ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF DISPARITIES IN SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

“A root cause analysis provides a structured process for looking beyond symptoms to understand the underlying causes of a problem. Root cause analyses are not new; they have been used in business for many years and more recently in fields such as education to understand academic failure. A root cause analysis is a systematic process for identifying the deepest underlying cause or causes of a problem. If you can identify and eliminate root causes, then you can eliminate the problem. The goal is to avoid making changes that are expedient, but incomplete and inadequate. As one government agency describes it, root cause analysis gets you past just putting out fires and onto finding ways to prevent them. Data—both quantitative and qualitative—are essential to the root cause analysis process.

When data are collected in a transparent and objective manner, and when effective communication about the data is supported, schools and districts can have productive, data-informed discussions about disciplinary policies and practices. Keep in mind that because schools are complex social systems, the identification of a single root cause of disparities in school discipline may not be possible or even desirable. The examination in which you will engage as you work your way through the stages … will most likely reveal several root causes or clusters of causes.”¹, ²

Below are a few resources that can help school/district teams use root cause analysis to guide their work.


This comprehensive guide breaks improvement work into three main phases: 1) Digging into the Data; 2) Getting at the Roots of Disparities; and 3) Creating an Action Plan. The guide is accompanied with several tools including a glossary, data mining decision tree, discipline disparities risk assessment tool, root causes diagnostic tree, and an action plan template.

³ See note 1.
Supporting School-Level Root Cause Analyses of Disproportionate Discipline Outcomes

This webinar provides an overview of the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments' *Addressing Root Causes of Disparities in School Discipline: An Educator's Action Planning Guide*. Specifically, it explains the purpose of a root cause analyses, describes what is involved in conducting a root cause analyses, and provides an overview of each step of the guide, including identifying disparities, conducting the root cause analysis, and planning how to address root causes of disparities. Time was provided for Q/A and discussion on how you might use the guide.

MindTools

This website contains a comprehensive toolkit with resources for many different areas of organizational leadership, including how to engage in root cause analysis for solving complex problems and challenges.

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5 Resources specific to root cause analysis available at: [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_80.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_80.htm)