

# Family Playbook: School Suspensions, Discipline & Restorative Justice

Understanding student discipline and suspensions data and research can **empower parents** to help their children and school communities flourish.

# Contents

- 3** Suspensions research & data
- 12** Restorative justice research & data
- 15** Data dive
- 18** More resources
- 20** About UChicago Consortium playbooks
- 22** Parents can...
- 26** Citation, contributors & acknowledgements



Parents and caregivers  
expect schools to be a  
**safe and nurturing**  
environment for their  
children.

The Chicago Public Schools (CPS)  
Student Bill of Rights & Student Code of Conduct  
states that every student has the right to be  
safe at school, and to be treated fairly,  
courteously, and respectfully.

When a student does not uphold the  
responsibilities within the Student Code of  
Conduct, school and district leadership determine  
next steps—including consequences like  
suspension or expulsion.





# Research says: **Suspensions** don't help

Suspensions and expulsions remove students from the classroom as a form of punishment, **taking away learning time.**<sup>1</sup>

School staff and families may believe that removing a student from their classroom or school will de-escalate conflict and improve other students' learning environments. But research shows the opposite.

Suspensions & expulsions have negative effects on students, their peers, & school culture.

# Research says: Suspensions & expulsions...

1

Negatively affect the school climate—and even impact students who are not suspended.

3

Damage student-school staff relationships.

2

Increase the likelihood of a suspended student repeating a grade, dropping out of school, and becoming involved with criminal justice systems.

4

Do not provide students with tools and opportunities to learn new approaches to resolving conflicts.

# Research says: Suspensions & expulsions...

## 1 Negatively affect the school climate—and even impact students who are not suspended.

- In schools with higher out-of-school suspension rates, **students reported feeling less safe.**<sup>2</sup>
- Schools with higher suspension rates did not improve learning conditions. Compared to similar schools, they had **lower school-wide achievement**, worse climates for learning, and less positive peer relationships among students.<sup>3</sup>
- Students had lower academic achievement in classrooms where suspensions were used for minor infractions more frequently. This was true for both students who were suspended—and students who were not suspended.<sup>4</sup>

## 2 Increase the likelihood of a suspended student...

- repeating a grade, dropping out of school, and becoming involved with criminal justice systems.<sup>5</sup>

## 3 Do not provide students with tools and opportunities to learn new approaches to resolving conflicts.

- School suspensions do not address any of the reasons that lead to misbehavior. They are **not effective** at preventing future misbehavior for the disciplined students nor their peers.<sup>6</sup>

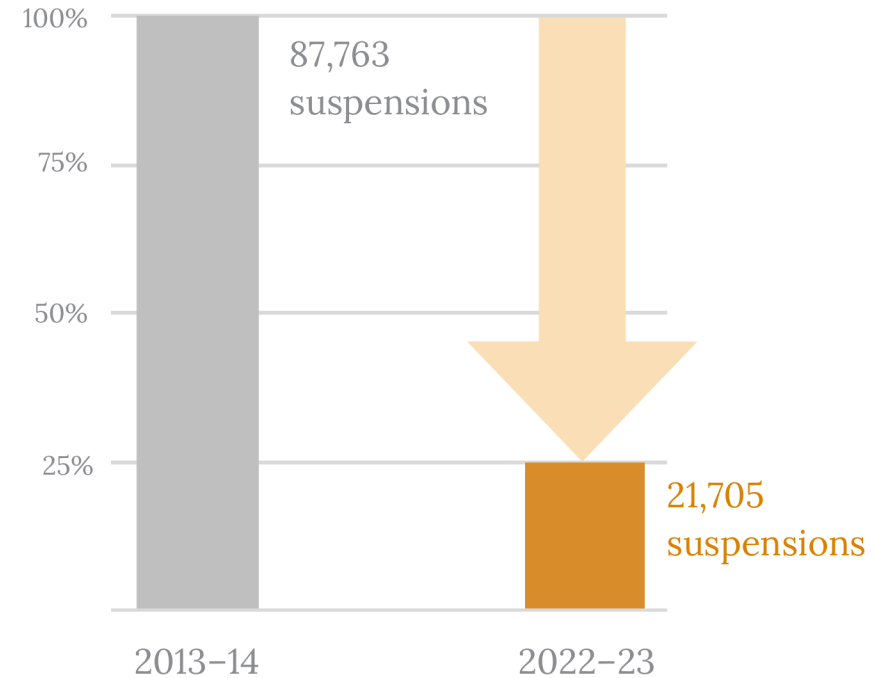
## 4 Damage student-school staff relationships.

- Student-teacher relationships with low trust and understanding can lead to cycles where a student misbehaves, a teacher uses out-of-the-classroom discipline, the student feels angry, the student mistrusts their teacher more, and then a cycle of more anger and misbehavior continues.<sup>7</sup>
- **Student-teacher relationships suffer** when teachers use punishment to try to improve behavior. Students' respect for teachers and motivation to behave well in class drop.<sup>8</sup>

# Number of suspensions have dropped in CPS

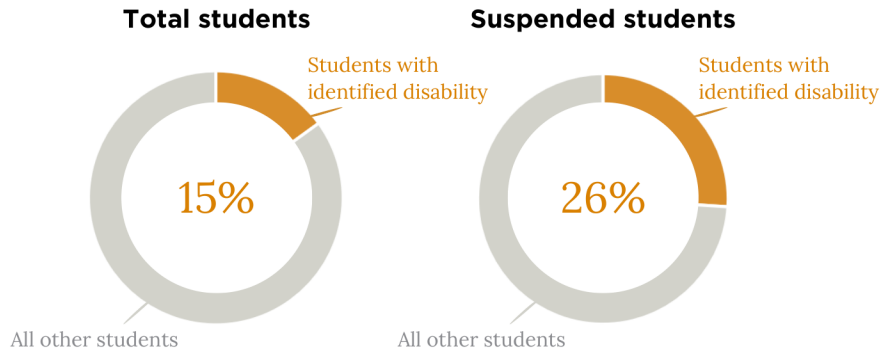
In 2012, CPS adopted a revised Student Code of Conduct. It focused less on punishment and more on social and emotional learning (SEL).

Since then, in-school and out-of-school suspensions dropped from 87,763 in 2013-14 to 21,705 in 2022-23 — a 75% drop.<sup>9</sup>

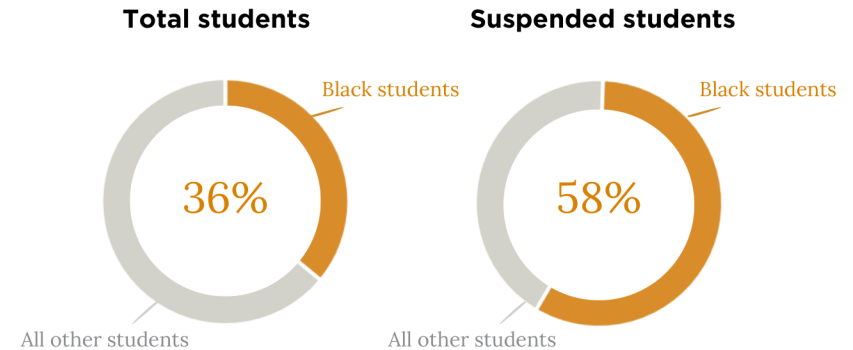


# But some student groups are suspended more than others

**Students with an identified disability** accounted for 15% of CPS students—but 26% of suspensions.



**Black students** accounted for 36% of CPS students—but 58% of suspensions.





Individual schools can have a big influence on how often students are suspended or expelled.



**Schools with similar students had very different suspension rates**

# A small group of schools had very high suspension rates in 2022-23.



Almost all of the **high-suspending schools** served mostly Black students.\*

But at the same time, most schools with mostly Black students did not have high suspension rates.<sup>12,13</sup>

See Data Dive on p.19-20 for details.



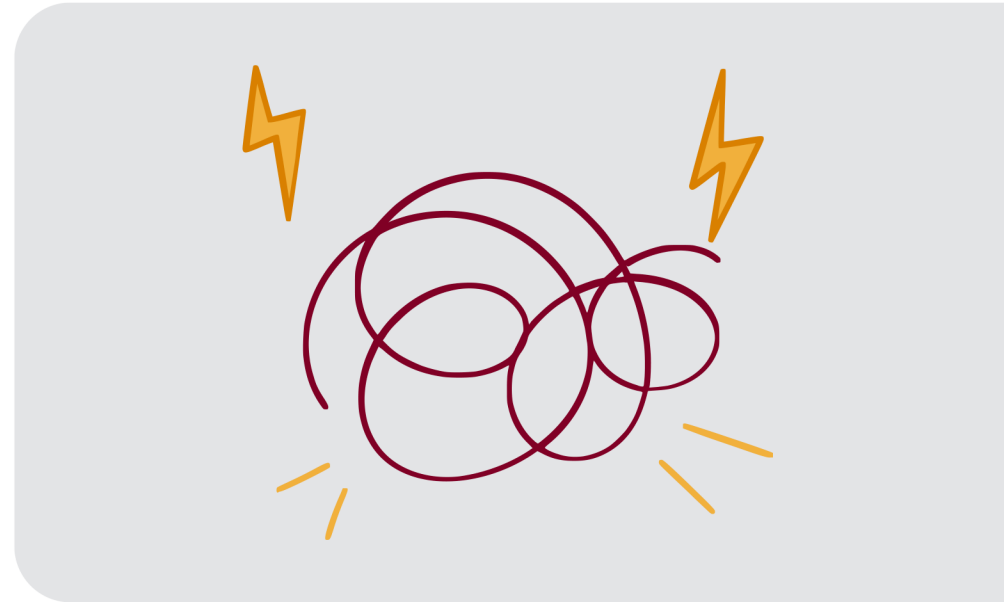
\*High rates = 1.5 times higher-than-average % of unique students with in- or out-of-school suspensions in 2013-14.

# Schools with high suspension rates also had weaker school climates.

High suspension rates (and the related incidents) may lead to poor climates,

or poor climates may lead to high suspension rates —

or both.



Research says:

# Restorative justice can reduce suspensions & improve school climate

Restorative justice aims to bring non-punitive, relationship-centered approaches for preventing and addressing harm to school communities by:

1

Building healthy relationships among all members of the learning community—including parents, school staff, and students.

2

Working to heal harms and conflict by a) addressing the needs of the person(s) harmed and b) providing opportunities for those who caused the harm to learn, grow, and make amends.

3

Fostering justice and equity by identifying and challenging the use of school suspensions at different rates for different students.

# Restorative justice

is grounded in the values of **respect, dignity & mutual concern** for all learning community members, and a belief that all people are worthy of being valued.

→ It has origins in indigenous communities.<sup>14</sup>

# Research says:

## Restorative justice practices led to...

- fewer suspensions
- reduced racial disparities in school discipline
- fewer discipline referrals
- improved school climate
- higher-quality teacher-student relationships
- higher attendance rates
- improved academic achievement across elementary and high school classrooms<sup>15</sup>

## ...and were effective when...

- schools received coaching, support, and resources to implement practices effectively and schoolwide<sup>16</sup>

## CPS schools using restorative practices & policies had...

- **35%** reduction in student arrests in school
- **15%** reduction in student arrests out of school
- **18%** decrease in out-of-school suspensions
- Improvements in students' perceptions of school climate<sup>17</sup>

**National studies**

**Chicago study**

The image features a solid orange background. In the center, there is a faint, light-orange line-art illustration of a computer monitor. On the screen of the monitor, a line graph with four data points is visible. A magnifying glass is positioned over the right side of the screen, focusing on the second data point from the right. The text "Data Dive" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font, centered over the monitor's screen.

# Data Dive

# CPS high schools & high suspension rates



90

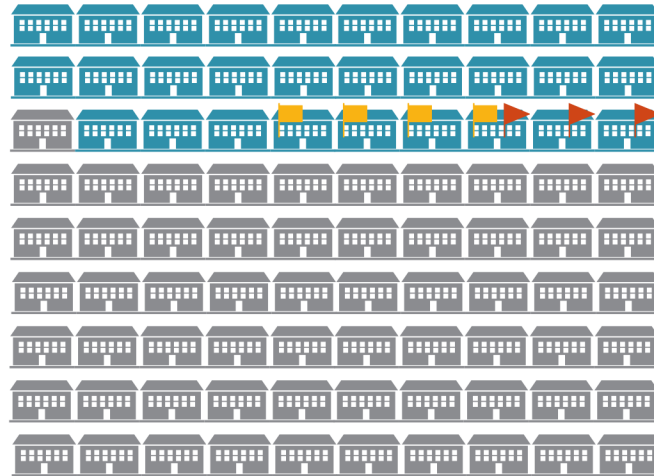
CPS high schools

29

served mostly Black students\*

61

did not serve mostly Black students



While most schools serving mostly Black students did not have high suspension rates...

...all high schools with high suspension rates served mostly Black students

- 4 schools had high out-of-school suspension rates
- 3 schools had high in-school suspension rates

All schools that did not serve mostly Black students did not have high suspension rates

Almost all of the high-suspending schools served mostly Black students.

But at the same time, most schools with mostly Black students did not have high suspension rates.<sup>12,13</sup>



# CPS K-8 schools & high suspension rates



**373**

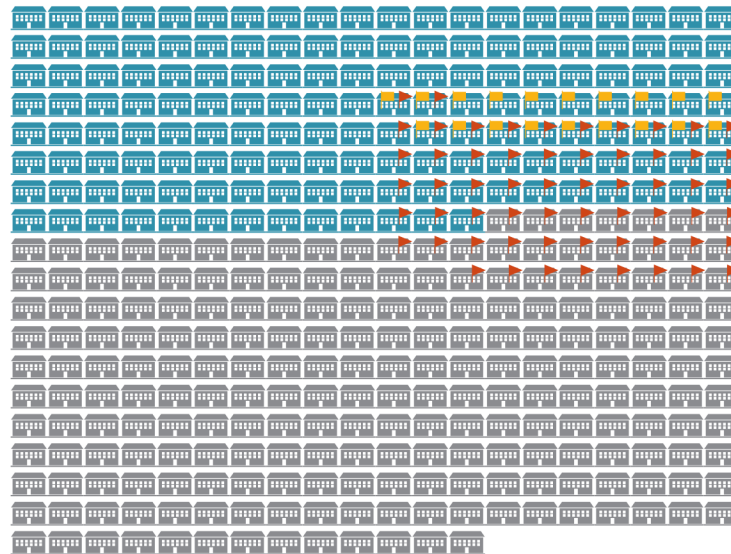
CPS K-8 schools

**153**

served mostly Black students\*

**220**

did not serve mostly Black students



110 K-8 schools serving mostly Black students **did not have high suspension rates**

19 schools had high out-of-school suspension rates

All 19 (100%) served mostly Black students

60 schools had high in-school suspension rates

35 of those (58%) served mostly Black students

25 of those (42%) did not serve mostly Black students

185 K-8 schools did not serve mostly Black students & **did not have high suspension rates**

Almost all of the **high-suspending schools** served mostly Black students.

But at the same time, most schools with mostly Black students **did not** have high suspension rates.<sup>12,13</sup>

\*Schools are defined as serving mostly Black students if 75% or more of their students are Black. CPS 2022-23 data.<sup>10</sup>

# More resources!

Want to learn more about discipline, restorative justice, and school learning environments that help students thrive?

Check out these resources:

[5 Actions to Reduce Exclusionary Discipline](#)

From the U.S. Dept. of Education blog, including links to more research & resources

[Parent-to-Parent Guide: Restorative Justice](#)

From COFI (Community Organizing and Family Issues) in Chicago

Our full list of related research on the next page.



# Related research

**Adukia, A., Feigenberg, B., & Momeni, T. (2023)**

From retributive to restorative: An alternative approach to justice (Working Paper No. 2023-117). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Becker Friedman Institute for Economics.

**American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. (2008)**

Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools?: An evidentiary review and recommendations. *American Psychologist*. 63(9),852-62.

**Chicago Public Schools. (2023a)**

Misconduct, police notification and expulsion report through EOY 2023: City wide [data file and codebook]. Retrieved from <https://www.cps.edu/about/district-data/metrics>

**Chicago Public Schools. (2023b)**

Misconduct, police notification and expulsion report through EOY 2023: School Level [data file and codebook]. Retrieved from <https://www.cps.edu/about/district-data/metrics>

**Fronius, T., Darling-Hammond, S., Persson, H., Guckenburg, S., Hurley, N., Petrosino, A. (2019)**

Restorative justice in U.S. schools: An updated research review. San Francisco, CA: WestEd Justice & Prevention Research Center.

**Gregory, A., & Evans, K.R. (2020)**

The starts and stumbles of restorative justice in education: Where do we go from here? Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center.

**Leung-Gagné, M., McCombs, J., Scott, C., & Losen, D.J. (2022)**

Pushed out: Trends and disparities in out-of-school suspension. Alto Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

**LiCalsi, C., Osher, D., & Bailey, P. (2021)**

An empirical examination of the effects of suspension and suspension severity on behavioral and academic outcomes. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

**Massar, M.M., McIntosh, K., & Eliason, B.M. (2015)**

Do out-of-school suspensions prevent future exclusionary discipline? University of Oregon: Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

**Okonofua, J., Paunesku, D., & Walton, G. (2016)**

Brief intervention to encourage empathic discipline cuts suspension rates in half among adolescents. *PNAS*, 113(19), 5221-5226.

**Sartain, L., Allensworth, E., & Porter, S. (2015)**

Suspending Chicago's students: Differences in discipline practices across schools. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

**Stevens, W.D., Sartain, L., Allensworth, E.M., & Levenstein, R. (2015)**

Discipline practices in Chicago schools: Trends in the use of suspensions and arrests. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

**Wang, M.-T., Scanlon, C.L., & Del Toro, J. (2023)**

Does anyone benefit from exclusionary discipline? An exploration of the direct and vicarious influence of suspensions for minor infraction on adolescents' engagement and achievement. *American Psychologist*, 78(1), 20-35.

# UChicago Consortium Playbooks



Key info, data & research to help parents & caregivers make **informed decisions & take action** on important topics

Research shows that family engagement in schools is closely linked to:

- Improved student academic achievement
- Enhanced student social skills
- Fewer student behavior issues
- Improved parent-teacher and teacher-student relationships
- Positive school environments

Parents & caregivers  
are key for student  
and school success.



# How was this playbook developed?

The Consortium is actively working to engage more broadly with parents and community leaders to use research to support sustainable and long-lasting change in our school communities.

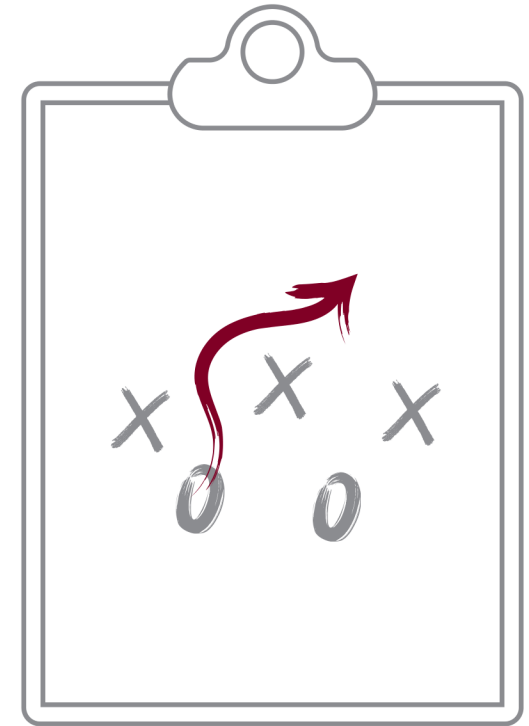
To date, we have worked with CPS district leaders and community-based organizations, including **COFI (Community Organizing and Family Issues); Raise Your Hand; and Kids First Chicago**, alongside the To&Through Project, to consider how Consortium playbooks may support parents' efforts to help their school communities flourish. This collaboration has included listening sessions, collaborative vision-setting, and feedback on content.

**A very special thank you to COFI for their partnership with this first playbook** in particular, challenging us to center parents' and caregivers' hopes, dreams and concerns related to their children's education and beyond. Our partnership is possible because of Aida Palma Carpio; thank you, Aida.

We are grateful for our partners and look forward to continued collaboration with these organizations, and many more.

If you're interested in future collaboration, we'd love to hear from you at

[consortiumpartners@uchicago.edu](mailto:consortiumpartners@uchicago.edu)



**How can parents learn more about  
their child's school's approach to  
school discipline and school climate?**



# Parents can...

- Learn about their child's school's approach to school discipline and school climate.

Parents can ask the school leadership the following questions:

1

- **How are you supporting students' social, emotional, and academic learning?**

- Are there specific goals related to supporting social and emotional development in our school's continuous improvement work plan (CIWP)?
- How are you using Cultivate and 5Essentials survey data to engage in conversations about students' experiences and needs?

2

- **Whose job is it to ensure all students feel safe and secure and treat each other well?**

- Does the school have a whole school safety plan that outlines how our school is providing emotional, relational and physical safety?

3

- **What approaches to discipline practices or programs does our school use? (e.g. Suspensions? Restorative justice?)**

- How do teachers and other staff know and determine when and which type of discipline is needed?
- How do we as a school community know these approaches work?
- How can families and students provide feedback to school leaders and staff regarding discipline practices at our school?

4

- **How can I as a parent request a restorative justice or social emotional intervention for my student if they experienced or caused harm in a school incident?**

# Parents can...

## ➤ Talk with other parents and community members and get involved.

- Share this playbook with other parents and school leaders
- Get involved on school committees to engage in conversations around these topics.
- Ask questions and encourage conversations about the use of evidence-based strategies and data to inform your child's school's approach to discipline.

## ➤ Know the relevant policies.

- The CPS Student Bill of Rights and Student Code of Conduct outlines the rights and responsibilities of students, parents/guardians, school staff, and CPS leaders.
  - This document includes policies involving students with special education needs and an appeal process with contact information, if needed.





# Endnotes

1. Leung-Gagné, McCombs, Scott, & Losen (2022).
2. Sartain, Allensworth, & Porter (2015); American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008).
3. Sartain et al. (2015).
4. Wang, Scanlon, & Del Toro (2023).
5. LiCalsi, Osher, & Bailey (2021); Leung-Gagné, McCombs, Scott, & Losen (2022); Fronius, Darling-Hammond, Persson, Guckenbug, Hurley, & Petrosino (2019).
6. LiCalsi, et al. (2021); Sartain, et al. (2015).
7. Wang et al. (2023).
8. Okonofua, Paunesku, & Walton (2016).
9. CPS enrollment in non-charter, non-contract schools declined 19% during this time period, from 343,376 in 2013-14 to 267,851 in 2022-23—so while the enrollment drop may have played a role in some of the drop in suspensions, it cannot solely account for the 75% drop.
10. Chicago Public Schools (2023a). Charter, Options, and special education schools are included in the available dataset. No values are reported for charter schools.
11. These findings echo findings in a 2015 UChicago Consortium report by Stevens, Sartain, Allensworth & Levenstein about [discipline practices across CPS schools](#), found that some students were more likely to be suspended than others: Black students (who were also more likely to attend schools with very high suspension rates served predominantly Black students), students with a history of abuse or neglect, and students living in neighborhoods with high unemployment and high rates of families with incomes below the federal poverty line (\$24,250 for a family of four in 2015) (Stevens, Sartain, Allensworth, & Levenstein, 2015).
12. Chicago Public Schools (2023b). Charter and Options schools are included in the available dataset, but were omitted here to allow for consistent comparisons with the 2015 Consortium report. Schools with fewer than 30 students (~one class) are excluded.
13. Suspension rates were calculated as the percent of unique students receiving in-school suspensions (ISS) or out-of-school suspensions (OSS). For high schools with high suspension rates, the % unique students:  $OSS \geq 35$ ;  $ISS \geq 30$ ; for middle school:  $OSS \geq 9$ ;  $ISS \geq 3$ . This was calculated using 1.5 times higher than the average % of unique students with ISS or OSS in the base year of 2013-14.
14. Fronius, Darling-Hammond, Persson, Guckenbug, Hurley, & Petrosino (2019).
15. Adukia, Feigenberg, & Momeni (2023); Gregory, & Evans (2020); Massar et al. (2015); Fronius, Darling-Hammond, Persson, Guckenbug, Hurley, & Petrosino (2019).
16. Massar, McIntosh, & Eliason (2015).
17. Adukia et al. (2023).
18. Schools are defined as predominantly serving Black students if 75% or more of their students are Black.

# Citation, contributors & acknowledgements

## Suggested citation

UChicago Consortium on School Research. (2024). *Family playbook: School suspensions, discipline, & restorative justice*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

## Contributors

Rosa Ramirez Richter  
*Director of Partnerships & Engagement*

Vanessa Gutiérrez  
*Research Analyst*

Jessica Tansey  
*Managing Director of Communications*

Gregory Pollard  
*Research Analyst*

Chen An  
*Managing Director of Statistics & Analysis*

## Acknowledgements

In addition to the collaboration with and feedback from our community partners (see p. 21), we are grateful to our colleagues Dom McKoy, Shanette Porter, Elaine Allensworth, Jenny Nagaoka, Jessica Puller, Amy Arneson, and Laura Davis for feedback that improved this playbook.



Learn more about how the work of the  
UChicago Consortium on School Research  
can help you and your school community at

<https://consortium.uchicago.edu/events-and-resources>