



## FINDING: SOME MPS POLICIES NEED TO CHANGE. MANY ARE ENFORCED INEQUITABLY AND PREDICTABLY BY STUDENT IDENTITY.

### DESCRIPTION

YPE projects have explored various school policies. Common topics of interest include: behavior policy, dress code, cell phone policy, backpack policy, and school schedules. In general, students would like to be more involved in shaping the policies that support their school community, and would like staff to address issues of bias (related to race/ethnicity and gender identity) prevalent in the enforcement of policies. Many YPE teams have collected data from staff in addition to students, and found that many staff also want changes in school policies and enforcement.



Implicit bias and stereotyping are critical to understanding this issue for MPS students. The way school policies are enforced can be highly dependent on the presence of bias or stereotypes, which is ultimately connected to student and staff **relationships**.

### *Policies and Student Identity*

Barton's team wanted to know "how our school disciplines children, and if race and ethnicity has anything to do with it?" Using MPS discipline data, they found African American students report a much higher referral rate than other students no matter how long they have been at Barton ([Barton 2019](#)).

Seward's YPE team explored the enforcement of their school's dress code. They found that 60% of students receiving dress code violations identify as female ([Seward 2019](#)). One Seward student shared, "I was in 3rd grade, I was told I had to put on a sweater because I had spaghetti straps, what was the problem? I was a child, and yet I was somehow sexualized for showing my shoulder as a 9 year old. Even now, why does a bra strap cause any problems? Well, it doesn't until teachers come in and tell people to cover it up, the rules are sexist" ([Seward 2019](#)).

Of the Seward students who felt they were disciplined more than their classmates of a different gender identity, **87% identified as female.**

### *Student Voice*

YPE teams have found that, too often, students do not know the school policies. In addition, students believe school climate and student behavior would improve if students were involved in making the policies that impact them.

For example, the Barton YPE team discovered only 50% of students know what a behavior referral is, while only 7% of students reported that their teachers have reviewed the discipline policy with them ([Barton 2019](#)). Most teachers surveyed stated they knew about the school's discipline policy, but don't necessarily tell their students about it. This team suggested teachers and staff go over the discipline policy with students at the beginning of the year to make sure students know what repercussions will occur in response to certain behavior referrals.

Regardless of the outcome of the YPE investigation on a school policy, and regardless of whether the teachers and students agreed, YPE teams have demonstrated that students are able to conduct their own investigation unaided by the administration to best serve their school's students and their needs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Informed by their research, YPE teams have provided the following recommendations to improve school policies throughout MPS:

1. Co-create policies with students and staff so that all members of the school community know and agree to follow them.
2. Interrupt predictability in policy enforcement through a frequent review of behavior and discipline data, and mandate staff professional development on bias. Remove staff who cannot effectively interact with and support students of color.
3. Find compromises within school policies that balance student priorities with staff needs, such as allowing cell phones during lunch or backpacks during the final hour of the school day.