**Systemic Racism in School Discipline**

**Challenge**

Federal and state laws and regulations govern school conduct. Each local P-12 school provider has specific policies that comply with federal and state laws and regulations. Policies regarding school conduct and responsibilities are published on district and school websites and are usually available in printed copies on request. Not all schools and school districts engage parents and students in discussions of the school policies through special meetings, courses, or webinars. In many instances, parents and students learn about school policies when a violation has been committed and they are confronted with consequences. Often, parents and students are not informed about required procedures, their rights, and responsibilities when consequences are invoked. These practices disproportionately impact students of color and low-income students. These students are disproportionately subjected to harsh punishment that includes suspension, expulsion, referrals to law enforcement, and school related arrests. Data from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (2014), indicates that Black students are 16% of school enrollment; however, they are 33% of out of school suspensions, 34% of expulsions, 27% of referrals to law enforcement, and 31% of school related arrests. Many of the issues leading to harsh discipline are initiated in classrooms. This is an indication of a very serious issue.

**Intervention**

In 2014, the U. S. Department of Education in collaboration with the Office of Civil Rights issued an advice and guidance letter to assist the nation’s public elementary and secondary schools “in meeting their obligation under Federal law to administer student discipline without discriminating on the basis of race, color, or national origin.” The following is a quote from this letter.

The department strongly support schools in their efforts to create and maintain safe and orderly educational environments that allow our nation’s students to learn and thrive. Many schools have adopted comprehensive, appropriate, and effective programs demonstrated to: (1) reduce disruption and misconduct; (2) support and reinforce positive behavior and character development; and (3) help students succeed. Successful programs may incorporate a wide range of strategies to reduce misbehavior and maintain a safe learning environment, including conflict management, restorative practices, counseling, and structured systems of positive interventions. The Department recognizes that schools may use disciplinary measures as part of a program to promote safe and orderly educational environments.

**Impact**

The intervention has not fully met expectations. Harsh discipline continues to be disproportionately administered to students of color and low-income students.