

Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty: Study finds unintended consequences of Obama era suspension policies

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Cameron Sholty | WILL Communications Director
cameron@will-law.org | 414-727-7416 | 262-409-9816

Milwaukee, WI - The Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty issued a new report, *Feds in the Classroom: The Impact of the Obama Administration's Discipline Policy on Wisconsin's Public Schools*. The results reveal that federal actions to change discipline policies led to suspension rates plummeting in Wisconsin public schools. In particular, the WILL review shows that the racial disparity of suspensions, ostensibly the aim of the federal policies, has not closed at Milwaukee Public Schools. The study also underscores the growing body of literature concluding that factors other than race, i.e. poverty, are the main predictor of whether a child is suspended.

The Obama Administration's Justice and Education Departments issued guidance to, and threatened investigation of, state and local school officials to force changes in schools suspension policies in order to combat racial discrimination. Previous White House data showed that more minority students were being suspended than their white peers.

The WILL study, authored by Dr. Will Flanders and Natalie Goodnow, concludes the following:

Since 2007-2008, suspensions in Wisconsin's K-12 public schools have declined by

about 41%.

Around the same time, the state Department of Public Instruction began pushing alternative methods to discipline through the increased use of “positive” behavior reinforcement in lieu of punishment.

As the suspension rate has declined, concerns over school climate and school safety have begun to rise. Surveys and polls from teachers show that changes to suspension and discipline policies are leaving teachers unsatisfied and even fearful.

Despite Obama Administration claims, our study shows that in Wisconsin’s largest school districts – Milwaukee, Racine, Kenosha, Madison – factors other than race (poverty, disability) are the primary factors in determining whether a child is suspended. This is yet another example of why Washington D.C. should not get involved in local school district issues.

Even still, the data shows that the racial disparity of suspensions – the point of the Obama Administration actions – has not closed at Milwaukee Public Schools.

The study specifies with several “Call to Actions” including U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos to rescind the Obama Administration actions, including the 2014 “Dear Colleague” letter.

“Policymakers, school leaders, and parents ought to rely on good data, not just good intentions, when evaluating the effectiveness of a given policy,” said William Flanders, Research Director at WILL. “The changes made with regard to discipline and suspension policies in Wisconsin schools have not had the intended effect, and may be contributing to negative changes in school culture.”

“Secretary DeVos should rescind the 2014 “Dear Colleague” letter and work to empower state and local officials to make decisions about discipline policies affecting their students and schools,” said Natalie Goodnow, Research Fellow at WILL.