



Behavior Education Plan Evaluation

2013-14 through 2016-17

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Executive Summary

The Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) introduced the Behavior Education Plan (BEP) at the beginning of the 2014-15 school year. The BEP, which replaced the Student Code of Conduct and Discipline, embraces a proactive approach toward student behavior and moves away from zero-tolerance policies and the use of exclusionary practices. Although the district reviews behavior data regularly and provided the Board of Education with quarterly Behavior Education Plan updates throughout 2016-17, this data has not always been tightly coupled with the goals of the Behavior Education Plan, nor was its purpose evaluative. Therefore, the Research & Program Evaluation Office (RPEO) has been asked to lead an evaluation focused on Behavior Education Plan from the 2013-14 through 2016-17 school years. This report includes the findings from that evaluation.

What was our evaluation plan?

Our evaluation uses a mixed methods approach, drawing from both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data includes traditional behavior metrics as well as other sources that measure school climate and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) fidelity. We focused on four years, including the year prior to implementation (2013-14) and the first three years of the BEP (2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17). We report quantitative data overall, by level, and for African-American students and Students with Disabilities. We also included qualitative sources, such as implementation plans, open-ended survey comments, focus groups with staff and students, and observations. We looked for trends in the separate analyses and integrated the two types of data together whenever possible. We were able to review preliminary findings with program leadership and the participating schools in spring 2017 to get initial reactions and we adjusted the narrative based on their feedback.

What have we learned about Behavior Education Plan implementation?

Our work produced mixed evidence in terms of implementation.

1. MMSD has invested significant resources into Behavior Education Plan implementation, and yet concerns over capacity to implement remain
2. MMSD has sparked new conversations and encouraged restorative approaches to behavior, but not all staff think their beliefs and values align with the approach outlined in the Behavior Education Plan
3. MMSD has increased the explicit teaching of positive behaviors in elementary schools, but there is more work to do, particularly at the secondary level
4. Students and staff are mixed on whether their schools have stated clear expectations for student behavior that students understand
5. MMSD has enhanced the behavioral infrastructure through changes in approach and documentation
6. Implementation varies significantly by school

What have we learned about Behavior Education Plan outcomes?

Our work produced mixed evidence in terms of outcomes.

1. MMSD has recorded more behavior events under the Behavior Education Plan
2. Elementary schools have reduced the use of exclusionary practices by reducing out-of-school suspensions, while secondary schools have not seen similar declines in suspensions but have reduced the length of suspensions and the use of expulsions
3. Disproportionality has not improved

What do we conclude and recommend?

When thinking about the success of the Behavior Education Plan to date, we believe it is helpful to distinguish between complicated and complex problems. Using the Cynefin framework, which is a conceptual framework to help leaders make decisions, complicated problems have predictable causes and effects and are solved by applying policy and/or technical solutions developed based on expertise. Complex problems are less predictable and require experimental and/or relational solutions. We believe that MMSD has made significant progress in solving complicated problems under the Behavior Education Plan. The district has communicated a vision, outlined the expected interventions and consequences for student misbehavior in detail, adopted new response practices, improved documentation, and created new tools for monitoring results. However, progress on complex, unpredictable factors like mindset and how to address the root causes of disproportionality remains elusive. In addition to some technical and process related actions, we recommend a series of actions focused on relationships, innovation, variation, and digging into the root causes of disproportionality to help the district move its work on student behavior forward during the next three-year cycle.

Background

The Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) is committed to planning and reviewing progress on a regular basis. The district's [Evaluation and Review Cycle](#) is a key component of this work. The cycle calls for evaluations of major plans every three years. The first internal evaluation of a major plan under this cycle is an evaluation of the [Behavior Education Plan](#) conducted during the 2016-17 school year. The Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) introduced the Behavior Education Plan (BEP) at the beginning of the 2014-15 school year. The BEP, which replaced the Student Code of Conduct and Discipline, embraces a proactive approach toward student behavior and moves away from zero-tolerance policies and the use of exclusionary practices. Over the course of the last three years, district administrators and Board of Education have reviewed behavior data regularly in the form of quarterly data updates. Although these data reviews were informative and provided regular snapshots of the district's current progress on exclusionary practices and BEP implementation, they were not designed to be evaluative. Therefore, the Research & Program Evaluation Office (RPEO) has been asked to lead an evaluation focused on Behavior Education Plan outcomes that will include data from the 2013-14 through 2016-17 school years. This report includes the findings from that evaluation. In this report, we use the term "we" to refer to the evaluation team that produced this report; therefore, any statements or opinions starting with "we" should be interpreted as those of the evaluators and not necessarily those of the district as a whole.

What is the Behavior Education Plan?

The MMSD Board of Education approved the elementary and secondary versions of the Behavior Education Plan in a 6-0 vote (one abstention) in March 2014. The Behavior Education Plan replaced the prior Code of Conduct starting in the 2014-15 school year, with revisions made in 2015-16 and 2016-17. According to the BEP, it is a progressive and restorative approach to behavior and discipline that is immersed in teaching and learning, as opposed to zero tolerance policies relying on punishment and exclusionary practices to correct misbehavior. The purpose of the BEP is to designate the rights and responsibilities of various parties (e.g., student, parent/guardian, teacher/staff, administrator, Central Office) around supporting student positive behavior, to delineate expectations for adults to teach students about MMSD behavior expectations, to provide expectations for student behavior, to ascertain appropriate and consistently applied interventions and consequences that will support students, to assure fair treatment of all students, to set the expectation of partnership between schools and parents/guardians, and to utilize a "trauma-informed" approach to behavior. The BEP organizes response strategies, interventions, and resolution/disciplinary action by level of behavior, and it explains how the intervention and discipline progress if the lowest identified level of intervention or discipline does not work or if the behavior happens more often, intensifies, or increases in duration. Practice of the Behavior Education Plan relies on a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework that integrates academics (Response to Instruction/Intervention) and behavior (Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports).

What does the literature tell us about discipline policy?

One of the many important components of a school district is its response to student behavior, and using an appropriate and effective approach is always a concern for schools (e.g., Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin, & Cohen, 2014; US Department of Education, 2014). While many different types exist or have existed, finding the most appropriate approach is crucial because it can impact student academics and school climate (e.g., The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force [APA], 2008; Fronius, Persson, Guckenburger, Hurley, and Petrosino, 2016).

One approach to behavior that schools employ focuses on **punitive discipline and exclusionary practices**. This approach is the basis of zero tolerance policies or policies that apply to a violation of rules, typically resulting in the meting out of a predetermined consequence which may include removal from the classroom or school (The National Association of Psychologists, 2001). The emergence of zero tolerance policies on a national level in K-12 schools accompanied the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, as this law required, among multiple things, a mandatory one-year expulsion for weapon possession (Skiba & Kesting, 2001). As zero tolerance expanded to other items, schools began using zero tolerance for a "wide degree of rule violation" (The National Association of School Psychologists, 2001). The literature revealed few studies indicating positive outcomes associated with such policies, although Fries & DeMitchell (2007) suggest that some may support zero tolerance policies because of their consistent no-nonsense approach to setting the bar high for behavior. More research has recently shown that zero tolerance policies or exclusionary discipline practices negatively affect student outcomes related to achievement, drop out, attendance, and course failures, and that they may play a role in the school-to-prison pipeline (e.g., American Institutes for Research, 2015; Advancement

Project, 2010). The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) investigated zero tolerance policies and discovered that many of the assumptions undergirding support for zero tolerance policies (e.g., removing students will create a better school climate) were not true. Specifically, the group identified the negative effects related to school climate, effectiveness of discipline, disproportionality, and the inappropriateness of such policies as they relate to child development. Rosa, Keelan, and Krueger (2015) later summarized the literature on zero tolerance policies and indicated that increased exclusionary practices, negative effects related to academics, repetitive exclusionary practices, the school-to-prison pipeline, and disproportionality related to race, gender, disability, ELL, and those with mental health issues. Research related to 9th grade out of school suspensions in a sample of Florida students further showed that with each suspension, the chances of graduating and/or enrolling in post-secondary education decreased alongside increased chances of dropping out. Those researchers indicated the importance of even a single suspension as harmful to student success (Balfanz, byrnes, & Fox, 2014). Exclusionary practices, measured by inequitable rates of suspension, also predicted lower levels of connectedness by 6-12th grade students of all racial backgrounds at a large urban school district (Anyon, Zhang, & Hazel, 2016). Generally, these policies do not harmonize with goals of developing noncognitive skills (e.g., García, 2014).

Instead of punitive or exclusionary approaches, some districts focus on **positive behavior support/response or more restorative approaches** to teach behavior. MMSD's Behavior Education Plan aligns to this approach. Other school districts have implemented a similar approach to behavior as MMSD, such as Oakland, California; Denver, Colorado; Chicago, Illinois; and New York City, New York. Language written in the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) pushed for positive approaches to behavior instead of a focus on discipline for Students with Disabilities, and this shined a light on positive behavior interventions and supports. The funding of the [Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#) was another public way of supporting such approaches (Samuels, 2013). There are system level alternatives in terms of universal strategies and prevention (e.g., multi-tiered systems of support, restorative justice, social-emotional learning), the individual level (e.g., mental health services or behavioral contracts), and those which involve the school collaborating with the community (e.g., family involvement) (Rosa et al., 2015; Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Moreover, there are documented positive student behavioral and academic outcomes associated with some of these positive behavior policies. For example, researchers studying *multi-tiered systems of support* (e.g., school-wide positive behavior interventions and support) found positive outcomes with behavior (fewer behavior events) and attendance (increased attendance rate) in high schools with high implementation fidelity (Freeman et al., 2015). Zins and Elias (2006) summarized the positive outcomes related to *social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions* into attitudes (e.g., better sense of community), behaviors (e.g., fewer absences and suspensions), and performance (e.g., higher achievement tests scores). Bear, Yang, Mantz, and Harris (2017) found that students in grades 3-12 perceived a more positive school climate when they perceived teachers teaching SEL as compared to perceptions of teachers using praise and rewards or punitive consequences. Specific to *restorative justice* approaches, Fronius et al. (2016) tentatively suggest that while research in this area is in its infant stages, positive links may exist between restorative approaches and discipline, attendance and graduation, climate, and other academic outcomes. On a more personal level, high implementers of restorative practices resulted in more positive teacher-student relationships in high school (Gregory, Clawson, Davis & Gerewitz, 2016). Generally, research suggests that positive behavioral policies seem promising for students and little was found to suggest otherwise, although anecdotally, Shah (2013) suggested that such approaches can be difficult to pull off and they do not provide a fast solution to a problem.

As indicated by Freeman et al. (2015), the implementation of positive or restorative approaches to teaching behavior matters, and **implementing with fidelity requires putting certain supports in place**. Implementation is important because the implementation of the program moderates or affects student outcomes (e.g., Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). In a meta-analysis of school-based programs targeting the reduction of aggressive behavior, Wilson, Lipsey, and Derzon (2003) found that, in terms of general program attributes, implementation quality (defined as fully providing interventions to the sample with no difficulty) was a significant predictor of positive effects. That being said, implementing with fidelity requires time, planning, training, and other supports such as communication to be in place throughout implementation and after. Karp and Breslin (2001) identified problem areas of implementation for restorative practices: time in terms of training, seeing a change in attitude towards punishment (1-3 years), and repairing certain harms. They highlight the difficulty of coordinating with other policies and what they call "internal inertia." Similarly, Flannery, Frank, Kato, Doren, and Fenning (2013) focused on implementing the universal tier of

prevention, and they found that school-wide positive behavior support in high schools takes longer to implement with fidelity (a minimum of 2 years), perhaps because of the structure of high schools – staff at one school referred to the first year as “zero year” (p. 278), which was spent planning. Consensus building and communication among staff was also central in establishing school-wide expectations and consistent consequences. Likewise, part of successful implementation involves the level of preparation of schools to take on the work. One research collaborative learned that the quality of SEL programs depended on how particular programs are chosen, staff involvement in decision, training, and continued support (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015). Additionally, school use of data and district capacity building affected the sustained implementation of school-wide positive behavior support (McIntosh et al., 2013).

Some recent research points to how **adults may treat students differently in disciplinary contexts depending on their race/ethnicity**. For example, Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015) conducted two experimental studies that showed racial disparities in discipline based on identical hypothetical behavior infraction(s) committed by a white student and an African American student. They found no differences by race/ethnicity in reactions to the first incident involving a student. However, teachers felt more troubled about the second behavior incident if the student was African American, that teachers felt that the African American student should be disciplined more severely following his/her second infraction, and that teachers were more likely to label the African American student a “trouble maker” compared to the white student. As such, racial disparities in discipline surfaced and manifest following the second infraction. The researchers additionally found that teachers were more likely to identify a “pattern” in the misbehavior of the African American student than the white student, and they were more likely to imagine themselves suspending the African American student in the future compared with the white student. A line of research around the “failure to warn” points to other challenges that may manifest among well-intentioned staff. Several experiments have demonstrated that white individuals are less likely to give critical feedback to African-American students in areas such as writing quality or reasonableness of course load due to concerns about appearing racist (Crosby & Monin, 2007; Croft & Schmader, 2012; Harber, Gorman, Gengaro, Butisingh, Tsang, & Ouellette, 2012). As Croft and Schmader (2012) state, “stigmatized students sometimes fail to receive the critical feedback necessary to identify areas needing improvement, particularly when evaluators are concerned about appearing prejudiced.” This bias toward positive feedback could contribute to a lack of improvement in not just academic settings, but behavioral settings as well.

Evaluation Plan

We set out to answer the following research questions:

1. What have we learned about Behavior Education Plan implementation from 2013-14 to 2016-17?
2. What have we learned about Behavior Education Plan outcomes from 2013-14 to 2016-17?

To facilitate reading of this document, headers and subheaders associated with each question of interest appear in different colors. The **implementation section appears in dark blue** and the **outcomes section appears in green**.

Data and Methods

MMSD has a tremendous amount of existing behavior data available for analysis, some of which the district uses regularly for progress monitoring. In this evaluation, we tried to bring this quantitative data to bear on the questions of interest, but also wanted to collect new, qualitative data to complement what we already had. The goal was then to merge these two data sources together into a more robust picture of the Behavior Education Plan. To narrow in on the highest leverage metrics for implementation and outcomes, we reviewed documentation and presentations on the Behavior Education Plan over the course of the past three school years, plus met with Student Services and Behavior Education Plan team leadership throughout the evaluation process.

To better understand **implementation**, we explored six areas publicly stated by the program as key areas of interest:

1. Staffing and resources
2. Equity, mindset, and the restorative approach
3. Integration of social-emotional learning
4. School-wide expectations
5. Infrastructure, assessment, and intervention at Tier 2 and Tier 3
6. Adherence and equitable application of policy

To better understand **outcomes**, we focused on the two stated goals of the Behavior Education Plan:

1. Reducing the use of exclusionary practices
2. Reducing disproportionality, especially for African-American students and Students with Disabilities

We highlight results for African-American students and Students with Disabilities not just because they were mentioned within the Behavior Education Plan, but because these groups tend to experience the greatest disproportionality within MMSD. Low-income students and multiracial students also are overrepresented in recorded behaviors, but less so than African-American students and Students with Disabilities; white students, Asian students, Hispanic/Latino students, English Language Learners, and Advanced Learners are underrepresented. Note that African-American students and Students with Disabilities are not mutually exclusive, so the data presented for these two groups includes some overlap.

Table I includes all data sources examined as part of this report.

Table I: Project Data Sources

Data Source	Grades	Years
Behavior Education Plan budget, including total allocation and FTE	N/A	2014-15 – 2016-17
Self-Assessment Survey (SAS)	K-12	2013-14 – 2016-17
Behavior Education Plan Staff Survey	K-12	2014-15 – 2016-17
Staff Climate Survey	K-12	2014-15 – 2016-17
Student Climate Survey	3-12	2014-15 – 2016-17
Behavior Support Calls	K-12	2015-16 – 2016-17
Interventions and/or Response Strategies	K-12	2014-15 – 2016-17
School Implementation Plans	K-12	2016-17
Behavior Events	K-12	2013-14 – 2016-17
Out-of-School Suspensions	K-12	2013-14 – 2016-17
In-School Suspensions	K-12	2013-14 – 2016-17
Expulsion recommendations and expulsions	K-12	2013-14 – 2016-17
Report Card SEL Standards	K-5	2016-17
Staff Focus Groups	Select locations	2016-17
Student Focus Groups	Select locations	2016-17
Observations	Select locations	2016-17

For all **quantitative data** included in this report, we include four years of information or more, when available and appropriate. We present the change in totals or means over time for most measures under the logic that changes observed since 2013-14 are associated with the implementation of the Behavior Education Plan. We disaggregate results by level (elementary, middle, and high) when appropriate.

Please note that the tables and graphs in this report may have minor differences from those in past published reports. Data from previous years may change as staff edit or delete erroneous records or receive new information. We base all of our publications on the most recent data available, so the data presented in this document is the most accurate source if discrepancies are observed.

To better understand schools' experiences with the Behavior Education Plan, we collected **qualitative data** by analyzing open-ended comments from the Behavior Education Plan Survey and by talking with staff and students at four schools (two elementary, one middle, and one high). Our goal was to select schools based on a variety of factors, including consistent staffing and leadership; average Behavior Education Plan implementation fidelity (based on a combination of the metrics listed above); and leadership willingness to participate in the evaluation. We created a short list of potential options and then reached out to principals to secure participation.

RPEO staff collected data on the Behavior Education Plan via focus groups and observations in the fall of 2016. Our focus group protocols were semi-structured and included questions focused around implementation, outcomes, and effectiveness. We spent a full day in each of the four participating schools, hosting student and staff focus groups (anywhere from 3 to 7), shadowing the primary behavior responder, and observing the school environment. We requested that student focus groups include students who were representative of the school in terms of demographics and engagement; principals took different approaches to organizing these student groups, such as having us attend existing classes or selecting students to participate. All staff focus groups were voluntary. We also conducted two focus

groups with Central Office staff. In total, we talked to more than 180 people across approximately 20 focus groups (five leadership, seven staff, five student, and two Central Office; 10 elementary, four middle, three high, and two Central Office). More than two thirds of our participants were female and about two thirds were white. We spoke with more than 80 students, more than 40 staff, and about 50 individuals in leadership meetings. Student focus groups covered students in grades 4-12.

To understand the data collected from the focus groups, we performed qualitative analysis using a multi-step procedure. First, we structurally coded comments made in the focus groups. Coding is a way of organizing and sorting qualitative data that involves assigning labels, or codes, to each comment or response, which make it easier to draw themes from and summarize the data. Structural coding, in this case, refers to assigning the same code to all responses associated with a specific question. This resulted in three groups (or “bins”) of comments referring to implementation, outcomes, and perceived effectiveness, which were the themes of our focus group questions. Next, comments within each of those bins were coded as positive, negative, or neutral, sometimes known as sentiment coding. Comments about things not related to the Behavior Education Plan were coded as “other.” We then revisited the comments within implementation to further code around three areas: consequences, expectations, and interventions. This thematic coding helped us parse out specific trends and ideas within these areas. Finally, we read all comments within each code to look for trends, commonalities, and key words, which helped identify the themes that emerged organically. Note that qualitative data coded as perceived effectiveness was folded into areas of implementation and outcomes and is therefore not presented as its own category in this evaluation.

Once all the quantitative and qualitative data had been analyzed separately, we then brought the findings together to create a **mixed methods report**. We looked for trends in the separate analyses, and integrated the two types of data together whenever possible. We were able to review preliminary findings with program leadership and the participating schools in spring 2017 to get preliminary reactions, and we adjusted the narrative accordingly.

Limitations

Throughout the research process, we worked to make sure our data was as accurate and actionable as possible. However, this project has several limitations we wanted to acknowledge. The first limitation relates to the accuracy and consistency of available administrative data. We believe that schools have unique ways of tracking behavioral data that reflect varied approaches and values, although the district does not promote this practice. As such, with all quantitative behavioral data presented in this report, we can present only what schools record using district systems; it does not include any local systems that schools use internally. That said, we must assume that what we present here is a fair and accurate representation of what actually occurs. In addition, we know that there have been challenges to using particular data systems, such as Oasys for interventions/responses and report cards for tracking social-emotional learning. Staff have expressed concerns about Oasys and the district is transitioning to a different system for recording intervention and response; challenges in using Oasys may affect the quality of recorded data. The current elementary report cards indicate certain social-emotional standards as strengths or areas for growth for individual students via their presence or absence. This type of assessment system, where all measures do not appear consistently over time, makes assessing students’ progress over time extremely challenging. While we recognize that these systems are imperfect, we believe they give us valuable insight into behavior in MMSD.

Another limitation relates to the individuals whose opinions we did and did not collect during the qualitative research process. We have collected qualitative data districtwide via the climate survey and Behavior Education Plan survey, but our focus groups by necessity only covered a portion of the district. We believe we gathered rich information on the perspectives of Behavior Education Plan and district leadership, but given that we spoke with fewer than 100 staff in a district that employs thousands, mainly through voluntary focus groups, we cannot be positive that their opinions are representative of all staff. In addition, we did not collect qualitative data from families, whose perspective is not captured in this report. We believe capturing their viewpoints on the BEP is an important next step as the district moves forward.

This project also faces limitations that are common in evaluative work. In general, our data focuses on changes over time and includes a year of pre-Behavior Education Plan data for comparison and context. However, because the Behavior Education Plan was a districtwide change in policy and practice, we cannot observe a true counterfactual (i.e., what

would have happened in the absence of the Behavior Education Plan). We also have not found a reliable way to measure peer/spillover effects of the Behavior Education Plan (i.e., the impact of student misbehavior on peers not currently demonstrating behavioral needs). We conducted some exploratory quantitative work in this area, but our models did not have sufficient explanatory power to warrant inclusion in this report. We also do not investigate a causal relationship between the Behavior Education Plan and academic outcomes. To do so would require an extremely complex research design that may or may not accurately answer the question of how the Behavior Education Plan changed outcomes due to the challenge of isolating the effects of the Behavior Education Plan from the myriad factors influencing student achievement. Changes to behavior event coding during the years studied also mean that comparisons of behavior event levels may not be consistent.

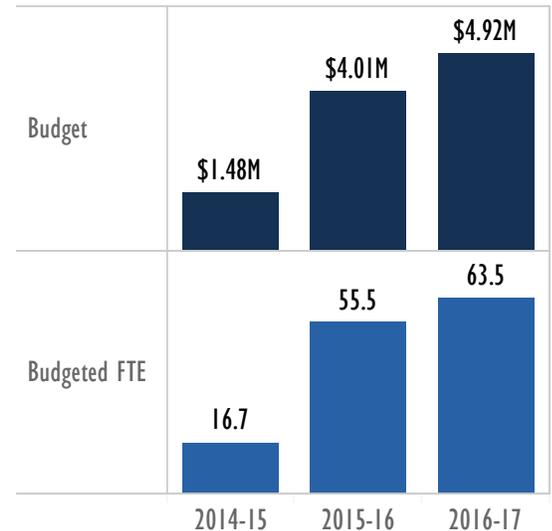
Finally, an important limitation that is particularly pertinent to our quantitative data is that we cannot know the true source of disproportionality in results. Observed disproportionality across student groups in recorded behaviors has two major potential explanations: (1) Staff respond to the same behaviors differently depending on student characteristics or (2) Students with certain characteristics actually exhibit more behaviors than their peers and disproportionality reflects accurate recording of what occurs. In short, we do not know whether recorded differences in behaviors result from the actions of adults, the actions of students, or both.

Behavior Education Plan Implementation – What Have We Learned?

In this section, we use a variety of data to investigate Behavior Education Plan implementation with the goal of answering our first guiding question: What have we learned about Behavior Education Plan implementation from 2013-14 to 2016-17? We organize our findings under headers that summarize major lessons learned.

MMSD has invested significant resources into Behavior Education Plan implementation, and yet concerns over ability to implement remain

Overall, the district invested a large amount of financial resources during the first three years of the Behavior Education Plan. The 2014-15 MMSD budget was the first budget to include specific allocations for the Behavior Education Plan. The **primary and consistent budget expenditure is staffing**, which we report on in this section. The total budgetary allocation during these three years was more than \$10 million (see Figure 1). However, the district’s investment in the first year was much lower than the two subsequent years. To support plan implementation as needs became clearer, there was a large jump in budgetary expenditures – \$2.5 million – between the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school year. In 2014-15, the district budgeted \$1.48 million, which funded 16.7 FTE, while the district allocated \$4.01 million in 2015-16, which funded 55.5 FTE dedicated to supporting the Behavior Education Plan. Those figures increased to \$4.92 million and 63.5 FTE in 2016-17.



These figures represent budgetary allocations from the district’s annual budgets and do not represent *total* expenditures. The Behavior Education Plan also relies on pre-existing resources, including staffing (such as school staff hired prior to the Behavior Education Plan but sharing behavior responsibilities, including psychologists, social workers, PBIS coaches and counselors, as well as Central Office and Student Services staff), facilities, and materials. Therefore, we believe **these figures underestimate our total investment** in the Behavior Education Plan, which includes time spent by thousands of staff districtwide. Nevertheless, the investment of \$10.41 million marked a significant expenditure for the district during the three school years.

Figure 2 at right breaks down total investment and FTE by level. “Districtwide” refers to employees not based at a particular school. We see that about half of the total monetary investment and more than half of the total FTE investment occurred at the elementary level, which encompasses more than half of the district’s schools and students.

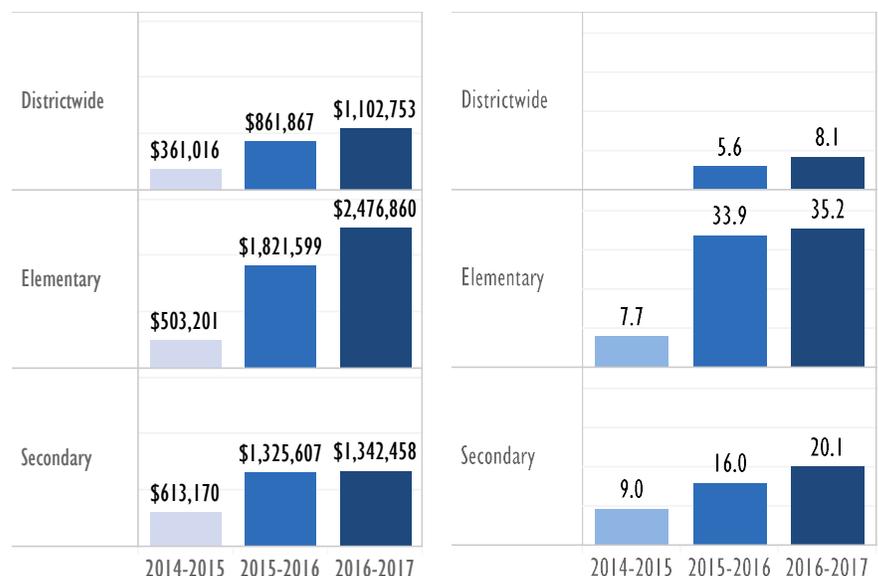


Figure 2: Investment and FTE by Level

The next graphic shows FTE investments by level and type. The district added staff in a variety of roles, but the most common were Educational Assistants (EAs) and Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) coaches.

We also heard that the **timing of the initial launch of the Behavior Education Plan led to implementation challenges**. Unlike other major plans in the district, the Behavior Education Plan did not have a planning year, and instead implementation happened directly after Board approval in March and unveiling the BEP to staff in August. Staff cited the initial rollout in August 2014 as “pretty problematic because it felt very forced, like there was not nearly enough time given for people to get used to what it was or get resources to people about interventions they were supposed to do and what that should look like what the options were.” The budget expenditures point to this concern, as the initial investment in 2014-15 was relatively low compared to the investments in subsequent years. Some staff believed “it has changed significantly since then for the better,” but at the time “the process wasn’t understood when it was implemented.” Staff expressed concerns over existing capacity to implement the Behavior Education Plan well. Many specifically cited a lack of time and resources to implement the BEP with fidelity. With new systems brought on by the Behavior Education Plan, including new ways of documenting behavior and new expectations for interventions, staff cited increased frustration about the “gap between policy and ability to implement policy in a way that was workable for staff.” Staff cited the need for more time and resources to address behavior and more professional development for teachers.

Level	Job Type	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
Districtwide	Cross Categorical Teacher	2015-2016	2.0	
		2016-2017	2.0	
	Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) Coach	2016-2017	2.5	
	Program Support Teacher - Special Education	2016-2017	0.1	
	Special Education Assitant (SEA)	2015-2016	1.6	
		2016-2017	1.6	
Districtwide	Teacher Leader	2015-2016	2.0	
		2016-2017	1.9	
Elementary	Counselor	2014-2015	0.2	
		2014-2015	2.5	
	Educational Assistant - Interventionist	2015-2016	26.7	
		2016-2017	19.9	
	Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) Coach	2014-2015	3.5	
		2015-2016	5.7	
		2016-2017	15.3	
	Psychologist	2014-2015	1.1	
		2015-2016	1.1	
	Social Worker	2014-2015	0.4	
	2015-2016	0.4		
Secondary	Counselor	2014-2015	0.7	
		2015-2016	0.3	
	Educational Assistant - Interventionist	2015-2016	0.8	
		2016-2017	3.4	
	Learning Coordinator	2015-2016	0.3	
	Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Teacher	2015-2016	1.0	
	Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) Coach	2014-2015	5.9	
		2015-2016	11.2	
		2016-2017	14.7	
	Psychologist	2014-2015	1.4	
Secondary	School Security Assistant	2015-2016	0.8	
		2016-2017	0.8	
	Social Worker	2014-2015	1.0	
		2015-2016	1.2	
	2016-2017	0.2		
Student Engagement Coordinator	2015-2016	0.3		
	2016-2017	1.0		

Figure 3: BEP FTE by Job Type

MMSD has sparked new conversations and encouraged restorative approaches to behavior, but not all staff think their beliefs and values align with the approach outlined in the Behavior Education Plan

A key piece of implementation of the Behavior Education Plan is communicating a shift in mindset, with a focus on equity and the restorative approach to behavior and consequences. Proponents of the Behavior Education Plan cited it as “the right work, it’s the right way of thinking” partly because it **changed the conversation around behavior** and inspired more difficult conversations around behavior practices, race, and equity. The Behavior Education Plan “was what was needed to get people to start reflecting on their practice,” and staff described how the Behavior Education Plan allowed leadership to “reflect on their practices around consequences and exclusionary practices.” Some staff also credited the Behavior Education Plan for bringing forward opportunities of learning around race and equity, opening “doors that were bolted shut before” and helping them now “look through an equity lens at data.”

Part of this new conversation and approach to behavior included **a new mindset or approach when responding to behavior**. Some staff praised the philosophy of the Behavior Education Plan for thinking more holistically about children and helping emphasize the learning of behavior, rather than punishment. As one staff member described, “it’s not that you’re naughty, it’s that you made a bad choice and here’s how we are going to fix it.” Some staff believed the Behavior Education Plan represents a more developmentally appropriate approach to behavior, one that aligns with the district’s core values, and is “more culturally appropriate across the board.”

As such, we see **increased use of restorative practices** across the district, including conversations and circles. The most common intervention overall and for African-American students and Students with Disabilities was a Restorative

Conversation. The primary implementation focus of the Behavior Education Plan was putting in a positive approach to behavior response and shifting behavior policy away from a punitive approach, “creating systems that allow more of a restorative process than a punitive process.” As one staff member described, “globally there has been a more restorative approach to behavior in other words when behavior happens, more of a paired with some sort of subsequent action – repair harm, figure out what happened, how to reconcile this.”

In spite of this, other staff were **highly critical of the Behavior Education Plan’s approach to behavior**, perhaps because of a fundamental disagreement with the beliefs and values that underlie the Plan. When asked specifically about whether the Behavior Education Plan has been effective thus far, we heard about three negative reactions for every two positive statements, which says opinions are mixed at best. The Behavior Education Plan survey also provides an interesting source of evidence. As shown in Figure 4 below, a minority of staff who responded to that survey reported that their beliefs and values aligned with the Behavior Education Plan, although a large majority believed they understood the Behavior Education Plan. According to this survey, staff perceptions of misalignment between the Behavior Education Plan and their values and beliefs appeared overall and across levels and did not improve substantially under the first three years of the Plan. We do see some differences by level, with elementary staff more likely to report their beliefs and values align with the BEP compared to middle or high school staff.

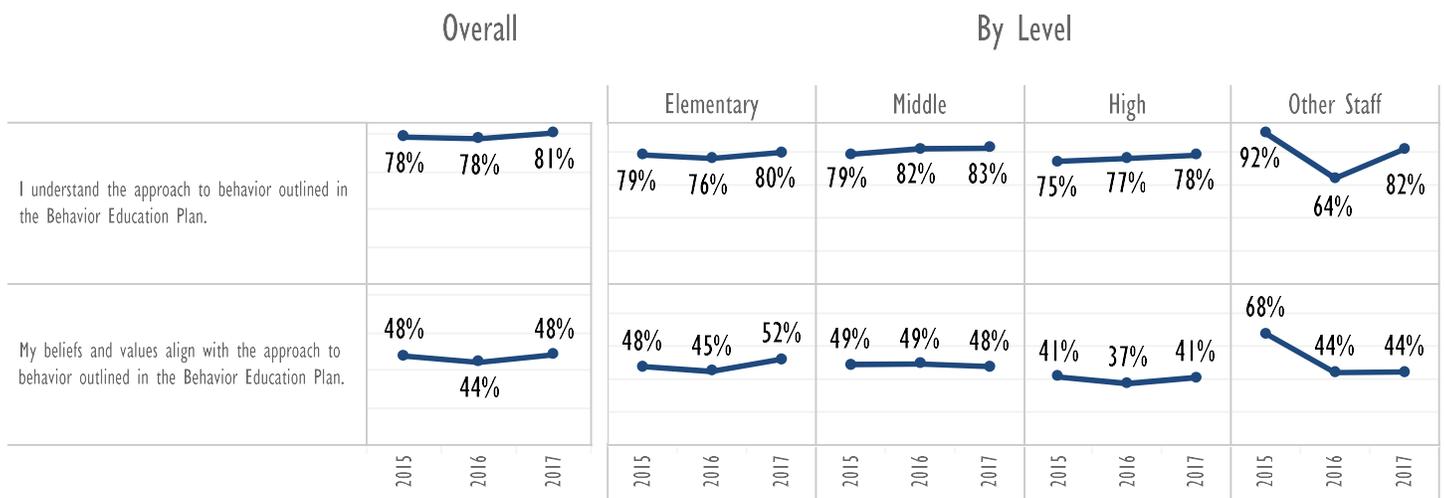


Figure 4: Behavior Education Plan Survey Responses to Select Questions

Note: “Other staff” represents staff who are not based at a particular school, such as staff working in multiple locations. The number of “Other” respondents is much lower than other groups and there is more turnover among this group than others.

We found an interesting example of this misalignment in perceptions around consequences. Staff who were highly critical of the Behavior Education Plan pointed to the **perceived lack of consequences for students**. On one hand, staff cited a dramatic need to address the problematic and unsafe behaviors from a small group of students exhibiting the highest needs. Staff also noted an increase in small behaviors and disrespect, such as swearing in the hallways or being late to class, and said that students have figured out that there are no consequences for these acts. Staff described the lack of consequences by saying “[the] Behavior Education Plan is giving chances, giving chances, they can come into a classroom and do something bad, and that’s not getting them community ready. We’re doing an injustice for these kids.” The perception of an inability to suspend, in particular, was cited as problematic; staff described it as “[we] took away the line in the sand and didn’t replace it with anything.” Furthermore, comments left in the Behavior Education Plan survey indicated “consequences” as the most common theme of the comments, specifically related to perceptions that they were inappropriate, inconsistent, or did not exist at all. The number of times the word “consequences” surfaced in comments connected with how much respondents agreed or disagreed with some aspects of implementation of the Behavior Education Plan at their school. Staff that strongly disagreed or disagreed with some aspects of implementation of the Behavior Education Plan at their school used the word “consequence” more in their responses than staff that strongly agreed or agreed with the same statements. This was especially apparent in responses to questions related to the use of restorative practices having a positive effect on school culture/climate and if the respondent’s beliefs and values aligned with the approach to behavior outlined in the Behavior Education Plan.

However, other staff in our focus groups believed that the lack of consequences argument was untrue, and instead believed that it was a **lack of understanding among staff about how consequences could and should work**. As one staff member described, “a lot of people equate punishment with consequences, [which leads to] a real sense that there are no consequences.” Those supportive of the Behavior Education Plan’s approach to consequences believed that MMSD has “shifted how we respond when kids aren’t there yet [with behavior].” They argued that MMSD has not “lowered expectations” as some staff claim, but instead are “scaffolding kids to learn about the expectation.” In addition, based on our review of the BEP itself, there appears to be relatively clear alignment between event types, associated levels of discipline, and potential consequences and interventions. Therefore, the lack of ability to draw a link between a child’s action and potential adult reactions may have more to do with familiarity or differences in practice rather than a true lack of options. Some of these differences in practice could relate to the “failure to warn” discussed in our literature review, if staff avoid assigning consequences to lower-level behaviors that may deter higher-level behaviors because of concerns about being too punitive with students of color.

MMSD has increased the explicit teaching of positive behaviors in elementary schools, but there is more work to do, particularly at the secondary level

A key component of Behavior Education Plan implementation is the integration of social-emotional learning into the curriculum. To examine this, we looked at select items from the Self-Assessment Survey (SAS) that pertained directly to teaching behaviors (see Figure 5 below).

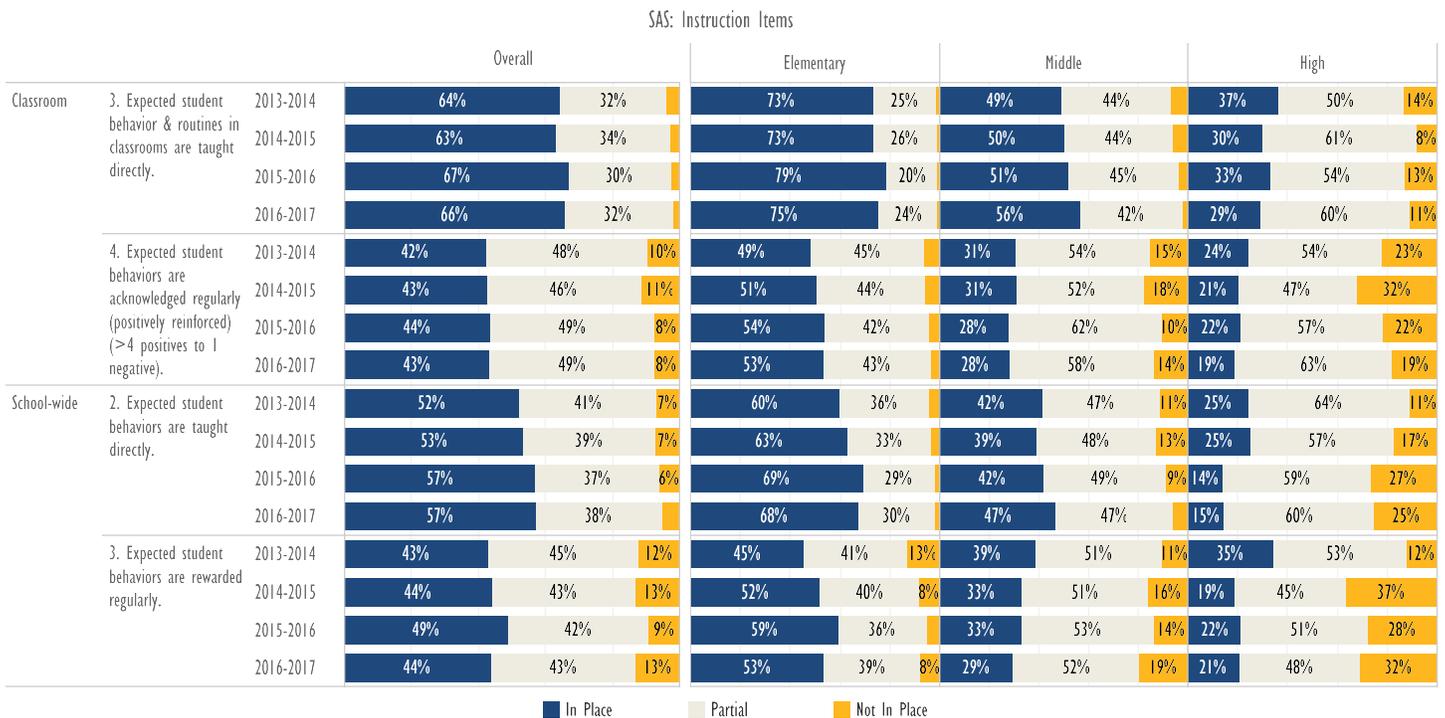


Figure 5: SAS Skill Instruction Items

Overall, we see that **both classroom and school-wide metrics related to explicitly teaching behavior and positively reinforcing good behaviors have remained consistent or have slightly increased** over the first three years of the Behavior Education Plan. When we look by level, we see that elementary schools drive this result, with increases in these metrics since 2013-14. High schools report these same metrics decreasing over the first three years, while middles have slightly increased the teaching of behavior, but decreased on positive reinforcement.

To get a wider sense of the impact of social-emotional learning, we also chose to look at key questions from the student climate survey that appear to connect to the conditions MMSD hopes to foster under the Behavior Education Plan. Our particular focus was on questions about student relationships, feelings of safety, and feelings of belonging (Figure 6 below). We acknowledge that this is not a direct measure of social-emotional learning, but rather of some of its intended effects.

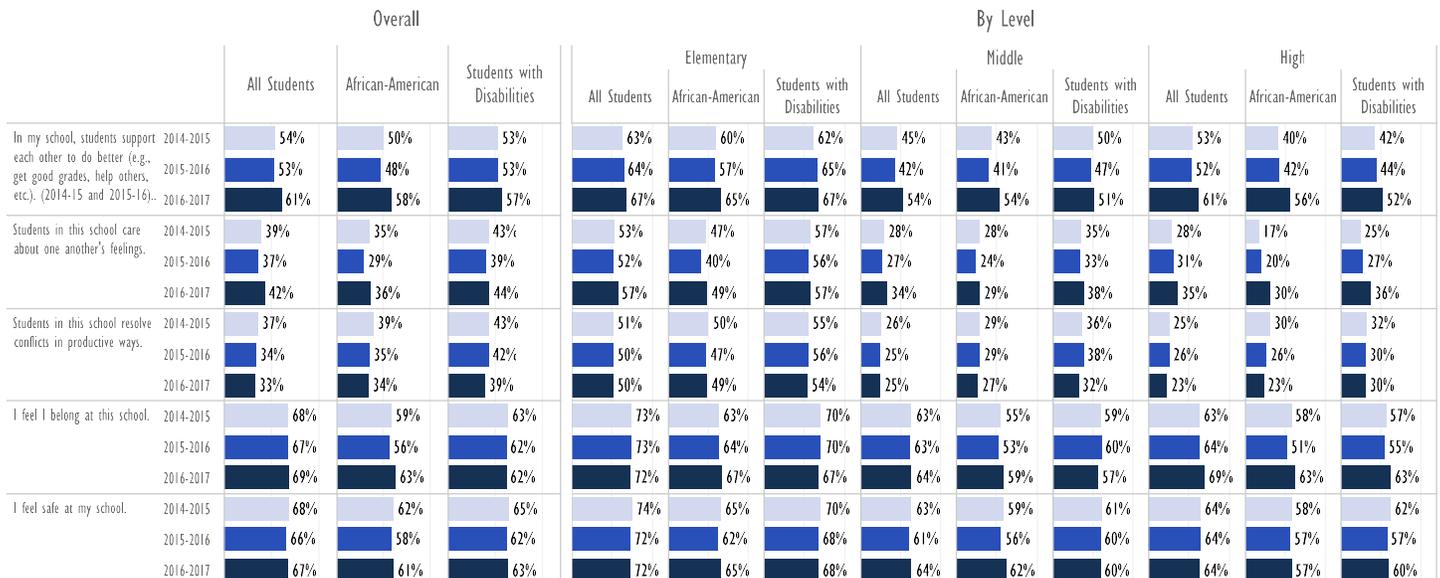
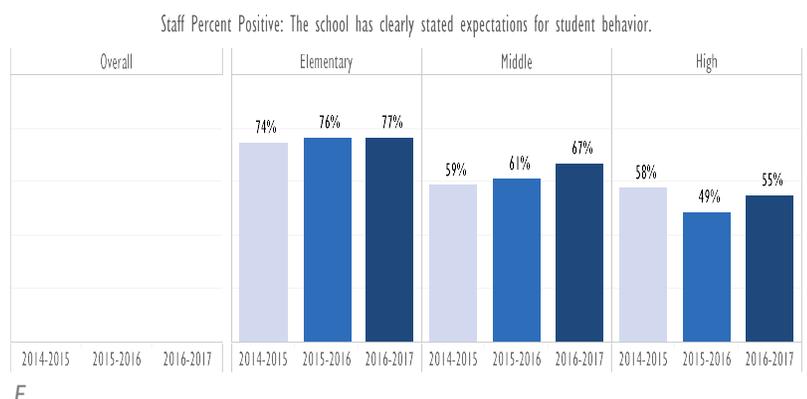


Figure 6: Student Climate Social-Emotional Items

We observe **increased feelings of support and caring about feelings, but declining results on conflict resolution and unchanged feelings of belonging and safety.** The lowest positivity was around conflict resolution, with only one third of students agreeing that students resolve conflicts in productive ways, down four percentage points from 2014-15. Across levels, African-American students are less likely to report feeling they belong or feeling safe at their school. Finally, agreement was lower at the secondary level across questions.

Students and staff are mixed on whether their schools have stated clear expectations for student behavior that students understand

According to climate survey results and focus groups, staff and students did not believe the Behavior Education Plan has led to clear expectations. Among staff, **a majority at both levels believed that their schools have clearly stated expectations for student behavior.** Staff agreement (see Figure 7 at right) was higher at the elementary level and lowest at the high school level. In focus groups, staff described how students have “seen more explicit teaching so we spend a lot of time saying this is the behavior that we expect...instead of telling [students] after the fact.” Some staff did express concern that expectations are not clear, particularly staff at the secondary level. As they described, “the expectations are out there but in practice, no, that does not happen.” They cited individual discretion of adults, giving examples of how the person’s mood that day, the time of day, and the relationship with the student can change what expectations are in place and how they are followed through upon.



These results are corroborated by staff responses on the Self-Assessment Survey (SAS) (see Figure 8 at right), where a majority of staff believed that their school has clearly defined expectations for student behavior. Similarly, agreement was much higher for staff at the elementary level.

In total, **about half of students agree that students understand how they should and should not behave** (see Figure 9 at lower right). African-American students and Students with Disabilities were more likely to agree with that statement, as were elementary school students. Agreement from year to year declined slightly overall but increased slightly for African-American students and Students with Disabilities.

Students described mixed feelings on whether expectations for behavior are clear. Some believed they are, stating that “everyone should know what is expected at this point” and that “[the teachers] will teach you about the rules, but you should really know the rules – be a student and let others learn too.” Others were not so sure, citing that “rules are different in [different] classrooms.”

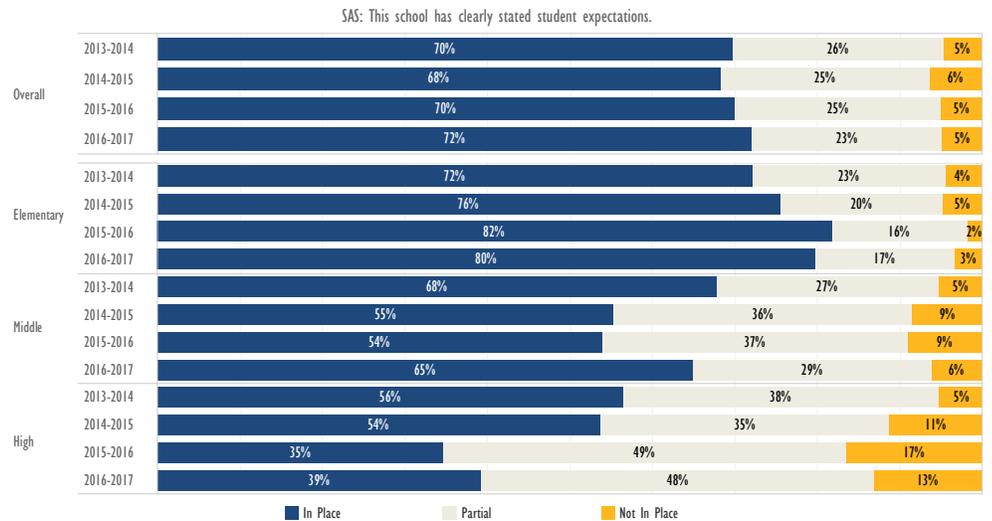


Figure 8: SAS Percent "In Place" on Expectations

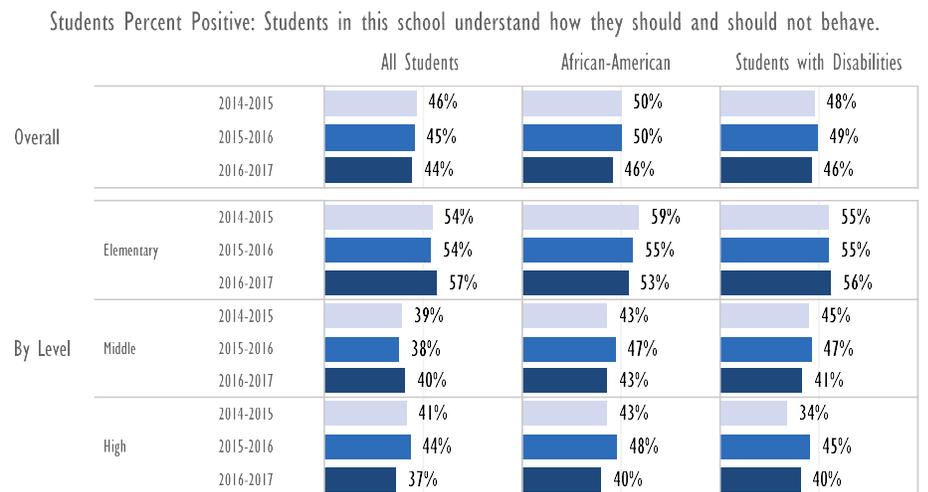


Figure 9: Student Climate Percent Positive on Understanding How to Behave

MMSD has enhanced the behavioral infrastructure through changes in approach and documentation

Throughout the course of Behavior Education Plan implementation, we see an **increased fidelity to Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS)** across the district, as evidenced by Self-Assessment Survey (SAS) results. The SAS is an annual survey given to school staff to measure staff members’ perception of the implementation and priority level of PBIS policies within four school systems: school-wide, classroom level, non-classroom, and individual student. Respondents are asked to give their opinion on the status of implementation and the priority level, ranging from “In place” to “Not in place.” For our purposes, we aggregated the responses within each section to provide an average score (or percent of respondents answering “In place”) for each of the four school systems. Overall, we observe an increase in PBIS fidelity (see Figure 10). The percent of staff that believe PBIS systems are “in place” rose from 42% in 2014-15, the first year of Behavior Education Plan implementation, to 47% in 2016-17. This increase is due to increases at the elementary level (from 45% to 53%). Middle schools were stable and high schools declined.

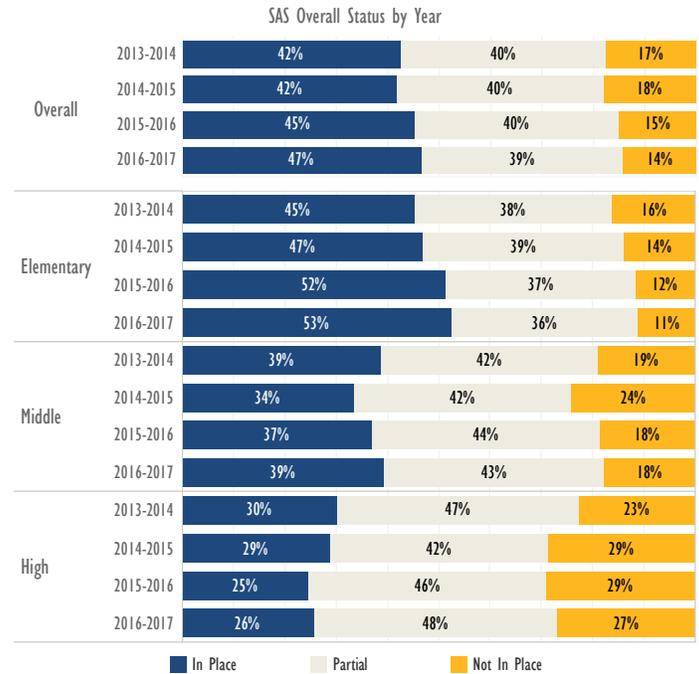


Figure 10: SAS Responses

Staff believed that the district has improved its implementation of PBIS system at all PBIS levels, as shown in Figure 10. We observe an increase across all four school systems (see Figure 11), with the greatest gain in the percent of respondents saying PBIS systems at the individual level are “in place.”

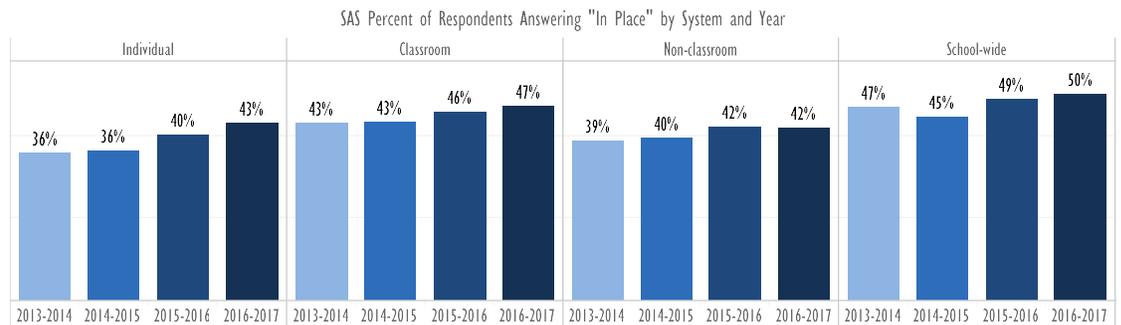


Figure 11: SAS Percent “In Place” by System and Year

In general, we find evidence that schools and Central Office have “gotten a lot better at strategically organizing how to address behavior.” In focus groups, staff cited **numerous systemic changes in their approach to behavior**, such as specific examples like flowcharts of response systems, definitions of when to call for help and when to handle behavior in the classroom, and school-wide conversations about expectations and consequences. These changes included increased tracking of behavior data, both through districtwide data systems like Oasys and internal systems like Google spreadsheets. Staff credited the Behavior Education Plan with making “the level of reporting data cleaner” and “increasing consistency across data and documentation practices district-wide.” While staff acknowledged the work is not perfect, “it seems more structured and organized” than before. Over the course of the three years of implementation, Central Office staff including PBS external coaches and teacher leaders have created numerous resources to support school implementation, including the Behavior Education Plans, implementation plan templates, guidance documents, and toolkits. In addition, they have instituted a School Targeted Assistance Tool (STAT) system for monitoring behavior at each location and provided regular updates to the Board of Education.

To implement the Behavior Education Plan, MMSD promoted the **use of mobile behavior response**, which one staff member described as “one of the biggest changes [of the Behavior Education Plan].” When staff place a call for support, a member of the behavior response team goes to meet the student and begin the resolution/response process. Team members vary across schools and can include anyone from support staff (e.g., social worker, Behavior Education Assistant, multicultural student coordinator) to administrative leadership (e.g., principal, assistant principal, dean of students). In our observations, we saw these behavior response systems in place, with designated responders intervening in classrooms and hallways as needed and bringing support to the classroom rather than removing students. This mobile response resulted in other changes to exclusionary practices in certain schools, such as no longer having detention, alternative learning spaces, or sending students to the office.

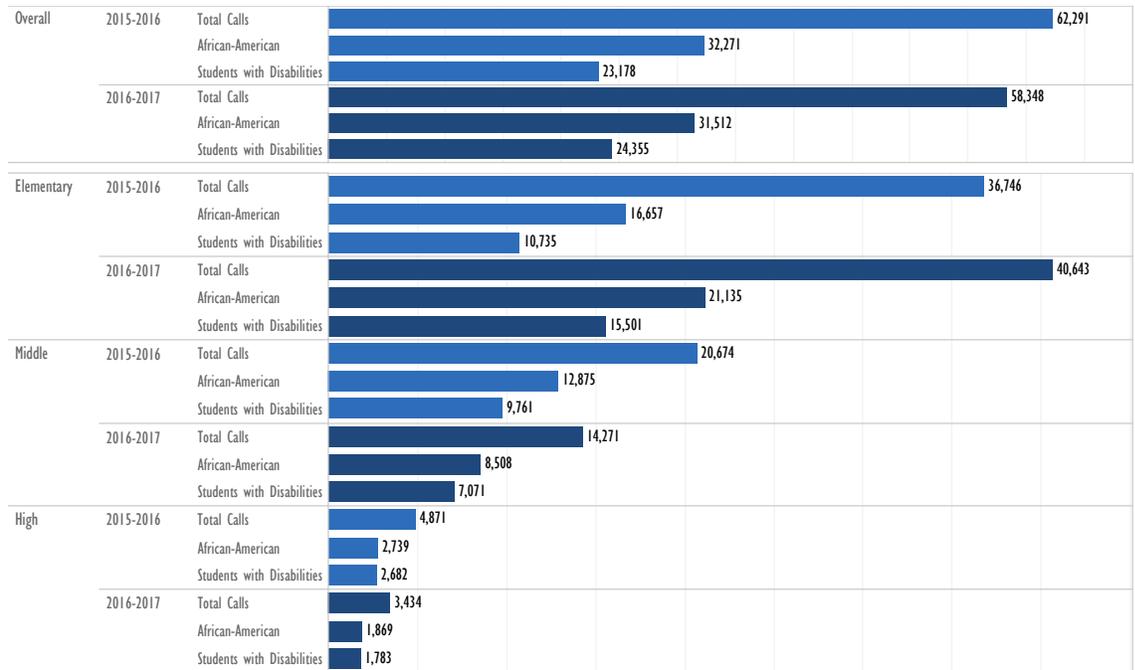


Figure 12: Behavior Support Calls

Behavior calls were recorded in Oasys starting with the 2015-16 school year. Figure 12 at right shows total behavior calls from 2015-16 and 2016-17.

Overall, we see that more than 62,000 calls were recorded during the 2015-16 school year and more than 58,000 in 2016-17, with more than half associated with African-American students (for broader context, 18% of students enrolled are African American). There were more calls at the elementary level than the secondary level, but disproportionality for African-American students and Students with Disabilities was higher at the secondary level.

Under the Behavior Education Plan, we also see **increased use of interventions and response strategies** to address behavior. Due to differences in the recording system for behavior interventions prior to 2014-15, we only can include three years of behavior intervention data. In total, schools documented almost 91,000 behavior interventions or response strategies in the district supported documentation system over the past three years. Table 2 below shows the ten most common interventions and intervention totals in 2014-15 and 2015-16 overall (sorted by 2015-16 prevalence).

Table 2: Interventions and Strategies 2014-15 and 2015-16

	2014-2015				2015-2016			
	Elementary	Middle	High	Total	Elementary	Middle	High	Total
Restorative Conversation	2,224	1,527	393	4,144	4,720	2,646	347	7,713
Behavior Response Team problem solving and interve	1,866	753	101	2,720	2,439	817	425	3,681
Teach and reinforce replacement behavior/coping st	2,429	598	250	3,277	2,387	1,063	171	3,621
Direct Skill Instruction	210	208	128	546	2,502	365	131	2,998
Collaborative Problem Solving	1,040	703	251	1,994	1,256	926	167	2,349
Check In/Check Out	590	120	20	730	1,112	211	13	1,336
Mediation & Mediation/Conflict Resolution	720	310	92	1,122	771	279	72	1,122
Home/School communication system	281	369	311	961	323	581	75	979
Motivational Interviewing and Brief Intervention	48	15	68	131	136	498	71	705
Restorative Circle	90	116	98	304	351	201	111	663
Total	10,693	5,414	1,968	18,075	18,149	8,369	1,809	28,327

The increase in recorded interventions from 2014-15 to 2015-16 occurred at both levels but was driven primarily by elementary schools. The most common interventions were similar across levels. Focus group data confirmed this trend, with staff citing “more intentional effort to use interventions” as one key change. Staff gave numerous examples that correspond to those listed above. While staff were generally supportive of increased use of interventions, they did cite that it “takes a lot of time and resources.”

Table 3: Interventions and Strategies 2016-17

	2016-2017			
	Elementary	Middle	High	Total
Remind / Redirect	5,440	2,157	541	8,138
Restorative Conversation	4,832	1,532	566	6,930
Take a Break Out and Back	4,848	532	80	5,460
Parent/ family communication	1,750	1,740	1,575	5,065
Other Intervention	2,262	802	906	3,970
Loss of Privilege	2,518	954	382	3,854
Teach and reinforce replacement behavior/coping st	2,948	488	368	3,804
Quick Conference	834	1,321	792	2,947
Mediation & Mediation/Conflict Resolution	616	396	187	1,199
Create a behavior contract or chart	593	55	67	715
Total	28,212	10,437	5,621	44,270

Table 3 shows the same information for the 2016-17 school year. We present this year separately because the interventions and strategies

available for staff to select changed. We see a larger increase in the recorded number of interventions and strategies, reaching a high of 44,270. Schools at all three levels saw an increase, with elementary gaining the most.

Implementation varies significantly by school

Across metrics, we have found that **Behavior Education Plan implementation varies greatly across schools**. With 50 locations, it is unsurprising that these differences occur, especially given the flexibility within parameters allowed to schools. For some schools, the Behavior Education Plan represented a significant change in their approach to handling behavior; for those schools, they may be “still struggling and still feeling up into their shoulders and head in the work and can’t get ahead of it.” For others, “our day to day procedures didn’t change much” and the Behavior Education Plan was a continuation of work already underway. This difference was particularly stark between levels. In general, staff believed elementary schools already had begun much of the work under the Behavior Education Plan as part of previous work around social-emotional learning and a whole child approach that seemed to come more naturally in an environment where one teacher primarily is with the same students for the entire day. While the Behavior Education Plan implementation may have aligned with some of the work underway in secondary schools, such as the emphasis on building relationships, staff expressed disagreement about whether teaching expected positive behavior was or should be part of the school’s responsibility.

The quantitative implementation measures also point to this variation. Figure 13 below shows a series of quantitative measures of Behavior Education Plan implementation over the past three years. Each dot represents an individual school; elementary schools appear in teal, middle schools in medium blue, and high schools in dark blue. The pale orange bar starts one standard deviation below and ends one standard deviation above the district average; therefore, the length of the bar is an indication of the level of variance of that measure. Dots to the right of the orange bar represent schools that are noticeably above the district average on these measures, indicating greater success in implementation based on these measures.

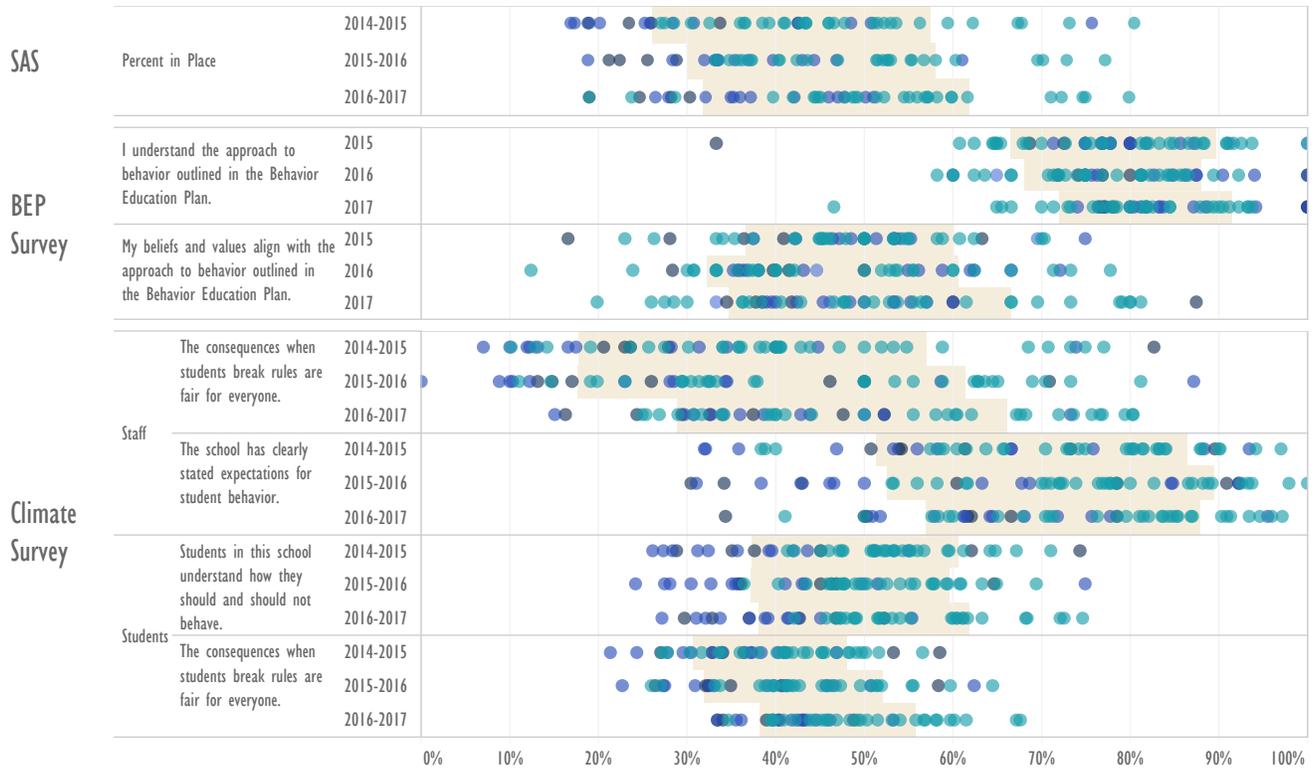


Figure 13: School-Level Variance on Implementation Measures

From this graphic, we see the **wide variance across schools on these measures**. For example, schools’ percent in place on the SAS ranges from below 20% to above 80%, and staff alignment of their beliefs and values with the approach to behavior outlined in the Behavior Education Plan has similarly high variance. Climate survey questions show substantial differences by school as well. Finally, in general, schools with the highest results on these measures tend to be elementary schools.

We also find that **schools differ in the patterns of student behaviors and needs**. The packed bubble charts in Figure 14 below each represent one MMSD school, provided as examples. Each individual bubble represents a student with a recorded behavior event in 2016-17; the size and color intensity of each bubble represents the number of events.

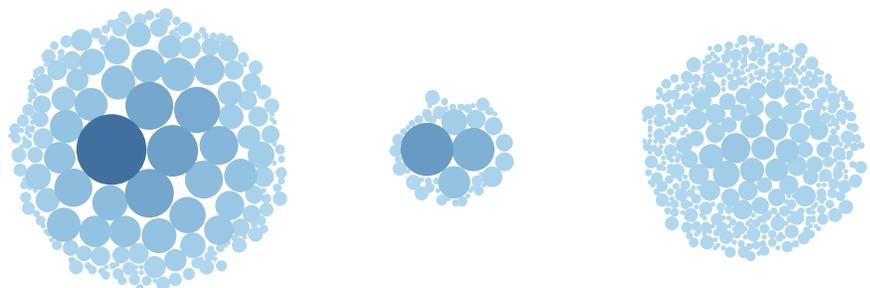


Figure 14: Students with Behavior Events at Three MMSD Schools in 2016-17

The first school pictured in Figure 14 at right has students with a variety of behavioral needs, including some students who stick out, but many others with lower numbers of events. The second school has several students who stick out dramatically, with very high behavior event totals, and relatively few other students with any events recorded, indicating a very obvious subset of students that require the greatest share of resources. The third school has many students with recorded events, but few with repeated events. This graphic shows us that based on recorded data, some schools have many students with recorded behavior events and some very few, and these totals do not necessarily vary in predictable ways with enrollment. In short, the landscape of recorded behavior is very different across schools.

A consistent theme in our observations and interviews was that staff are **struggling to make the Behavior Education Plan work for students with the most intense behavior needs**. Staff referenced the idea that the top 5% of students (e.g., the students in the Tier 3 of behavior), whose behaviors are most repeated and extreme, tend to occupy the majority to the time invested in behavior response by the school. Staff noted that the “struggle is the kids who need

intervention almost all the time. It can be all day – five days a week.” In our shadowing of behavior responders, we saw this difficulty firsthand, with several students occupying the majority of the time from those adults in response mode. In focus groups, staff cited this tension, noting that the Behavior Education Plan works for most kids, but not all. As one staff member described, “[supporting high-need students] looks markedly different from their peers and the amount of effort and time it takes to manage that is exhausting for students, for their families, and for the teachers.” Staff called for the district “to develop programs to help those kids too,” suggesting more mental health supports, alternative programs, or different interventions than what is currently available. Staff raised concerns that while the Behavior Education Plan supports keeping these students in school, it does not mean that “these kids are available for learning.” While staff did not explicitly discuss this issue in relation to Students with Disabilities, our quantitative data shows us that students displaying the most intense behavior needs (e.g., with the most behavior events) are more likely to be African-American students and/or Students with Disabilities.

Implementation Summary

Our work produced mixed evidence in terms of implementation. MMSD invested significant resources into the Behavior Education Plan, but staff still did not feel they had the capacity to implement the Plan. Changing mindset and adopting a more restorative approach has been difficult; although more explicit conversations about behavior are taking place and more restorative approaches are happening in schools, less than half of staff agreed with the beliefs and values outlined in the BEP. The BEP has led to more explicit teaching of behavior expectations, more interventions and responses, and a mobile response system, but these changes seem to be more in place in elementary schools than secondary schools. While staff overall believed expectations for student behavior are clear, differences exist by level and students’ beliefs about expectations are more mixed. Schools also showed tremendous variation across all implementation metrics and in their recorded events, which suggests that both implementation of the policy and student needs look different across locations.

Behavior Education Plan Outcomes – What Have We Learned?

In this section, we focus on student outcomes under the Behavior Education Plan. We present many different behavioral outcome measures, all focused on answering our second guiding research question: Did student outcomes improve from 2013-14 to 2016-17?

MMSD has recorded more behavior events under the Behavior Education Plan

Figure 15 shows us that **recorded behavior events have increased significantly** across the past three years. The graphs below show behavior events broken down by event level and year for the district overall, elementary, and secondary. The gray bars represent total events and the colored lines represent the number of events at each level.

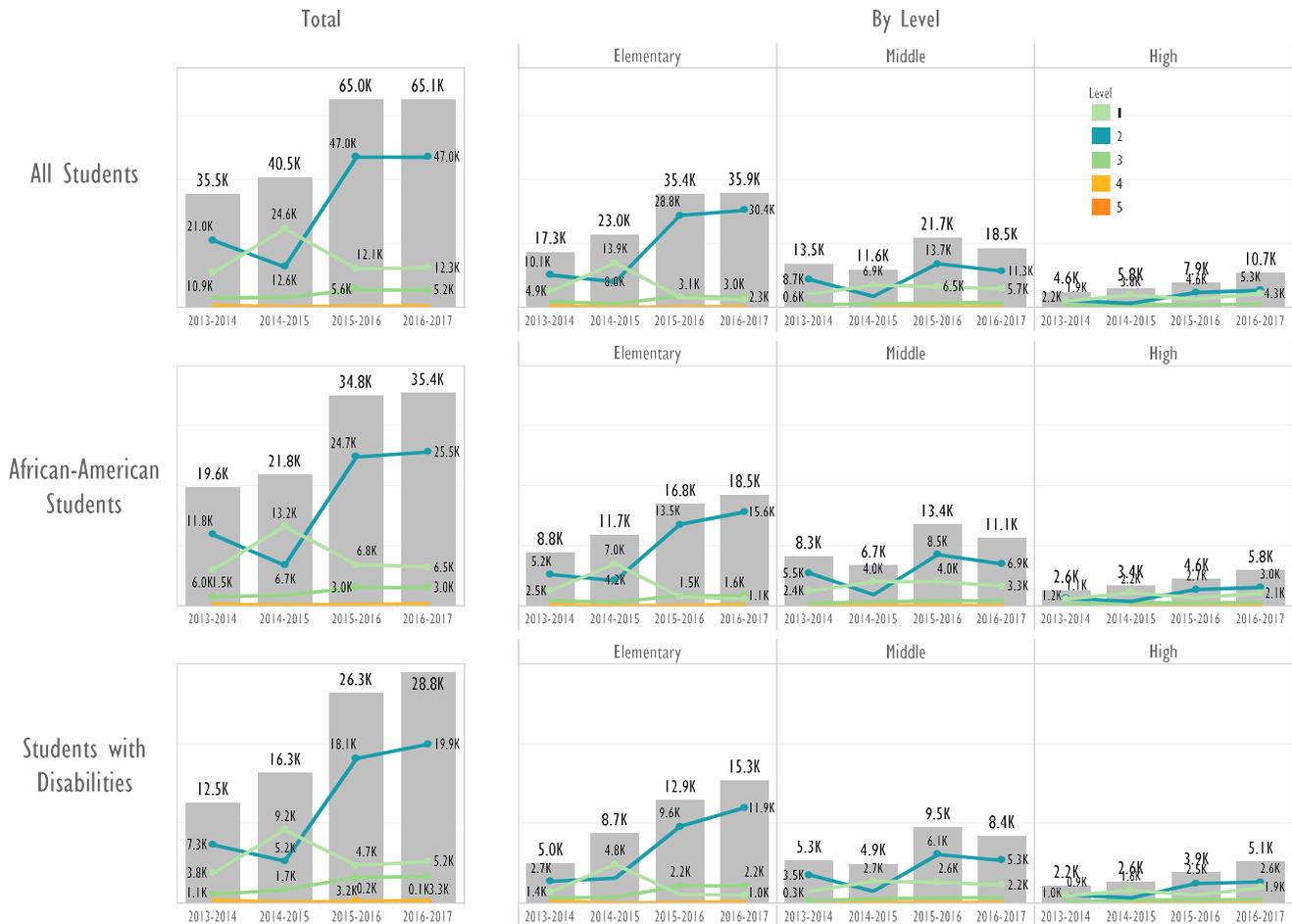


Figure 155: Total Behavior Events Overall and by Level

Event increases are observed across student groups and levels. We see a particularly large increase in level 2 events (appearing in teal) from 2014-15 to 2015-16, which aligns to a Behavior Education Plan goal of increasing level 2 documentation and a change in practice. In 2015-16, the policy was clarified to say that any time behavior support is called to assist with a student in a classroom, it is recorded as a level 2, rather than being either level 1 or 2 at the teacher’s discretion. In fact, staff cited the **increased documentation of behavior** as one of the major changes brought on by the Behavior Education Plan. As one staff member described, “I’ve also watched schools who have not reported behavior incidents, start reporting. We are building more consistent and more accurate data every year around behavior incidents.” We also observe an increase in level 3 and higher events over these three years.

Returning to the clustered bubble graphics used in the prior section, we created a graphic showing behavior events by student across the past four years. In Figure 16 below, the size of the circle represents the number of behavior events, while the color of the circle indicates disability and/or identification as black or African-American. **Blue circles** represent African-American students, **yellow circles** represent Students with Disabilities, and **green circles** represent African-American Students with Disabilities, while gray circles represent all other students.

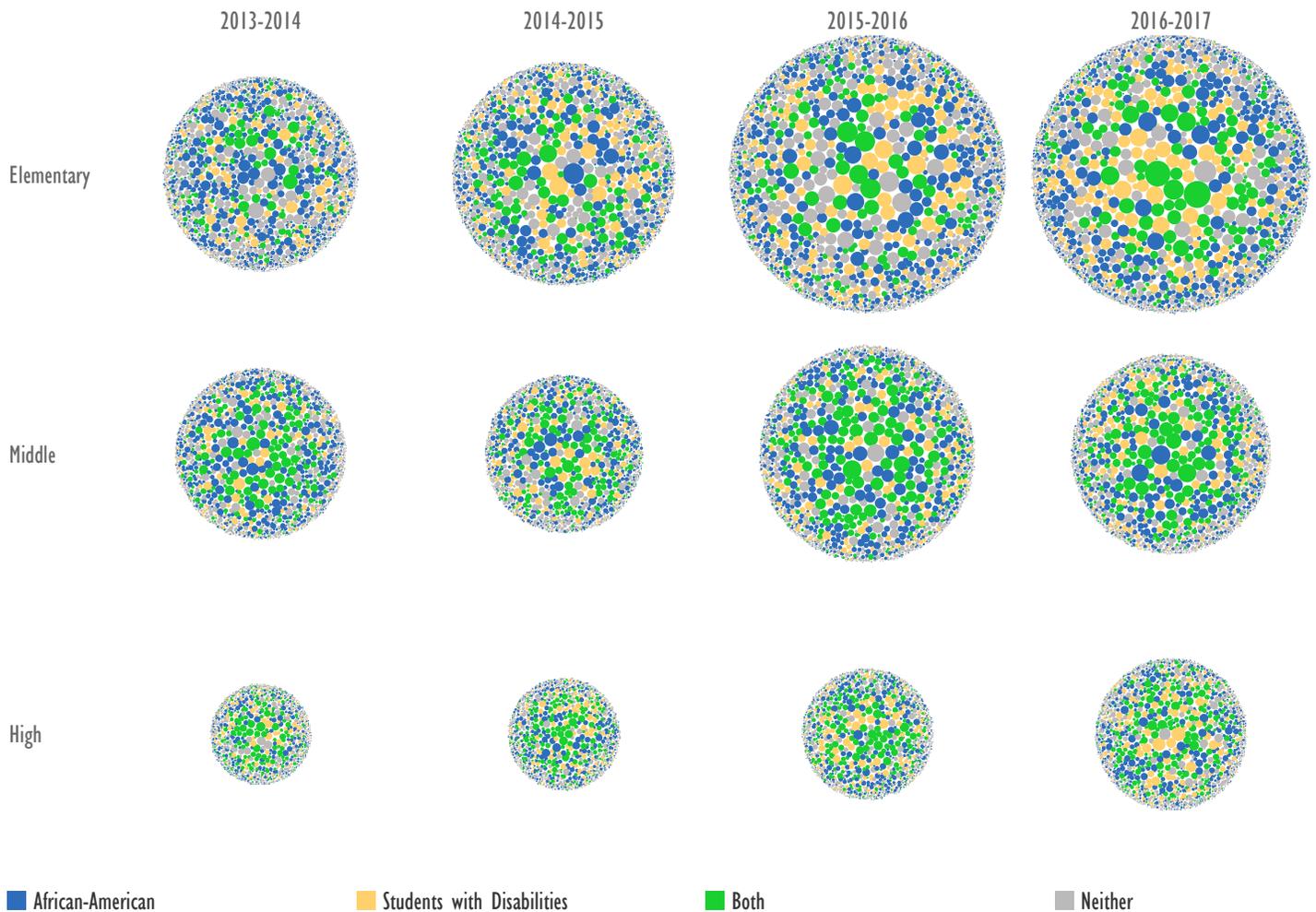


Figure 166: Behavior Events by Student with Select Demographic Characteristics

From this graphic, the obvious visual prominence of green dots, which represent African-American Students with Disabilities, indicates both the relative prevalence of behavior events for this group and the intersectionality of disability and identification as African-American among students recorded as exhibiting behavioral needs. We can see that **across levels, schools have increased their recorded events during these years**. The trend is most pronounced at elementary and high schools.

Elementary schools have reduced the use of exclusionary practices by reducing out-of-school suspensions, while secondary schools have not seen similar declines in suspensions but have reduced the length of suspensions and the use of expulsions

The Behavior Education Plan set out to reduce exclusionary discipline practices and keep students in the classroom more. Staff recognized this goal, citing that “there is that push to minimize lost instruction and keep kids in class.” To examine our progress, we looked at suspensions and expulsions.

Out-of-school suspensions have decreased at the elementary level but have returned to pre-Behavior Education Plan levels in middle and high schools across the past three years overall, as shown in Figure 17 at right. These overall trends also are present for African-American students and for Students with Disabilities.

We observe continued increases in suspensions in 2016-17, with total suspensions reaching the same levels as they did in the last year prior to Behavior Education Plan implementation at middle and high schools. Therefore, although suspensions went down overall, this decrease is attributable almost entirely to elementary schools.

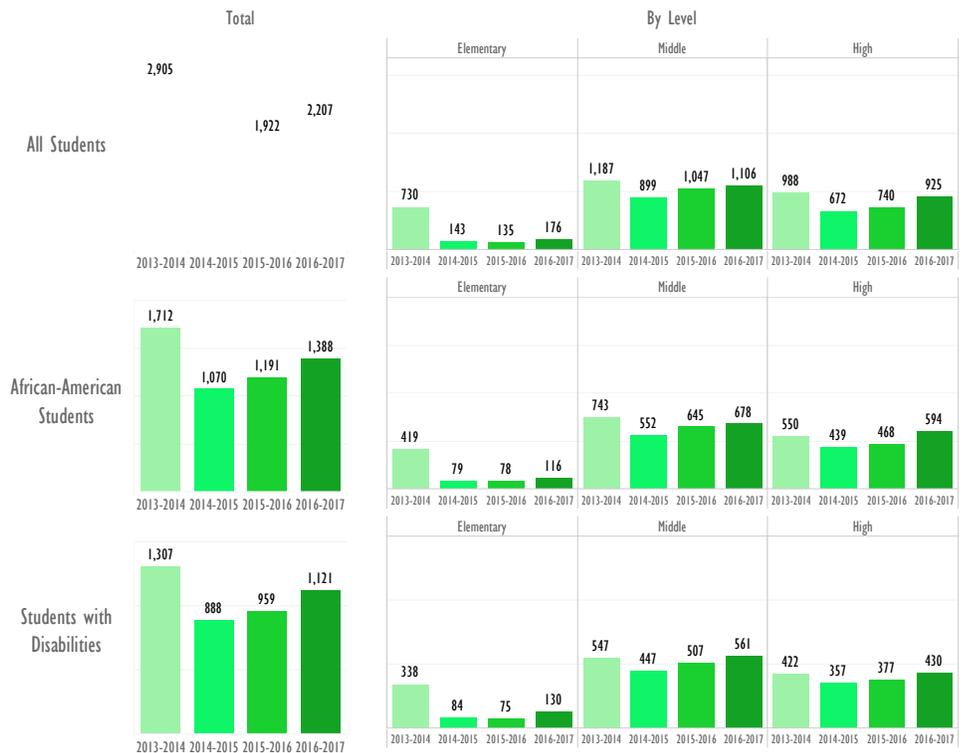


Figure 177: Total Out-of-School Suspensions

Elementary differences are expected due to significant limitations on suspension for students in grades 4K-3 without consultation and approval from Central Office under the Behavior Education Plan. This decrease can be credited in part to a change in policy, which significantly limited the behaviors that can result in suspension. However, at grades 4-5, we still observe a decrease in out-of-school suspensions, from 270 in 2013-14 down to 144 in 2016-17, indicating that progress occurred at the elementary level outside of policy limitations.

We also observe an increase in out-of-school suspensions at the secondary level from 2014-15 to 2015-16 after a large decline from 2013-14 to 2014-15, again as a result of a policy change which increased the ability for schools to suspend with consultation and approval. In 2014-15, the list of behaviors for which out-of-school suspensions were an option was limited, but starting in 2015-16, more behaviors could lead to a suspension. Because out-of-school suspension is intended to be required for events at levels 3-5 at the secondary level, staff discretion is limited and changes in suspension totals should reflect either policy changes (affecting the behaviors that can lead to suspension) or actual changes in higher-level behaviors.

In short, we see initial progress in reducing out-of-school suspension across levels, but that progress only has been sustained at the elementary level, where policy restrictions likely led to substantial reductions in grades 4K-3 and changes in practice led to reductions in grades 4-5. At the middle and high school level, where the policy itself does not necessarily stand in the way of suspension, gains from the first year have eroded.

We also observe **meaningful school-level differences in suspension changes over time**. Six of 12 middle schools and two of four conventional high schools had fewer suspensions in 2016-17 than in 2013-14. At the elementary level, seven

schools issued no out-of-school suspensions in 2016-17 and another 13 reduced out-of-school suspensions by ten or more since 2013-14.

We know that school attendance is associated with better student outcomes, and out-of-school suspensions can contribute to lower attendance rates.

Days of instruction lost due to out-of-school suspensions have declined (see Figure 18 at right). We see decreases in lost instructional time due to out-of-school suspension across levels and groups. This suggests that although total suspensions at the middle and high school levels returned to pre-Behavior Education Plan levels, suspensions are shorter.

This finding matters for a variety of reasons. For example, we examined the relationship between instructional time (as modeled through attendance) and MAP RIT scores in reading and math using a technique known as Hierarchical Linear Modeling (more details available upon request). We find that for both math and reading, attendance between the fall and spring test windows was a highly significant predictor of spring RIT scores, even when controlling for fall RIT scores, demographics, school, and grade.

This finding is robust at the 99% confidence level overall and for African-American students and Students with Disabilities in math, although the significance was lower (90%) for African-American students in reading and no significant association appeared for Students with Disabilities in reading. Therefore, we believe that higher attendance leads to higher achievement growth, and therefore that the practices encouraged by the Behavior Education Plan to increase instructional time may have a positive impact on student achievement for students who are no longer excluded.

Contrary to out-of-school suspensions, **in-school suspensions have increased** under the Behavior Education Plan. In-school suspensions are a less restrictive option because students have access

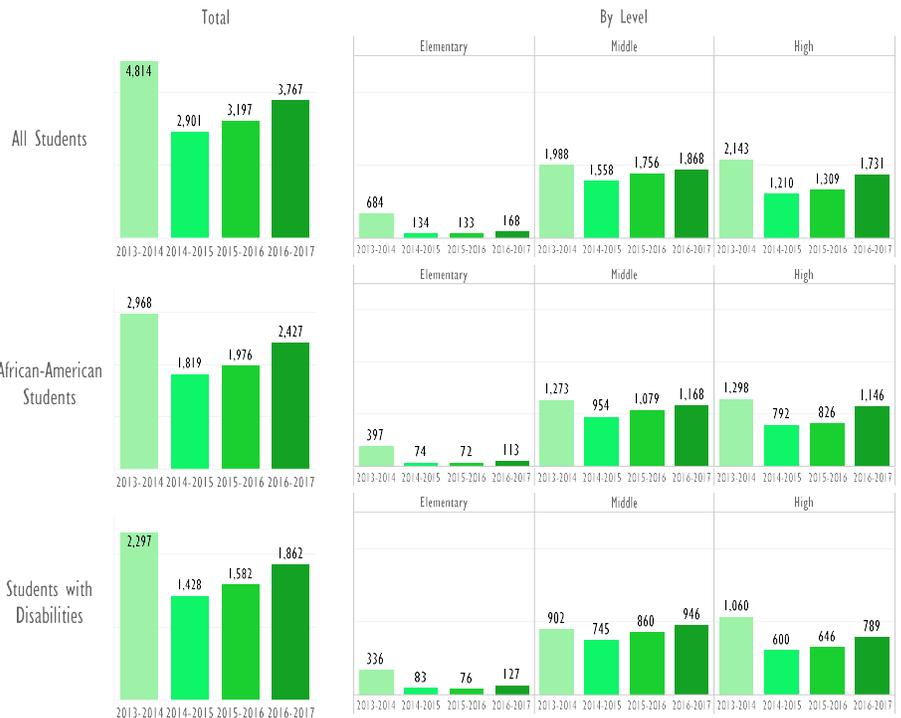
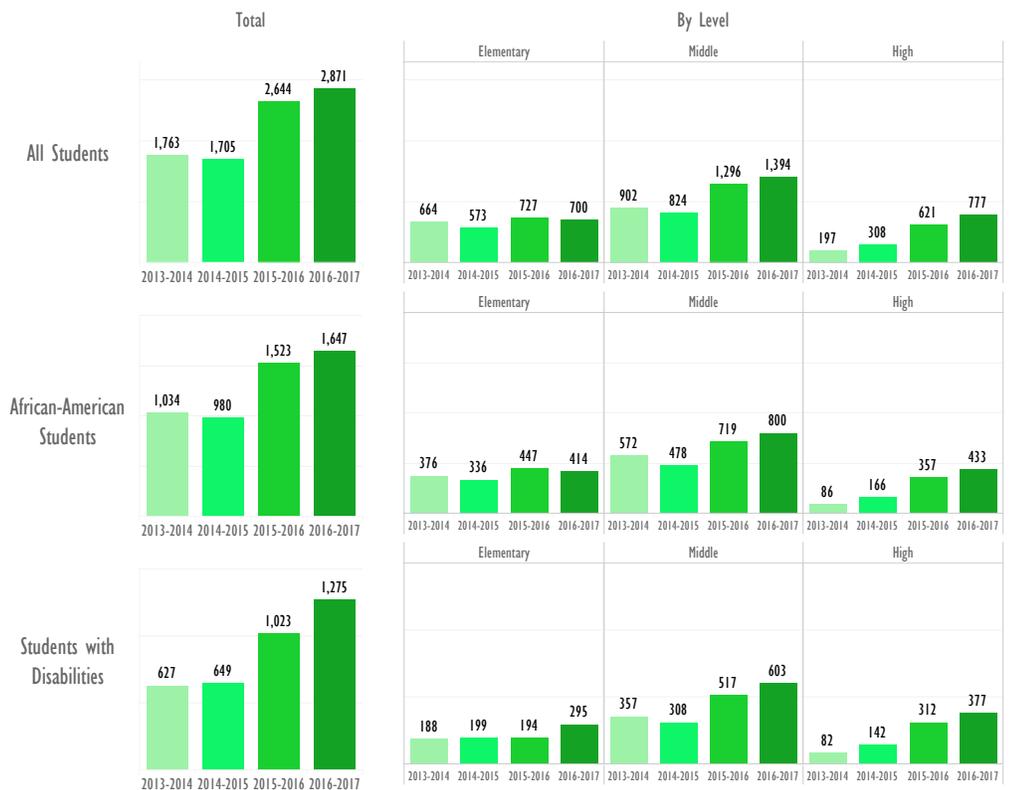


Figure 18: Out-of-School Suspension Days

even when controlling for fall RIT scores, demographics, school, and grade.



to academics and intervention. The characteristics of in-school suspensions vary greatly across schools, but a typical in-school suspension lasts less than a day and involves quiet work on assignments that staff bring to the student. We observe a large increase in in-school suspensions from 2014-15 through 2016-17, as shown in Figure 19. However, three middle schools and 18 elementary schools decreased in-school suspension under the BEP. In addition, the increase may be due to increases in recording practices, as recording of in-school suspension was not mandatory in past years the same was it was mandatory for out-of-school suspension.

Prior to 2015-16, the length of in-school suspensions was not recorded consistently. We began recording the time associated with in-school suspensions (as either half or full days) in 2015-16, and staff are expected to record only out-of-school suspensions that last at least 90 minutes. Figure 20 at right illustrates the total days of in-school suspension recorded. We see that out-of-school suspensions totaled around 2,000 days in each of the past two years, with about half occurring at the middle school level. The typical out-of-school suspension is less than a day.



Figure 20: In-School Suspension Days

Expulsion recommendations and expulsions have decreased noticeably under the Behavior Education Plan.

Total expulsion recommendations are at less than half of prior levels and actual expulsions stood at only four in 2016-17 (see Figure 21 at right). Given the significant challenges for students and families associated with both expulsion recommendations and actual expulsions, this change represents significant progress.

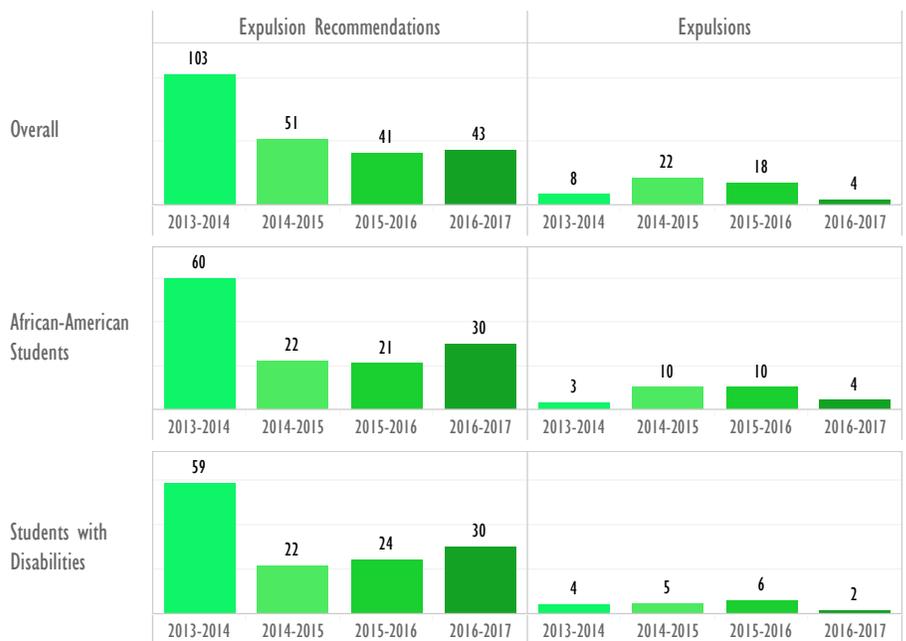


Figure 21: Expulsion Recommendations and Expulsions

Disproportionality has not improved

One of the stated goals of the Behavior Education Plan was to decrease disproportionality among behavior outcomes, with a specific focus on African-American students and Students with Disabilities. As one staff member indicated, “kids of color still lead the way in behavior referrals [and] that needs to be picked apart and examined further.” However, aside from this comment, **discussions of disproportionality were absent from our conversations.** Although some focus group participants alluded to different consequences and disciplinary challenges across groups, these comments did not address race or disability explicitly.

With analysis of the quantitative data, we see that **disproportionality has remained consistent** over the past three years, particularly for African-American students. To explore this further, we looked across multiple behavior measures, including behavior events, support calls, in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsion recommendations. We used expulsion recommendations instead of expulsions because the low number of expulsions in MMSD makes those proportions highly variable.

In Figures 22 and 23 below, the **teal circles** represent the percent of students in the district belonging to the relevant demographic group, while the **green circles** represent the percent of that type of behavior measure associated with that demographic group. For a measure with no disproportionality, the green circle and teal circle would overlap; the horizontal **gray bar** represents disproportionality.

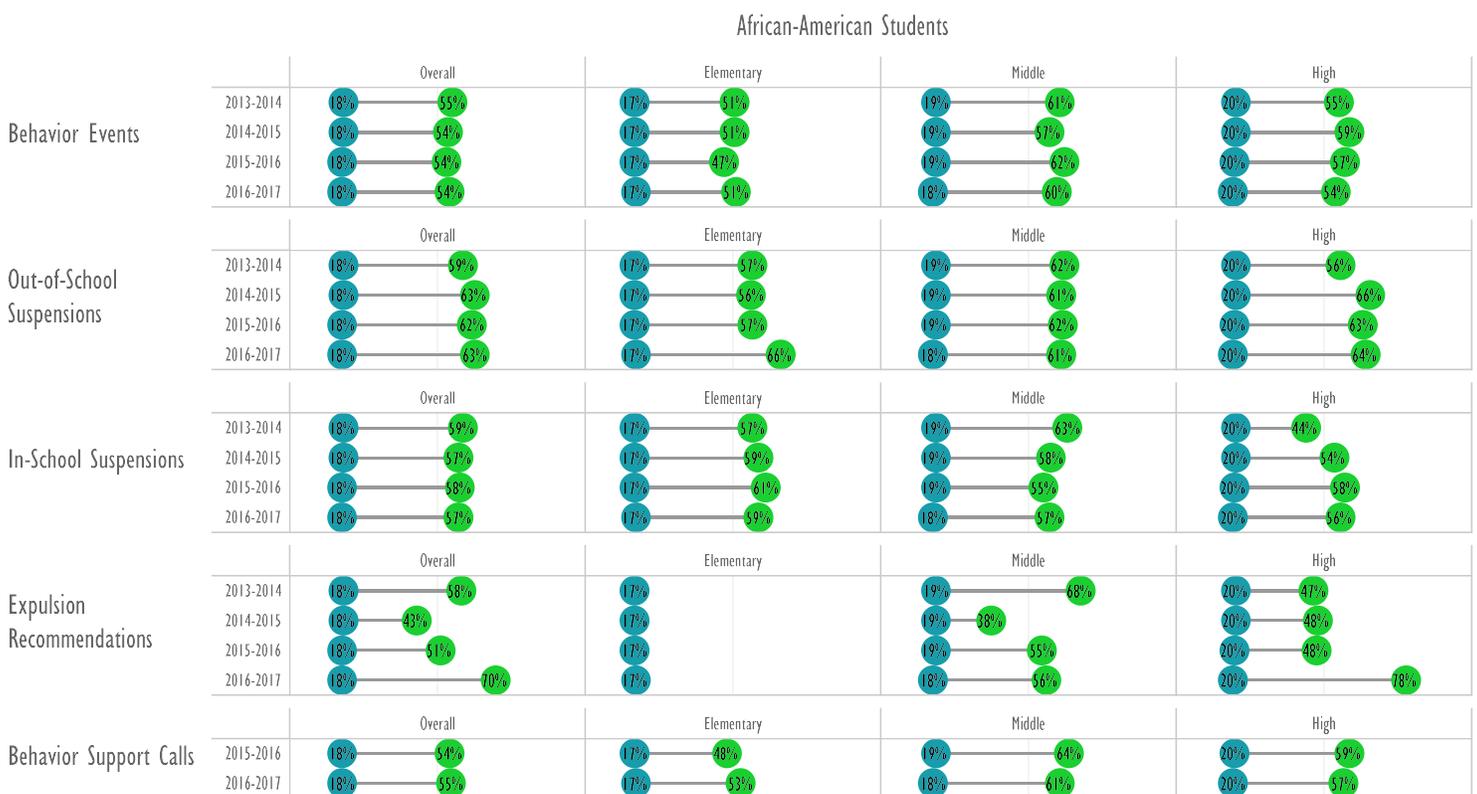


Figure 22: Recorded Behavior Disproportionality for African-American Students

This graphic shows us that African-American students receive these five types of behavior events at rates much higher than their proportion of the overall student population. The overall number of suspensions of each type and behavior events has changed quite a bit, but the percent associated with African-American students has changed little. This finding is similar across levels.

Students with Disabilities



Figure 23: Recorded Behavior Disproportionality for Students with Disabilities

Figure 23 shows that similar to African-American students, there is little evidence of improved disproportionality for Students with Disabilities across these measures and levels.

In addition, we looked at risk ratios for out-of-school suspensions, in-school suspensions, and behavior events for African-American students and Students with Disabilities. In this case, a risk ratio represents the relative odds that a student will have a certain type of behavior event during a year. We compared African-American students to white students and Students with Disabilities to Students without Disabilities. As an example, if 20% of African-American students and 10% of white students had an out-of-school suspension during the year, we would divide 20% by 10% to determine that African-American students had a risk ratio of 2.0 for out-of-school suspensions (meaning they were two times more likely to be suspended). We shorthand out-of-school suspensions as OSS and in-school suspensions as ISS.

The graphic at right (Figure 24) shows risk ratios by race/ethnicity over the past 10 years. Each bar shows the risk ratio relative to white students, with longer and darker bars representing higher ratios. The gray line imposed over the bars represents the percent of students with that type of behavior recorded during the year. Thus, the graphic shows both total and relative frequency of each event type.

From this graphic, we can see that even though **out-of-school suspension rates for African-American students have decreased, their risk ratio for out-of-school suspensions relative to white students is higher than it has been in previous years.** The 2016-17 rate of 10.3 is higher than any prior year and African-American students had higher risk ratios during all three years of the Behavior Education Plan than any year prior to the Behavior Education Plan. These risk ratios are substantially higher than national averages, which data from the Office of Civil Rights suggests are between 3.0 and 4.0. These ratios are high and similar across levels in aggregate.

Similar to total out-of-school suspensions, we see school-level variance in out-of-school suspension risk ratios and changes. Risk ratios at individual elementary schools are not meaningful because of the low suspension counts. When we look at secondary schools, five middle schools have risk ratios below 10 (including three with risk ratios below 5). Risk ratios are below ten at two conventional high schools and above 10 at the other two.

We also see in-school suspension risk ratios remaining high, although they were high as well for the several years prior to the Behavior Education Plan. Behavior event risk ratios have decreased as the percentage of white students with recorded behavior events has increased.

Out-of-School Suspensions

In-School Suspensions

Behavior Events

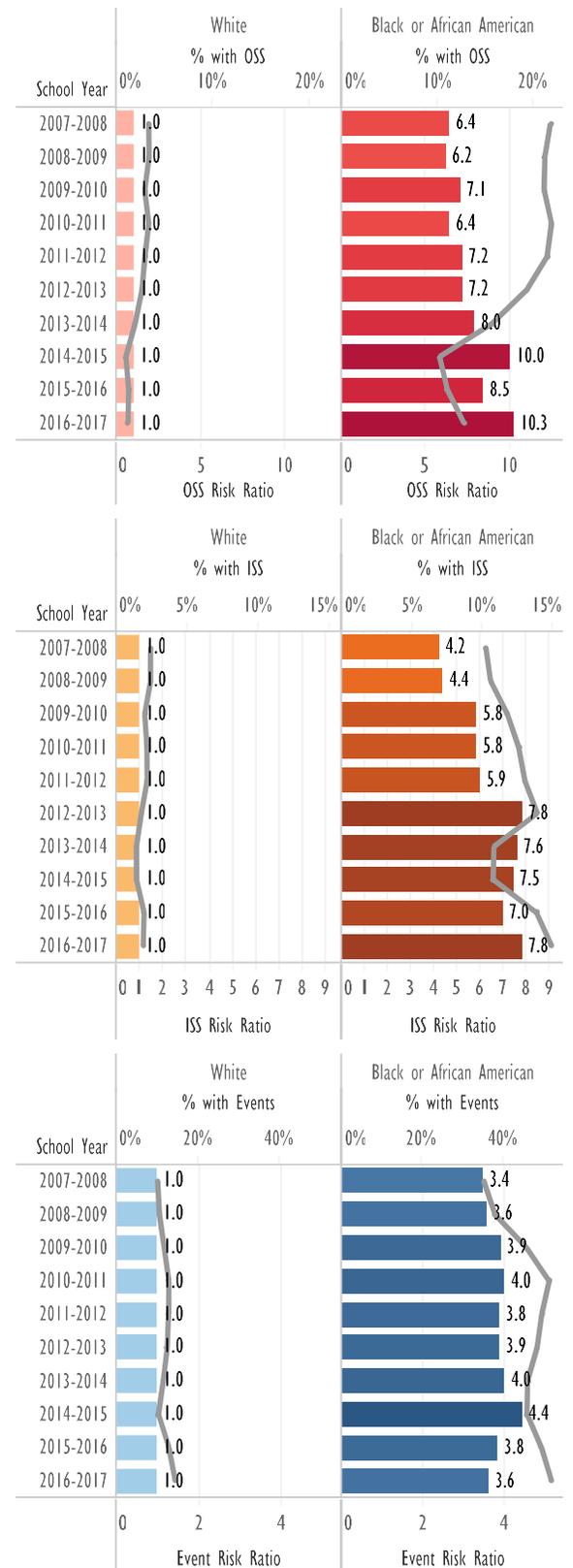


Figure 24: Risk Ratios for African-American Students

Figure 25 below presents the same information as Figure 24, but for Students with Disabilities (with all totals relative to Students without Disabilities).

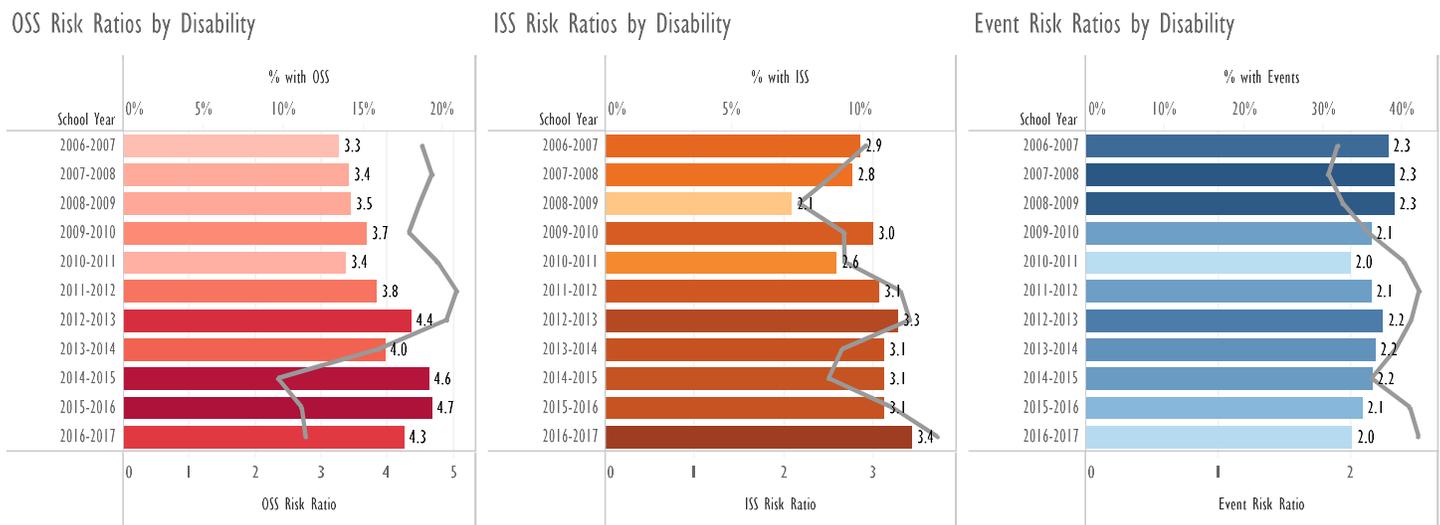


Figure 25: Risk Ratios for Students with Disabilities

Risk ratios for Students with Disabilities relative to Students without Disabilities are less dramatic than for African-American students relative to white students, but they remain high for both types of suspensions and have not improved under the Behavior Education Plan.

Finally, we observe **disproportionality on elementary students' report cards**. Starting in 2016-17, MMSD implemented new SEL standards as part of elementary report cards. There are three sets of standards used – one for Kindergarten, one for grades 1-3, and one for grades 4-5. Within each set are 23 strengths and 23 corresponding growth areas (which refers to areas where students *have room to grow*, not to areas where they *have grown*) that teachers can add to students' report cards, creating a total of 138 separate measures. Teachers do not rate students on each standard; instead, the presence of a standard on a report card under the header of Strengths or Growth Areas indicates status. Teachers can select as few as zero and as many as 23 standards under each header and relative use varies considerably.

African-American students and students with disabilities are not less likely than their peers to have identified strengths or more likely to have identified growth areas; instead, it is the identified items themselves that vary. We calculated the prevalence of each strength and growth area for African-American students (relative to white students) and for Students with Disabilities (relative to students without disabilities). To constrain our analysis from 138 possible standards, we looked at growth areas only and focus on the standard at each level (K, 1-3, and 4-5) that appeared the most tightly connected to appropriate behavior.

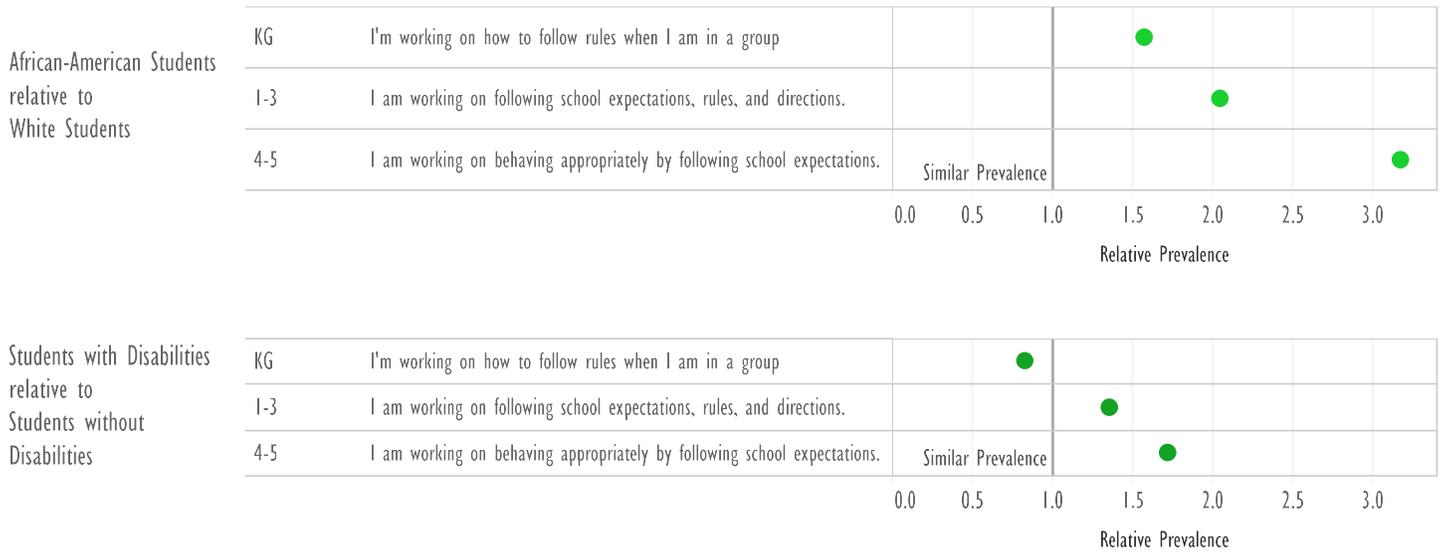


Figure 26: Relative Prevalence of SEL Growth Areas on Elementary Report Cards

From Figure 26, we see that on a proportional basis, African-American students are more likely than their white peers to have a standard related to following the rules identified as a growth area, particularly as they get older, with African-American students more than three times as likely to have this growth area identified in grades 4-5. For Students with Disabilities, the relative prevalence also increases in later grades, but these ratios are lower than for African-American students. Students with Disabilities in Kindergarten actually have less relative prevalence of this growth area compared to their peers without disabilities.

Our quantitative data shows that disproportionality is clear, consistent, and constant; however, as mentioned earlier, it is difficult to say whether disproportionality occurs because of inequitable treatment of different students leading to application of different consequences in similar situations or because of actual differences in behaviors exhibited. **A minority of staff agreed that consequences were fair for everyone** (see Figure 27 below). We see large differences between levels, with 51% of staff in elementary schools agreeing compared to only 29% of staff in high schools. As one staff member described, “I’m worried about what the other students are seeing. They see a kid getting away with something and they don’t know what’s going on. Is there a consequence? If there’s no consequence for him then [they think] I can do it.” Another believed consequences have become “more predictable, but I don’t think they are more fair.”

Staff Percent Positive: The consequences when students break rules are fair for everyone.

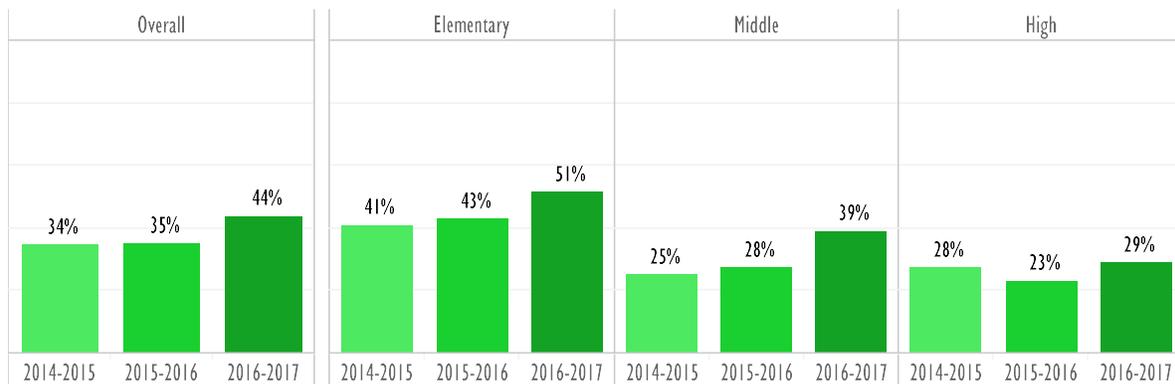


Figure 27: Staff Climate Percent Positive on Consequences

However, some pointed to more consistent application of specific consequences, such as suspensions, as an example of more fair consequences.

Overall, **a minority of students agreed that the consequences when students break rules are fair for everyone** (see Figure 28 at right). This result improved from 2014-15 to 2016-17 overall and for African-American students, and more for Students with Disabilities (particularly at the elementary and high levels). Elementary students were more likely than secondary students to agree that consequences were fair for everyone, although no level had particularly high agreement. Student focus groups affirmed this finding. As one student explained, when something happens in the classroom, “one student gets a call home, one talks to the principal, one takes a break.” However, students were unclear on whether fair consequences meant similar consequences by action, or whether fair meant a consequence that fit the particular situation and/or person.

Students Percent Positive: The consequences when students break rules are fair for everyone.

		All Students	African-American	Students with Disabilities
Overall	2014-2015	38%	36%	38%
	2015-2016	40%	37%	43%
	2016-2017	44%	40%	45%
Elementary	2014-2015	43%	41%	40%
	2015-2016	45%	42%	49%
	2016-2017	51%	45%	50%
By Level Middle	2014-2015	35%	30%	37%
	2015-2016	37%	33%	40%
	2016-2017	43%	36%	41%
High	2014-2015	36%	36%	32%
	2015-2016	36%	33%	38%
	2016-2017	38%	36%	43%

Figure 28: Student Climate Percent Positive on Consequences

Outcomes Summary

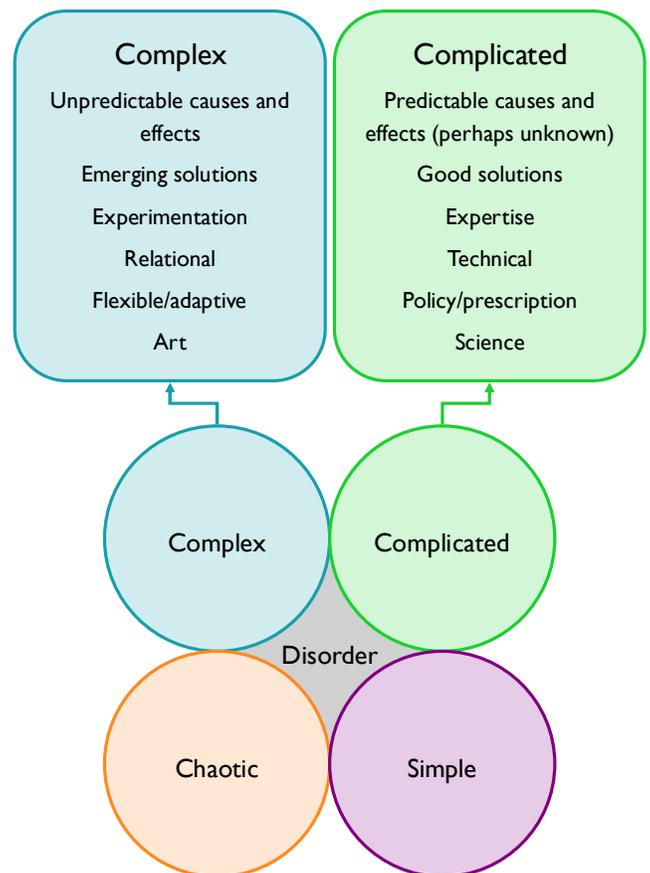
Since the introduction of the Behavior Education Plan, the district has increased documentation of behaviors significantly, particularly for Level 2 events. All levels have seen an increase in recorded behavior events across this time. A clear positive outcome under the Behavior Education Plan is increased instructional time due to reductions in out-of-school suspensions at the elementary level both in grades 4K-3 (where policy restrictions limited suspension) and in grades 4-5 (where they did not). However, out-of-school suspensions at the secondary level have reverted to previous levels after some initial decreases (although days of instruction lost have decreased at the high school level as the typical suspension has become shorter), and documented in-school suspension has increased significantly. In addition, disproportionality has not improved even as documented behavior and suspension totals have fluctuated. Risk ratios have not improved overall and across levels.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Over the past three years, **the district has set a vision for behavior education** focused on education and restorative practices, rather than punitive discipline. When we examine the first three years of the Behavior Education Plan in MMSD, **we see mixed evidence of success in implementation and outcomes**. MMSD increased resources, instituted new behavioral practices, and increased our explicit teaching of social-emotional learning in elementary. We did not see progress hoped for in other areas, such as the mindset shift and setting clear expectations in our schools. We saw positive outcomes like increased documentation of behaviors, reductions in exclusionary practices at elementary schools, and reductions in expulsions. Exclusionary practices at secondary and disproportionality overall, however, have not moved in the right direction. In total, MMSD has not experienced the progress the district hoped to achieve, and many outcomes are not meeting expectations. These outcomes are not for a lack of intense work by staff in schools and at Central Office. So why are the results not what the district hoped?

We believe that a potential explanation lies within the Cynefin framework (Snowden & Boone, 2007), which MMSD leadership are using during 2017 planning processes. This framework, developed originally by Dave Snowden, posits five contexts or domains for decision-making: simple, complicated, complex, chaotic, and disorder. Each context calls for making sense of problems in a different way (see Figure 29).

For the last several years, MMSD has **made progress on the Behavior Education Plan within the complicated domain**, one where problems have a predictable cause and effect, where technical expertise would identify good solutions to implement districtwide. In response, the district instituted technical solutions focused around policy changes that document the actions and reactions required. We see this as a useful first step, and one that has yielded noticeable structural results. The district has new practices for recording behavior events and interventions, helping to solve an informational problem. The district mandated policy change that limited the use of suspensions, which led to the reduction of exclusionary practices in elementary. In the Behavior Education Plan, MMSD has created a policy that outlines, in detail, the consequences for specific actions at each level and when staff can apply those consequences in a progressive fashion. Schools have adopted new practices for responding to and documenting behaviors, and Central Office has invested significant staffing and resources focused on behavior and created new data tools for digging into results. Perhaps most importantly, the district has articulated a vision that involves restoration rather than punishment, and even if staff do not always align to this vision, they do appear to understand it. MMSD treated behavior education as a science, focusing on technical solutions that laid a foundation for future work and solved a series of complicated problems.



Authors' adaptation of various published models

Figure 29: Cynefin Framework

Moving forward, though, we believe the district should continue to implement technical solutions where needed but also **should focus on the Behavior Education Plan as a complex problems**, with unpredictable causes and effects where innovation will yield emerging solutions. This work is inherently relational, requiring a focus on the relationships that guide individual interactions and flexible and adaptive reactions. At its core, behavior data is not solely a reflection of the actions of a student or the staff member; instead, it is a reflection of the interaction between those people, which cannot be predicted or changed long-term based solely on policy. These interactions, by their very nature, are complex. At the system level, changing mindsets and decreasing disproportionality have been elusive, in part because these challenges are more difficult to unpack, understand, and affect, and in part

because the magnitude of change associated with shifting mindsets that may have been ingrained for years or decades is immense. There are patterns at the system level to explore, but the problem likely requires more art than science. Complex problems can become complicated problems, in time, but applying processes useful in a complicated context will not make them so. We acknowledge that complex work around the BEP already has begun, with activities like principal training through the National Equity Project, but this type of work needs to continue and expand.

The district cannot continue to invest so much of its energy into the technical components of the Behavior Education Plan and expect results to change. **Technical solutions will not fix relational problems.** Putting more resources and energy into these areas likely will lead to the same trending results seen in this evaluation. MMSD needs to think creatively about the complex problem at hand. With that goal in mind, we make the following recommendations:

1. Expect every school to have a high-quality implementation plan that is approved, monitored and supported

To ensure that all schools meet minimum expectations for Behavior Education Plan implementation, the district must expect that each school have a high-quality implementation plan. This plan should be collected consistently, reviewed and approved by Student Services staff, monitored regularly by both the school and central office, and supported by staff within the school as well as administrators. By doing so, the district can encourage a strong foundation across schools while monitoring innovation and keeping abreast of emerging promising practices. We also encourage schools and central office departments to consider whether behavior support should have an explicit presence in School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and Central Office Measures of Performance (COMPs), if not there already. Innovation requires a strong and consistent foundation to exist across schools, and emphasizing that work in the next three years is critical.

2. Prioritize proactively teaching positive behavior

Over the last several years, MMSD has focused on the complicated work of outlining a clear system of response for student behavior. Moving forward, we recommend using the same approach to teach positive behavior and build relationships proactively, particularly at the secondary level. The absence of negative behavior is not the same thing as positive behavior, and given that only about a fifth of students have a recorded behavior event during a given academic year, the district should prioritize this focus on positive behavior to help the BEP be as meaningful as possible for those 80% of students whose behaviors never rise to the level of documentation and consequences.

3. Create additional supports for students demonstrating high needs

Both quantitative and qualitative evidence illuminate the need for additional, proactive support for students demonstrating high needs. What constitutes high needs will vary by context, but how best to support these students remains a challenge. Under the BEP, the desired shift away from exclusionary practices creates a gap between challenging behaviors and use of the same exclusionary practices used in the past. As a district, MMSD must work to fill that gap with positive, restorative, and student-centered support, as opposed to new exclusionary practices. We also recommend studying alternative options for these students beyond those currently offered within MMSD, such as alternatives to suspension.

4. Focus on building relationships between staff and students

To change how staff and students interact, MMSD has to address the mindsets and relationships that influence those moments. It is not just about adult or student actions; it is about the interaction between them. Moving forward, the work of the Behavior Education Plan should focus on building these relationships, infusing belief among staff in the approach outlined in the Plan, and helping students understand what the BEP means for them. We see these elements as relational instead of technical and believe that now that the structure of the Behavior Education Plan is in place, a renewed focus on the “why” will yield better results. This focus can dovetail with and complement the curricular focus on culturally responsive teaching, based on a similar need for authentic positive relationships. Relational change is likely going to take longer and require new ways of approaching the work, but ultimately may be the productive struggle necessary to make the vision come to life.

5. Promote innovation with consistent monitoring

Given the complex nature of student behavior, we encourage safe-to-fail experimentation, where staff can attempt new processes and innovations at a small scale where the goal is not to avoid failure, but rather to learn what might work and what to replicate. Safe-to-fail experimentation involves keeping an eye on multiple small-scale practices, even some which might appear contradictory, to see which appear to achieve results and which do not. MMSD should recognize local innovations and check in regularly on the associated results. When the district finds pockets of success, they must replicate and scale up those successes; when practices do not show success locally or system-wide, MMSD must be ready to adjust quickly. This requires responsiveness and consistent and regular monitoring, and an open mind on what good practice might look like across locations and contexts.

6. Learn from variation

In a district with dozens of schools and even more educational environments, a universal approach to reducing exclusion and disproportionality matters less than a universal mindset. The district has clearly articulated the mindset, but implementation variation remains. Across measures, we see evidence of progress at the elementary level that we do not observe at the secondary level. We recommend that the district dig into differences in practices and conditions across levels that likely contribute to differences in outcomes. MMSD can learn from the natural variation that has occurred thus far, using it to isolate pockets of success and correct trends that are not moving in the right direction. Conversations about and across levels are a critical piece of this process.

7. Dig into the root causes of disproportionality

The Behavior Education Plan stated a goal of improving disproportionality, but we do not observe progress. As behavior recording practices and the relative prevalence of certain consequences has varied, disproportionality has remained essentially unchanged. Disproportionality in student behavior outcomes runs counter to the district's high expectations for all students and the belief that every child can learn and succeed. Without surfacing the issue explicitly and having challenging conversations about where it originates, we do not believe the district can design effective policy to ameliorate the issue. These critical and challenging conversations need to include explicit discussions about the role racial identity and implicit bias play in responses to student behavior. They should also allow for multiple perspectives; as with all complex problems, more ideas increase the odds of finding solutions that work.

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