# Disproportionate Discipline

Root Cause Analysis Template

The root cause analysis is a method that Local School Systems (LSSs) and schools can use to identify underlying reasons for disproportionate discipline. A root cause 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).

A figure illustrating some of the factors that may be examined to identify root causes is below:
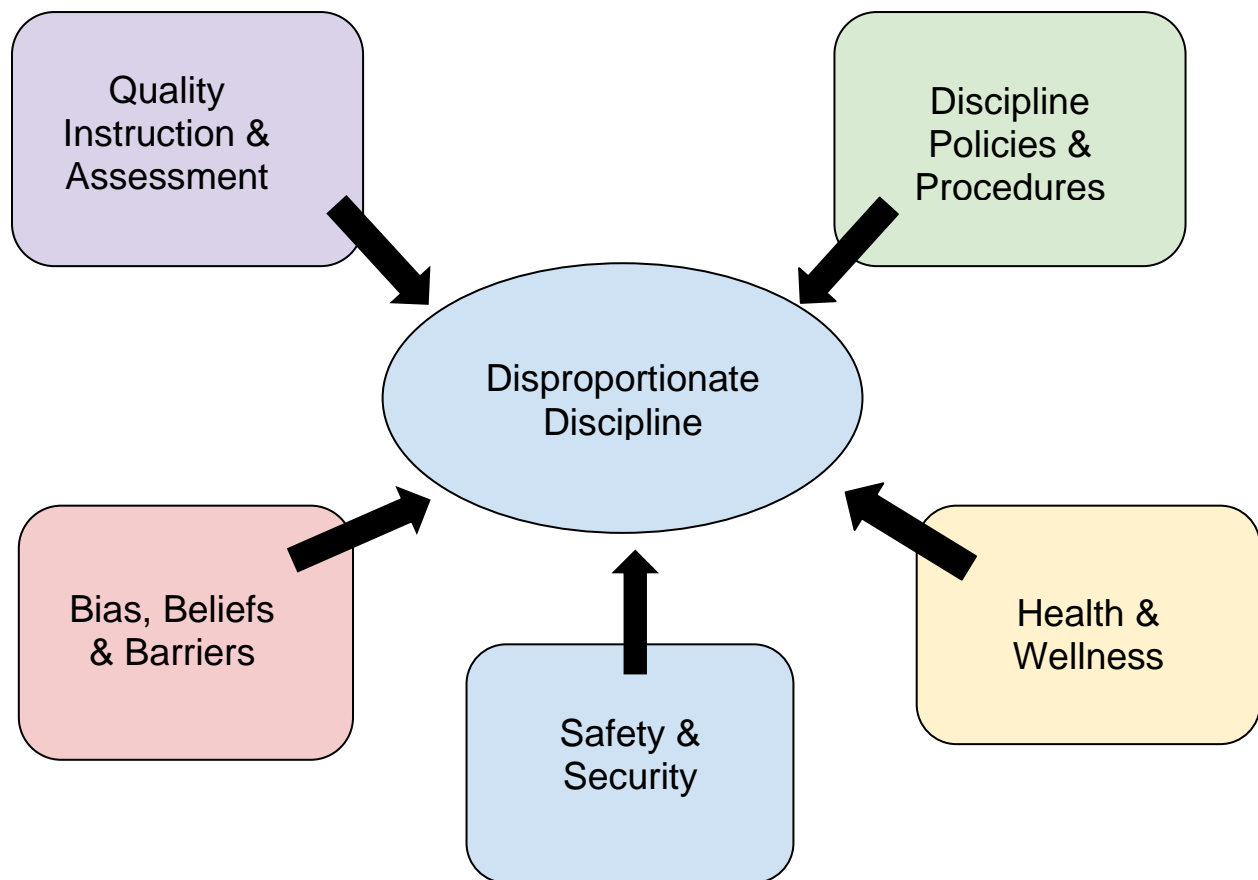
How to use the Template

The following steps are recommended to assist the committee 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 Root Cause is designed to lead the LEA through consideration of each potential cause for elevations in student misconduct that lead to out-of-school suspensions. Lists 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 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 What are we doing? What can we do in the future to maintain and improve?	Record Performance
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 School Support Teams, School Climate Teams, 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 you 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.

Step 1: Considering Root Causes
Focus Area: Instruction & Assessment

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
❏ Learning is passive, with the teacher talking at students for the majority of class. ❏ Instructional activities are mass produced with little application to the real world. ❏ The master schedule is rigid and time blocks are either too short or too long for active, engaging instruction. ❏ There is no time for teacher collaboration built into the daily schedule. ❏ Academic interventions are minimal and occur primarily after school. Teacher provide "one size fits all" instruction. ❏ Students are scheduled into classes based upon annual summative assessment data and past course completion. ❏ Staff believe student behavior is influenced by factors outside of the classroom. ❏ Assessment is used primarily as a method of sorting students and assigning grades. ❏ 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.	❏ Students are actively engaged in learning activities with minimal teacher directed instruction; teacher as facilitator. ❏ Instructional activities are connected to real world applications. ❏ The master schedule supports student learning through flexibility and time blocks that are developmentally appropriate. ❏ The master schedule encourages collaborative relationships among staff with teams working to achieve student behavioral and academic success. ❏ Multi-tiered interventions for student success are embedded into the school day. Teachers seek to use differentiated approaches for struggling learners. ❏ All students have equal access to a rigorous curriculum and courses. ❏ Staff recognize the correlation between quality instruction and student behavior. ❏ Assessment is used in a way that leads to student and teacher goal setting for growth ❏ 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: Prioritize Root Causes What are we doing? What can we do in the future to maintain and improve?	Record Performance
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.

Step 1: Consider Root Cause
Focus Area: Discipline Policies & Procedures

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
❏ School and district leaders adhere to defined consequences for any student misconduct. The same consequence is used repeatedly for consecutive infractions. ❏ Teachers believe that students should be compliant and attentive at all times. Teachers pay little attention to classroom management tools, procedures, and expectations. ❏ Building and school system leaders have little knowledge about methods for responding to student misconduct. ❏ Little effort is made to determine the reason for misconduct. ❏ 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. ❏ School board members and other community members of influence, support the use of suspension and expulsion as a one size fits all approach. ❏ Behavior interventions are implemented inconsistently within schools and are not used effectively. There is no system by which to monitor student behavior trends.	❏ School and district leaders use, and support the use, of a progressive discipline model focused upon identifying reasons for misconduct and seeking solutions. ❏ Teachers recognize the importance of classroom management tools, procedures, and expectations that support the success of all learners within the classroom setting. ❏ Building and school system leaders possess knowledge about a variety of types of responses to student misconduct. ❏ Building leaders demonstrate the use of a problem-solving approach to resolve student misconduct. ❏ 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. ❏ 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. ❏ 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: Prioritize Root Causes What are we doing? What can we do in the future to maintain and improve?	Record Performance
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.

Step 1: Consider Root Causes
Focus Area: Bias, Beliefs & Barriers

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
❏ School and district level staff say they believe all students can succeed, but actions taken demonstrate otherwise. ❏ Students receive messages from staff that lead them to feel inadequate and that leaving school is their best option. ❏ There is a hierarchy of academic course selections that leads to tracking of students and low expectations for a subset of the population. ❏ 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. ❏ 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. ❏ 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. ❏ Members of the school community think that the best way to stop misconduct is to suspend or expel students. Removing them from school allows others to learn and keeps schools safer. ❏ Staff report that families/guardians who do not participate or attend school activities and events care little for education and their child(ren).	❏ School and district level staff believe that all students can succeed when given the appropriate supports and interventions. ❏ Students receive a message from staff (hidden and direct) that they are valued and can succeed in school. ❏ Academic courses are offered in a way that supports all students having equal access to rigor and consistently conveys the message of high expectations. ❏ 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. ❏ 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. ❏ School staff and students believe that your street address, zip code or last name do not determine your behavior or ability to learn. ❏ 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. ❏ Staff recognize that the absence of family/guardian engagement in school activities and events does not imply a families lack of value for education.

Bias, Beliefs & Barriers cont.

Step 2: Prioritize Root Causes What are we doing? What can we do in the future to maintain and improve?	Record Performance
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 1: Consider Root Causes
Focus Area: Health & Wellness

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
❏ Schools structures do not include thoughtful consideration of the physical health of students with no defined plans for movement or healthy food choices. ❏ Systems do not acknowledge that some students may need support accessing dental, medical, visual and hearing services. ❏ 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. ❏ Schools and systems may or may not be mindful of environmental and community stressors that may influence students and staff, but take no action to reduce the impact upon teaching and learning. ❏ School and district level staff do not acknowledge the correlation between relationships and early detection of mental health concerns. ❏ School and district leaders spend little time considering the physical and mental wellness of staff. ❏ Schools have not considered how to support students and staff managing chronic illnesses; physical and mental.	❏ School structures demonstrate that the physical health of students is valued through plans for developmentally appropriate movement intervals and healthy food choices. ❏ Systems recognize the importance of students having access to dental, medical, visual, and hearing services. Provisions are made as needed. ❏ 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. ❏ 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. ❏ 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. ❏ School and district leaders value the physical and mental wellness of staff, recognizing the balance between staff wellness and student success. ❏ 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: Prioritize Root Causes What are we doing? What can we do in the future to maintain and improve?	Record Performance
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?

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Step 1: Consider Root Causes
Focus Area: Safety & Security

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
❏ 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. ❏ 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. ❏ Staff and student 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. ❏ Staff and/or student 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. ❏ The school has no clearly defined procedures to plan for the safety of students who may pose a threat to themselves or others.	❏ 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. ❏ 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. ❏ 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. ❏ Staff and students show tolerance for individuals who are different then themselves, even celebrating differences within the school community. ❏ Schools have 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.

Safety & Security cont.

Step 2: Prioritize Root Causes What are we doing? What can we do in the future to maintain and improve?	Record of Performance
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.