the cause, becoming a highly visible champion, brokering relationships, facilitating meetings and discussions, and searching out and contributing new ideas.
- Use the foundations’ influence to expand others’ legitimacy and reach. Mobilize “both our cash and our cachet,” as one interviewee put it.
- Lead from behind. Help to frame issues and contribute money, social capital, a public platform, and other resources without usurping the role of grantees or replacing the people and organizations that are most affected by the issues and that must continue the work after private investment ends.
- Maintain open lines of communication with public-sector allies to listen for their constraints and aspirations, strategize on solutions, and help them “think past their comfort zone.”

## **LESSON 2: Aligned partnership is crucial to social change, and it requires a flexible set of roles, relationships, activities, and supports.**

Aligned partners serve not only as co-funders (the traditional definition of “partner” for many in the public and private sectors) but also in a more flexible set of roles as thought partners, co-developers, co-learners, and persistent nudges to help other leaders and entities move forward. Partners who work in a loosely aligned relationship can each contribute according to their own strengths and constraints; those able to fund advocacy can do so while those who prefer to support programmatic interventions, research, or technical assistance can focus on those areas while still supporting the movement’s larger goals. And, by leveraging each other, the aligned partners can address more complex problems that require systemic solutions, which no single public- or private-sector player could accomplish on its own.

Aligned, cross-sector partnerships work best when the collaborators:

- Invest time and effort in building relationships among partners, with allies, and with key players in the sectors targeted for change. In particular, organize participation by the people and places most affected by the issue.
- Create and support environments in which collaborators from different sectors gain mutual trust and understanding so they can work together more productively (e.g., cross-sector convenings, coalitions, work groups, communities of practice).
- Act quickly, using flexible dollars, when opportunities arise for a short-term investment to produce long-term results.
- Leverage opportunities in multiple directions, using philanthropy’s influence to help advocates and researchers gain access to federal decision makers and to help government representatives find ways to hear directly from grassroots constituencies and researchers.
- Commit to shared goals and strategies rather than to a single perspective branded by one partner.
- Develop infrastructure to help partners communicate and stay aligned.

## **LESSON 3: A combination of inside and outside strategies can accelerate the pace and scale of change.**

Government’s vulnerability to political dynamics and public perceptions leaves many in the public sector reluctant to change the status quo. Public leaders are more likely to make reforms when they are pushed to do so by widespread public demand or by high-profile leaders in the relevant field(s). In fact, while staff of public systems may not be able to ask for it directly, they often need help drumming up outside pressure to provide the cover and support they need to advance an issue within the system. To use an inside-outside strategy successfully:

- Make sure that people understand the roles being played and trust that others will play their parts thoughtfully. People in the public sector have to understand that outside pressure is not a personal attack but a way to help them move forward, while funders and advocates should publicly recognize allies inside the system when they take positive actions.
- Be persistent. Government bureaucracies are complex, hierarchical, and highly politicized environments in which it is difficult to take action quickly. Even after a decision has been made, it may take months for the change to be publicly released.



- Recognize the important role of major national events to draw attention to the problem and potential solutions. In addition to raising awareness of the issue, events help to build a groundswell of demand as participants follow up in their home states.
- Educate journalists about the issue. Sponsoring a journalism fellowship or a topical beat at a news organization can increase the amount, depth, and accuracy of media coverage—a key factor in building outside pressure.
- Cultivate, mobilize, and support champions who can influence their networks of stakeholders.

#### **LESSON 4: A multi-leveled, integrated strategy can stimulate reform on a decentralized issue.**

One way to think about levels is along a spectrum of activity, from changing a policy to implementing, monitoring, and enforcing it to make sure the changes translate into new practices. Another way to think about levels is through the lens of local, state, and federal activity. Aligning and coordinating the work at all of these levels requires a full spectrum of activities: advocacy, leadership development, knowledge and consensus building, policy analysis, the creation of exemplars, data collection and research, strategic communications, and more.

By investing in all of these areas simultaneously and then connecting them—by linking, sequencing, and managing multiple constituencies, issues, ideas, movements, resources, and strategies—partners can articulate a problem more clearly and advance solutions more quickly than if they focus on one piece at a time. To make this approach work, partners need to:

- Be conscious of the need to step out of the echo chambers. Bring new people to the table (such as community-based stakeholders) and help people from different sectors communicate directly with each other.
- Translate and communicate what is happening in one area, level, or sector of work to other partners. For instance, help decision makers at the federal level understand how problems play out locally, what is being done to address the problems, and what has to change federally to improve local outcomes.
- Layer approaches to make and reinforce the case for change. As an example, when major research findings are about to be released, high-profile national events can create a venue for policymakers, system leaders, frontline practitioners, community representatives, funders, and researchers to discuss and reach new understandings of the findings and their implications.
- Fund the whole movement, not just one piece that addresses a single component of the social change ecosystem. Support multiple components; maximize the synergy among them; and allow funding to cover activities (e.g., public relations and media communications) that, while not directly related to the targeted outcome, are crucial for its success.

#### **LESSON 5: Careful framing and messaging of the issue attracts partners, builds momentum, and positions the issue favorably against competing interests.**

An effective frame provides a concrete, actionable way for stakeholders to confront a large, complex problem and shapes the message about how to solve it. In popular jargon, the frame changes the narrative and conveys a sense that the solution is (or should be) “the new normal.” To frame a problem and solution effectively, collaborators should:

- Lift up the values behind the issue to position the effort within a broader vision or goal (e.g., social justice, self-determination, community empowerment, etc.).
- Make sure the frame is specific enough to fully address the issue and broad enough to engage all of the partners needed to address it.
- Look at issues from a systemic perspective, not just from the perspective of individual children, families, and communities.
- Harness the power of data by commissioning research, using findings to embed the case for reform in a logical argument, packaging data in multiple formats for a variety of uses, and timing the release to coincide with mobilizing events.



# Conclusions

The improvements to policies, practices, and outcomes achieved by cross-sector alignment on school discipline are important in their own right. But they also are significant because aligning sectors and constituencies to address any one issue creates an infrastructure of relationships, roles, and processes that can be mobilized to address other issues. As we heard earlier, “It tills the ground.”

What does it take to ensure that well-tilled soil for lasting reform yields the greatest return, whatever seeds are planted? The lessons provided here underscore the value of four overarching qualities: a firm belief that change is possible, no matter how stark the problem or how long the odds of success; the conviction that challenges signify progress rather than failure; a commitment to building and sharing knowledge while also creating the conditions under which people can act on what is known; and continual attention to monitoring, enforcing, and sustaining what has been achieved while also gearing up to meet the next challenge.

**Those qualities, however, are not the only factors.** For instance, cross-sector partnership does not work well unless leaders consider the issue a priority. Therefore, the approach may not be equally effective for every issue; or extra effort may be required to persuade leaders that an issue is worth addressing. The approach also does not work well when the public sector develops its own solution and then tries to hand it over, fully formed, to the private sector to fund. And cross-sector alignment is harder to achieve—although, as we have seen, not impossible—when it targets systems that have a great deal of autonomy (e.g., education), compared with top-down systems (e.g., juvenile justice).

**From a philanthropic perspective, not every foundation can or should engage** in the type of cross-sector partnership described in this report. The foundations that are best suited to this approach have staff who: (a) interact well with people from other sectors, from grassroots organizations to the top of federal government; (b) have longstanding relationships in the field, which they

use to bring state and local players to the national table; and (c) can create and maintain a high degree of synergy among different pieces of work. The leaders of these foundations are willing to use advocacy to pressure systems and policymakers, can accept the risk of waiting several years for change to occur, and fund an entire movement while understanding that they cannot control the entire change process. Finally, the foundation itself is focused more on what the effort will mean for the people, systems, and places affected than for the partners and participating entities.

**Looking ahead, the people and institutions that partnered on school discipline reform face several transitions** that will require careful attention and hard work. The presidential, Congressional, and gubernatorial elections of 2016 will bring in new leaders who may not have the same deep relationships with philanthropy and who may not want to support reforms favored by their predecessors. The Atlantic Philanthropies will continue its fadeout from the philanthropic arena, potentially leaving a gap in funding and diminishing the intensity of the push for change. And as the issue evolves from reforming school discipline to advocating for a healthy school climate for *all* students, partners will have to make sure the new frame maintains a perspective on the disparities historically experienced by *some* students.

The big question now for collaborators on school discipline is the same one that all such partnerships eventually face: Are the alignment and partnership sufficiently institutionalized to keep the sectors moving forward together on other issues? Here, the cautiously optimistic words of Judge Kaye may offer the best advice, for this particular cross-sector partnership and for any other: “We are embarked on a very good course, but enormous change is still ahead. It would be foolish to think we’re done.”

**Push Back**  
**Against**  
**Push Out**

*Image courtesy of Dignity in Schools Campaign*

# Partners

## Grantees

- Advancement Project
- Alliance for Educational Justice
- Alliance for Excellent Education
- American Civil Liberties Union
- American Federation of Teachers
- AASA – School Superintendents Association
- American Institutes for Research
- Annenberg Institute for School Reform
- Children’s Defense Fund
- Center for Public Integrity
- Civil Rights Project of UCLA
- Columbia School of Journalism
- Council of State Governments
- Dignity in Schools Campaign
- Editorial Projects in Education (Education Week)
- Engaging Schools (Educators for Social Responsibility)
- Equity Center for Indiana University (Research-to-Practice Collaborative on Discipline Disparities)
- The Hatcher Group
- Johns Hopkins University, Center for Social Organization of Schools
- Just and Fair Schools Fund at NEO Philanthropy (transitioned to Communities for Just Schools Fund at New Venture Project)
- NAACP
- NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund & Legal Strategies Collaborative
- National Association of State Boards of Education
- National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
- New York Civil Liberties Union
- The New York Community Trust (NYC Donors’ Education Collaborative)
- New York Foundation for the Arts (Anna Deavere Smith Pipeline Project)
- New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children
- Oakland Unified School District
- Open Society Institute–Baltimore
- Rethinking Schools
- Schott Foundation for Public Education
- Southern Education Foundation
- Stone Lantern Films
- University of Chicago, Consortium for Chicago School Research
- University of Colorado, National Education Policy Center
- University of Virginia, Curry School’s Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL)
- W. Haywood Burns Institute

### **The Communities for Just Schools Fund supports grassroots organizations across the U.S., including:**

Alliance for Quality Education, Black Organizing Project, Boston-area Youth Organizing Project, Boston Parent Organizing Network, Boston Student Advisory Council, Building Responsibility, Equality and Dignity, Citizens of Louisville Organized and United Together, Coleman Advocates for Children & Youth, Community Asset Development Re-defining Education, Community Organizing and Family Issues, Desis Rising Up & Moving, Equality Federation Institute, Faith and Action for Strength Together, Sarasota United for Responsibility and Equity, Gay-Straight Alliance Network,

Gwinnett Parent Coalition to Dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline, Harriet Tubman Center, Illinois Safe Schools Alliance, Interfaith Coalition for Action, Reconciliation and Empowerment, Labor/Community Strategy Center, Lee Interfaith for Empowerment, New Settlement Apartments Parent Action Committee, North Carolina Coalition for Education Justice, One Colorado Education Fund, Padres y Jóvenes Unidos, People Acting for Community Together, Philadelphia Student Union – Campaign for Nonviolent Schools, Power U Center for Social Change, Progressive Technology Project, Southern Echo, Teachers Unite, Texas Organizing Project Education Fund, Urban Youth Collaborative, Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE), Youth on Board, Youth Justice Coalition, Youth United for Change.

**NAACP LDF Legal Strategies Collaborative members include:**

Advocates for Children of New York City, Advocates for Children’s Services of Legal Aid of North Carolina, ACLU Racial Justice Project, ACLU of Northern California, Civil Rights Project of UCLA, Charles Hamilton Houston Institute of Harvard University, Educational Law Center (in partnership with the Juvenile Law Center), Georgetown Poverty Law Center, Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights (formerly Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana), Kentucky Youth Advocates (in partnership with the Children’s Law Center), Legal Aid Justice Center, National Center for Youth Law, New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU), New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children, Public Counsel of Los Angeles, TimeBanks, USA and Texas Appleseed.

**Research-to-Practice Collaborative on Discipline Disparities members include:**

Russ Skiba, Indiana University (Convenor); James Bell, J.D., W. Hayward Burns Institute; Judith Browne Dianis, J.D., Jim Eichner, J.D., Advancement Project; Prudence L. Carter, Ph.D., Stanford University, School of Education and (by courtesy) Sociology; Christopher Chatmon, African American Male Achievement, Oakland Unified School District; Tanya Coke, J.D., John Jay College of Criminal Justice; Matt Cregor, J.D., Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and Economic Justice; Manuel Criollo, The Labor/Community Strategy Center; Edward Fergus, Ph.D., New York University, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development; Michelle Fine, Ph.D., City University of New York, The Graduate Center; Phillip Atiba Goff, Ph.D., University of California Los Angeles, Department of Psychology; Paul Goren, Ph.D., Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning; Anne Gregory, Ph.D., Rutgers University, Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology; Damon Hewitt, J.D., Open Society Foundations; Daniel J. Losen, J.D., The Civil Rights Project at UCLA; Tammy Bang Luu, The Labor/Community Strategy Center; Pedro Noguera, Ph.D., The Metropolitan Center for Urban Education; Blake Norton, M. Ed., Local Government Initiatives, The Justice Center; Mica Pollock, Ph.D., University of California San Diego, Center for Research on Equity, Assessment, and Teaching Excellence; Stephen T. Russell, Ph.D., University of Arizona, Norton School of Family and Consumer Services; Leticia Smith-Evans, J.D., Ph.D., NAACP LDF; Lisa Thomas, Ed.D., American Federation of Teachers; Michael Thompson, The Justice Center; Ivory A. Toldson, Ph.D., The White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities.



## **Foundations**

The California Endowment

Edward W. Hazen Foundation

Open Society Institute–Baltimore

Schott Foundation for Public Education

Raikes Foundation

Just and Fair Schools Fund/Communities for  
Just Schools Fund members, including:

- Anonymous Donor
- Arcus Foundation
- Cricket Island Foundation
- Einhorn Family Charitable Trust
- Ford Foundation
- Hyams Foundation
- Open Society Foundations
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Skillman Foundation
- Walter S. Johnson Foundation

And the Executives Alliance to Expand Oppor-  
tunities for Boys and Men of Color

## **Federal Agencies**

U.S. Department of Education

U.S. Department of Justice

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