

Disproportionate Discipline Root Cause Analysis Template

The root cause analysis is a method that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and schools can use to identify underlying reasons for disproportionate discipline. A root cause analysis can be defined as *“An objective, thorough, and disciplined methodology employed to determine the most probable underlying causes of problems and undesired events within an organization with the aim of formulating and agreeing on corrective actions to at least mitigate if not eliminate those causes and to produce significant long term performance improvement.”* - Vorley & Tickle, (2002).

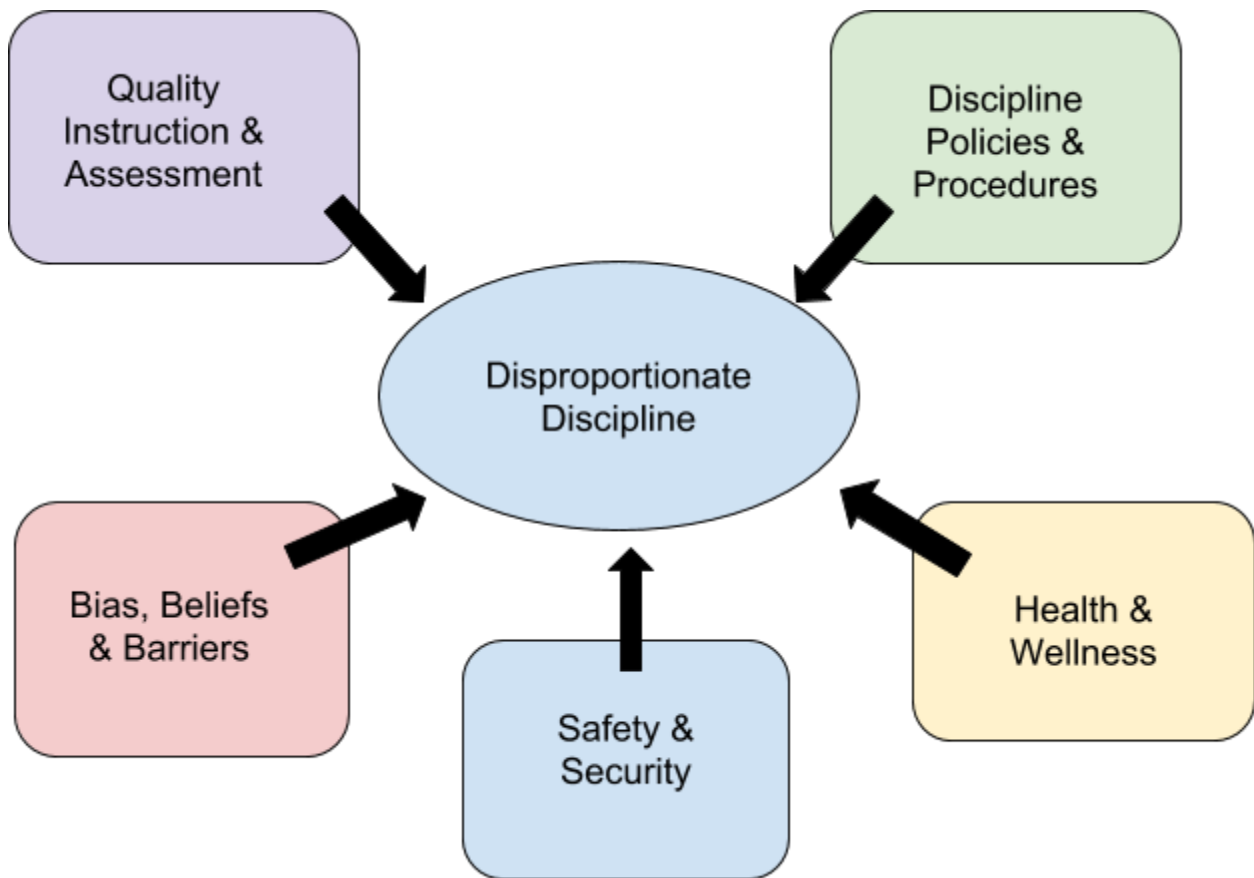


Figure illustrating some of the factors to examine when considering possible root causes of disproportionate discipline.

How to use the Root Cause Analysis Template

The following steps are recommended to assist the Disproportionate Review Team, DRT, in facilitating the data analysis, discussion, and problem-solving required to consider the many potential causes for the occurrence of high incidences of student misconduct and disproportionate discipline.

Step 1: Considering Possible Root Causes-- is designed to lead the DRT through consideration of each potential cause for elevations in student misconduct that lead to out-of-school removal. A list of conditions are provided with both a negative and positive position. This list is intended to produce dialogue among stakeholders as they either consider across all schools within the LEA, or for a specific school, the general status of the condition. A possible statement starter for dialogue about each condition could be: "In general, across our LEA/School ... ". It is recommended that individuals on the committee first complete independently their impressions using the document provided. Individuals should then come together either as a whole group, or in smaller work discussion circles depending upon the size of the committee, for dialogue. The end product should be whole group consensus on a hypothesis of whether the condition is a potential cause for elevated student misconduct and disproportionality or not.

Steps 2: Prioritizing Root Causes & Celebrations-- is divided into celebrations and causes for concern for each of the five areas. The committee should agree upon 3-5 celebrations and 3-5 causes for concern in Step 2. Celebrations should be considered closely as there may be effective implementation processes and resources that can be used to inform root cause actions.

Step 2: Prioritizing Root Causes & Celebrations What are we doing? What can we do in the future?	
Celebrations 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	Causes for Concern 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Step 3: Analyzing Root Causes-- is intended to lead committee members deeper into the identified causes for concern. Teams should gather more information, both quantitative (such as test scores, school climate survey data, focus groups, interviews, and student grades) and qualitative (such as teacher perceptions, administrator perceptions, parent perceptions, climate surveys, and student perceptions), to more closely examine a cause and develop an understanding of why it is happening.

It is recommended that individuals objectively gather quantitative information from families and students who have experienced academic and/or behavioral challenges in the LEA/school. Using neutral stakeholders to conduct interviews with a student who struggled to complete school, and the family of a student who struggled to complete school, can provide extremely valuable insight into barriers for success. Assumptions should not be made. This step is not to place blame, rather to understand and avoid a similar cycle from continuing to occur. Whenever possible, existing school resources and supports should also be used to assist with data gathering. For example, the Student Support Team, School Climate Team, the PBIS Team, and other school system, building-level, and/or grade-level teams may also provide useful information.

The committee should consider using the following method to identify root causes for concern by delegating smaller working groups to:

1. Develop a hypothesis about the proposed cause for concern.
2. Investigate and test the hypothesis for the root cause through a short-term plan of gathering both quantitative and qualitative information. (This should not take excessive time, creating a barrier to the development of action items.)
3. Share the story of what was found to the larger committee.
4. Determine as a whole committee if the cause for concern is one that warrants being addressed in the action plan.

Step 3: Analyzing Root Causes

Evidence of Cause for Concern

How do we know this is happening? Why is this happening?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Domain: Instruction & Assessment

Step 1: Considering Possible Root Causes

Read the performance descriptions below and use your best judgement to indicate which response best describes your LEA or school. Each checkbox has a negative and positive response.

Likely Cause for Action	Not Likely Cause for Action
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning is passive, with the teacher talking at students for the majority of class.	<input type="checkbox"/> Students are actively engaged in learning activities with minimal teacher directed instruction; teacher as facilitator.
<input type="checkbox"/> Instructional activities are mass produced with little application to the real world.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructional activities are connected to real world applications.
<input type="checkbox"/> The master schedule is rigid and time blocks are either too short or too long for active, engaging instruction.	<input type="checkbox"/> The master schedule supports student learning through flexibility and time blocks that are developmentally appropriate.
<input type="checkbox"/> There is no time for teacher collaboration built into the daily schedule.	<input type="checkbox"/> The master schedule encourages collaborative relationships among staff with teams working to achieve student behavioral and academic success.
<input type="checkbox"/> Academic interventions are minimal and occur primarily after school. Teacher provide "one size fits all" instruction.	<input type="checkbox"/> Multi-tiered interventions for student success are embedded into the school day. Teachers seek to use differentiated approaches for struggling learners.
<input type="checkbox"/> Students are scheduled into classes based upon annual summative assessment data and past course completion.	<input type="checkbox"/> All students have equal access to a rigorous curriculum and courses.
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff believe student behavior is influenced by factors outside of the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff recognize the correlation between quality instruction and student behavior.
<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment is used primarily as a method of sorting students and assigning grades.	<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment is used in a way that leads to student and teacher goal setting for growth.
<input type="checkbox"/> The school system communicates the value of reading proficiency but fails to provide adequate resources to ensure all students master basic levels for future success.	<input type="checkbox"/> The school system acknowledges that a student's reading proficiency correlates to behavioral outcomes and success in school. The system commits resources (e.g., money, time and quality personnel) to ensure a student's reading level is not a barrier for school success and completion.

Instruction & Assessment cont.

Step 2: Root Causes & Celebrations What are we doing? What can we do in the future?	
Celebrations 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	Causes for Concern 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Step 3: Analyze Root Causes Evidence of Cause for Concern How do we know this is happening? Why is this happening?
 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Domain: Discipline Policies & Procedures

Step 1: Consider Possible Root Causes

Read the performance descriptions below and use your best judgement to indicate which response best describes your LEA or school. Each checkbox has a negative and positive response.

Likely Cause for Action	Not Likely Cause for Action
<input type="checkbox"/> School and district leaders adhere to defined consequences for any student misconduct. The same consequence is used repeatedly for consecutive infractions.	<input type="checkbox"/> School and district leaders use, and support the use, of a progressive discipline model focused upon identifying reasons for misconduct and seeking solutions.
<input type="checkbox"/> Teachers believe that students should be compliant and attentive at all times. Teachers pay little attention to classroom management tools, procedures, and expectations.	<input type="checkbox"/> Teachers utilize classroom management tools, procedures, and expectations that support the success of all learners within the classroom setting.
<input type="checkbox"/> Building and school system leaders have little knowledge about methods for responding to student misconduct.	<input type="checkbox"/> Building and school system leaders possess and utilize their knowledge about a variety of types of responses to student misconduct.
<input type="checkbox"/> Building leaders make minimal effort to determine the reason for misconduct.	<input type="checkbox"/> Building leaders demonstrate the use of a problem-solving approach to resolve student misconduct.
<input type="checkbox"/> A large number of school staff, district staff, school board members, and individuals of influence in the community do not value members of the school community equally. Efforts are made, either covertly or directly, to exclude some members of the community.	<input type="checkbox"/> School staff, school system staff, school board members, and individuals of influence in the community, value the relationship between all members of the school community. They each actively work to develop and maintain relationships.
<input type="checkbox"/> School board members and other community members of influence, support the use of suspension and expulsion as a one size fits all approach.	<input type="checkbox"/> School board members and other community members of influence, support the use of responsive and alternative intervention methods to misconduct instead of suspension and expulsion.
<input type="checkbox"/> Behavior interventions are implemented inconsistently within schools and are not used effectively. There is no system by which to monitor student behavior trends.	<input type="checkbox"/> Multi-tiered behavior interventions exist within each school and are used effectively. Students are monitored for behavior progress at least monthly by a school based team.

Discipline Policies & Procedures cont.

Step 2: Root Causes & Celebrations What are we doing? What can we do in the future?	
Celebrations 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	Causes for Concern 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Step 3: Analyze Root Causes Evidence of Cause for Concern How do we know this is happening? Why is this happening?
 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Domain: Bias, Beliefs & Barriers

Step 1: Consider Possible Root Causes

Read the performance descriptions below and use your best judgement to indicate which response best describes your LEA or school. Each checkbox has a negative and positive response.

Likely Cause for Action	Not Likely Cause for Action
<input type="checkbox"/> School and district level staff say they believe all students can succeed, but actions taken demonstrate otherwise.	<input type="checkbox"/> School and district level staff believe that all students can succeed when given the appropriate supports and interventions.
<input type="checkbox"/> Students receive messages from staff that lead them to feel inadequate and that leaving school is their best option.	<input type="checkbox"/> Students receive a message from staff (hidden and direct) that they are valued and can succeed in school.
<input type="checkbox"/> There is a hierarchy of academic course selections that leads to tracking of students and low expectations for a subset of the population.	<input type="checkbox"/> Academic courses are offered in a way that supports all students having equal access to rigor and consistently conveys the message of high expectations.
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff have had no training or only a select few have been trained to recognize “blind spots” related to race, gender, religion, poverty, sexual orientation, and disabilities. The school and system culture is one of silence.	<input type="checkbox"/> All staff are trained to recognize and be aware of their individual “blind spots” related to race, gender, religion, poverty, sexual orientation, and disabilities. The school and system culture is one that supports dialogue about implicit bias, allowing for respectful questioning of decisions and actions.
<input type="checkbox"/> School staff, district staff, school board members and individuals of influence in the community value members of the community differently. They seek to develop relationships only with community members similar to themselves.	<input type="checkbox"/> School staff, district staff, school board members, and individuals of influence in the community value the relationship between all members of the school community. They actively seek to develop and maintain these relationships despite an individual's race, religion, economic level, street address, cognitive ability, or sexual orientation.
<input type="checkbox"/> School staff and students believe that your street address, zip code, or last name determine how you should behave and how successful you will be in school.	<input type="checkbox"/> School staff and students believe that your street address, zip code, or last name do not determine your behavior or ability to learn.
<input type="checkbox"/> Members of the school community think that the best way to stop misconduct is to suspend or expel students. Removing a student from school allows others to learn and keeps schools safer.	<input type="checkbox"/> Members of a school community think that consequences such as suspension and expulsion are ineffective. Members support keeping students connected to school through the use of other methods.
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff report that families/guardians who do not participate or attend school activities and events care little for education and their child(ren).	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff recognize that the absence of family/guardian engagement in school activities and events does not imply a family's lack of value for education.

Bias, Beliefs & Barriers cont.

Step 2: Root Causes & Celebrations What are we doing? What can we do in the future?	
<p>Celebrations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.4.5.	<p>Causes for Concern</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.4.5.

Step 3: Analyze Root Causes Evidence of Cause for Concern How do we know? Why is this happening?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.4.5.

Domain: Health & Wellness

Step 1: Consider Possible Root Causes

Read the performance descriptions below and use your best judgement to indicate which response best describes your LEA or school. Each checkbox has a negative and positive response.

Likely Cause for Action	Not Likely Cause for Action
<input type="checkbox"/> School structures do not include thoughtful consideration of the physical health of students with no defined plans for movement or healthy food choices.	<input type="checkbox"/> School structures demonstrate that the physical health of students is valued through plans for developmentally appropriate movement intervals and healthy food choices.
<input type="checkbox"/> Systems do not acknowledge that some students may need support accessing dental, medical, visual and hearing services.	<input type="checkbox"/> Systems recognize the importance of students having access to dental, medical, visual, and hearing services. Provisions are made as needed.
<input type="checkbox"/> Only a select few members of school and district level staff have knowledge related to signs of mental health concerns and can take action to assist a student or staff member in need.	<input type="checkbox"/> All school and district level staff have knowledge related to signs of mental health concerns and know immediate steps to take to report and locate resources for students and peers.
<input type="checkbox"/> Schools and systems may or may not be mindful of environmental and community stressors that can influence students and staff, but take no action to reduce the impact upon teaching and learning.	<input type="checkbox"/> Schools and systems are mindful of environmental and community stressors that may influence students and staff, taking steps to reduce their impact upon teaching and learning.
<input type="checkbox"/> School and district level staff do not acknowledge the correlation between relationships and early detection of mental health concerns.	<input type="checkbox"/> School and district level staff recognize that developing and maintaining relationships among all members of the community leads to the early detection of mental health concerns.
<input type="checkbox"/> School and district leaders spend little time considering the physical and mental wellness of staff.	<input type="checkbox"/> School and district leaders value the physical and mental wellness of staff, recognizing the balance between staff wellness and student success.
<input type="checkbox"/> Schools have not considered how to support students and staff managing chronic illnesses; physical and mental.	<input type="checkbox"/> Schools have procedures in place for students and staff in need of support managing chronic illnesses, both physical and mental.

Health & Wellness cont.

Step 2: Root Causes & Celebrations What are we doing? What can we do in the future?	
<p>Celebrations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.4.5.	<p>Causes for Concern</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.4.5.

Step 3: Analyze Root Causes Evidence of Cause for Concern How do we know? Why is this happening?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.4.5.

Domain: Safety & Security

Step 1: Consider Root Causes

Read the performance descriptions below and use your best judgement to indicate which response best describes your LEA or school. Each checkbox has a negative and positive response.

Likely Cause for Action	NOT Likely Cause for Action
<input type="checkbox"/> School communities have little knowledge of potential threats to students as they transition to and from school. Reports of unsafe conditions are delegated to others to resolve.	<input type="checkbox"/> School communities take consistent steps to ensure students can move safely to and from school every day. Reports of unsafe conditions are dealt with immediately through collaboration with local law enforcement agencies.
<input type="checkbox"/> School staff are not aware of “hot” zones on school grounds. Supervision of unstructured areas is infrequent. While staff are assigned duty locations to supervise there is no monitoring or adjustments made by school leaders during the school year.	<input type="checkbox"/> School staff are aware of “hot” zones on school grounds where bully behavior and student misconduct is likely to occur. An effective plan exists to increase supervision in these areas. School leaders closely monitor the plan making adjustments as needed during the school year.
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff and students have no universal understanding of what bullying is, nor do they have any strategies to help stop it’s occurrence. Students have not been given any clear expectations of conduct related to bullying in school or online.	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff and students possess knowledge about what bullying is and how to stop it from happening. Expectations related to bullying both in school and online are clear to students.
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff and/or students demonstrate little tolerance for individuals different then themselves. Cliques and student groupings can be clearly defined by similar appearance and beliefs. No effort is made by school staff to recognize or celebrate differences among community members.	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff and students show tolerance for individuals who are different then themselves, even celebrating differences within the school community.
<input type="checkbox"/> The school has no clearly defined procedures to plan for the safety of students who may pose a threat to themselves or others.	<input type="checkbox"/> The school has procedures in place to plan for the safety of students who may pose a threat to themselves or others. The school has a plan for how to appropriately and effectively communicate plans with staff and parents who need to know.

Step 2: Prioritize Root Causes What are we doing? What can we do in the future to maintain and improve?	
Celebrations 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	Causes for Concern 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Step 3: Analyze Root Causes Evidence of Cause for Concern How do we know? Why is this happening?
1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Step 4: Creating the Action Plan -- is intended to assist the LEA in developing the required action plan for submission to the Maryland State Department of Education. It is most important when developing the action plan that the team remain ever mindful of the root cause being addressed within each goal area. Check back frequently and ask the question to the team, “Will this strategy or intervention address the root cause?”. Consider ways to build upon identified celebrations from step 2 either in terms of an implementation process, or a strategy that has already proven effective within the LEA.

Based on the results of the root cause analysis, develop an action plan using the template below. Include measurable goals, activities, time frame, indicators of progress, and persons responsible. Goals should address an identified root cause and be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based (SMART). Activities should support the identified goal. Please refer to the example. Remember that this plan must reduce disproportionality after the first year of implementation and eliminate it over a three-year period.

Goal 1: EXAMPLE: By November 2020, ABC Public Schools will reduce the number of removals of students of color by 25% at identified schools through the implementation of training on implicit bias.

Root Cause: School administrators were removing students of color at a higher rate than their peers for similar behavior at identified schools.

Activities	Timeframe (beginning and end)	Indicator(s) of progress	Person(s) Responsible (Position)	Goal Status (beginning after Year 1)
EXAMPLE: Train central office supervisors and school-based staff at identified schools on implicit bias.	September 2018 through June 2019	November 2020 data will show at least a 25% decrease in removal of students of color.	LEA Equity Office Supervisor; Director of Student Services.	<input type="checkbox"/> Met <input type="checkbox"/> Progressing <input type="checkbox"/> Not Met <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started
				<input type="checkbox"/> Met <input type="checkbox"/> Progressing <input type="checkbox"/> Not Met <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started