



The Impact of State and Federal Law and Policy on Restorative Justice Practices in K-12 Education

Field Insights Series

NACRJ's Field Insights Series is designed to illuminate emerging perspectives, practices, and experiences relevant to community and restorative justice.

The series is intended to serve as accessible, field-informed resources that build awareness of developments across the field.

NACRJ Mission



The National Association of Community and Restorative Justice (NACRJ) advances community and restorative justice by supporting people and organizations working to build community and repair harm with fidelity to restorative principles. NACRJ works to support shared learning and connection across communities and systems committed to restorative practices.

Why This Topic?

Over the past three decades, restorative justice practices have played an increasingly important role in K–12 education systems across the country. More recently, federal, state, and local policy changes related to public education curriculum, discipline, diversity, equity, and inclusion have contributed to a constantly evolving educational landscape for administrators, educators, and restorative practitioners working in K-12 public schools. To better understand how and to what extent these developments have impacted restorative justice practices in educational settings and to inform future opportunities for shared learning, dialogue, research, and support, NACRJ conducted an online survey in fall 2025 with academic partners from Florida Atlantic University and the University of California College of the Law, San Francisco

A Brief Overview of the Education Law and Policy Landscape

While states maintain primary control over local education practices (e.g., curriculum, discipline, funding, teacher credentials, etc.), since January 2025 the federal government has taken a series of steps to increase its oversight of K–12 public education. This has included a series of presidential executive orders^[1] with significant policy and practice implications for programs and policies related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) (Executive Order 14151)^[2], curriculum addressing racism, bias, and/or gender ideology (Executive Order 14190)^[3], and race-conscious efforts to remedy racial disparities in school discipline (Executive Order 14280)^[4].

Similar to federal actions addressing school discipline and DEIA programs and policies, state legislatures and local school boards have also passed laws and enacted new policies that increase the scope of such limitations and rescind prior protections from exclusionary and punitive school discipline, specifically affecting youth of color and other marginalized students.^[5] Additionally, two states (Indiana and Louisiana) have amended legislation to remove all references to restorative justice practices and restorative justice.^[6] Further, Indiana and the District of Columbia passed laws to remove funding for professional development for restorative justice in K-12 schools.^[7]

Methods

The online survey asked respondents to reflect on their experience about the impact of federal, state, and local law and policy developments on restorative justice practices in K–12 educational settings, specifically concerning resources, training, technical assistance, professional development, and other related activities. Respondents were also asked if they had experienced any content restrictions affecting restorative justice practices in schools, or if they experienced or were aware of changes related to curriculum or programmatic materials specific to race, color, sex, or national origin.

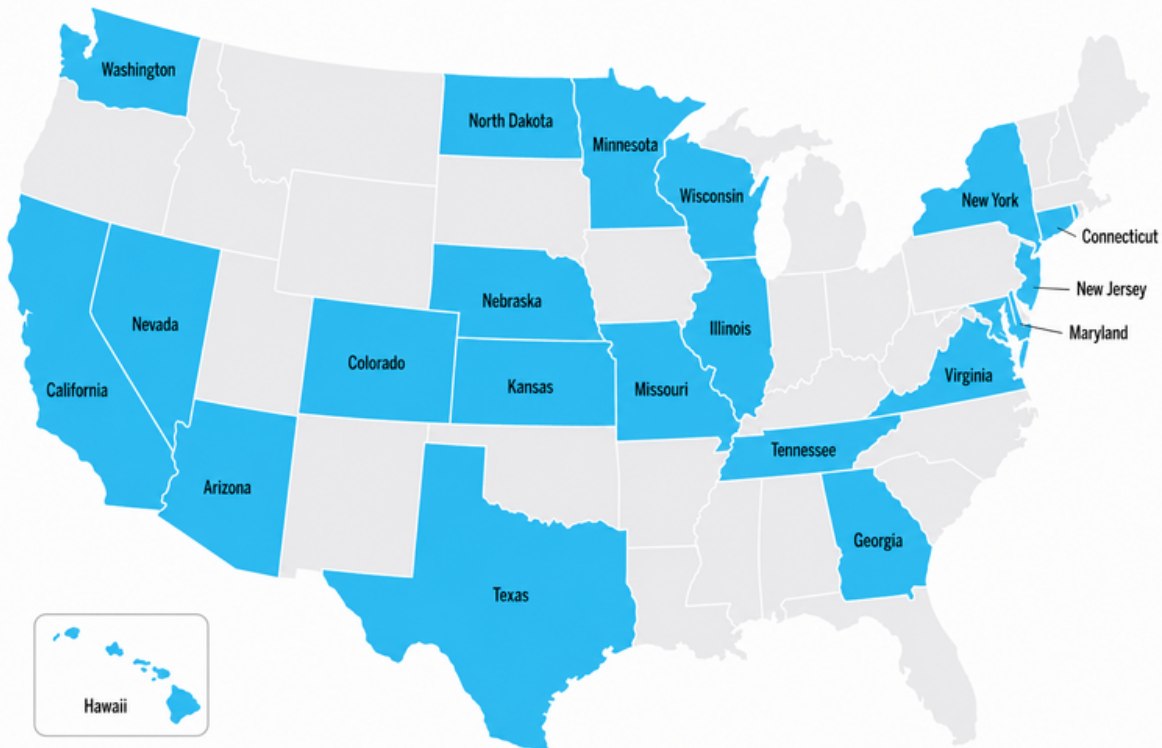
In addition, the online survey included a section in which respondents could provide information about any innovations implemented in their schools or districts to help navigate policy changes, as well as recommendations for NACRJ-led activities to support the field, such as meetings, webinars, presentations, circles, or working groups.



Who Responded



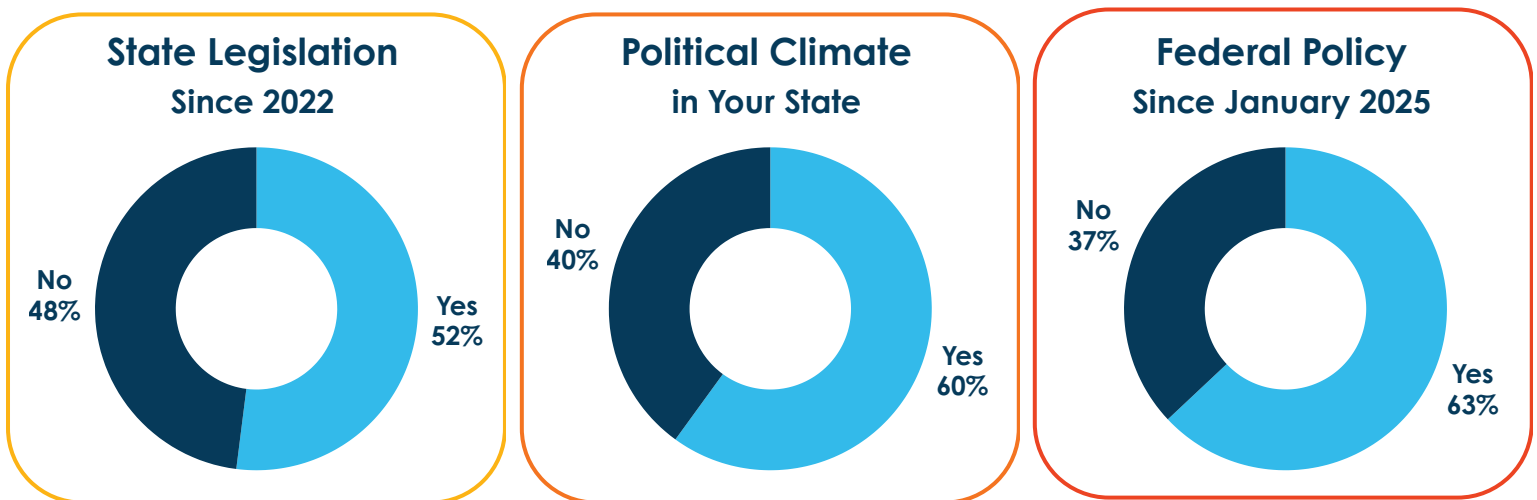
Of the 122 individuals who responded to the survey, representing 21 states and more than 65 school districts across the country, 88 identified as a K-12 educator, administrator or staff person, or as a consultant or contractor working in a K-12 school or school district. Only these respondents were able to complete the survey, and 44 (36%) completed the survey in full. Respondents included individuals serving in specialized restorative roles such as coordinators, facilitators, and school climate specialists and reported working in a wide range of educational settings and contexts, including public, charter, and private schools in urban, rural, and suburban districts of varying sizes. Some served multiple districts or communities.



Data Snapshot

Survey responses revealed a wide range of experiences across the country based on factors such as **state**, **locality**, **district**, **school**, and **position held**. The charts below provide a snapshot of survey responses and illustrate the diversity of perspectives and experiences reported by respondents.

To what degree have any of the following limited your ability to use restorative justice practices in your current work?



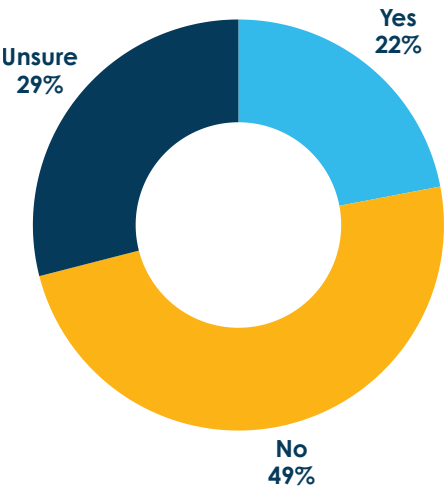
Respondents rated each item on a five-point scale from “A great deal” to “None at all.” All responses indicating any level of limitation are grouped as “Yes.” Across all categories, a majority of respondents reported at least some limitation on their ability to use restorative justice practices.

Comments from the Field

- “**The primary effect has been in funding.** The state has cut back funding to school districts, which has subsequently reduced funding for the [restorative justice practice] work we do.”
- “People we partner with for evaluation and research [for restorative justice practice] have been majorly impacted by **removal of Federal funds for educational research.**”
- “**Funding has greatly impacted our options and opportunities** to provide and deliver services, most recently funds from COVID relief and a pull of Federal and thus state funding has left deep impacts on our [restorative justice practice] work.”
- “The **current political climate** ... makes it even harder to bring forward restorative practices that center relationship, accountability, and community care.”

Data Snapshot

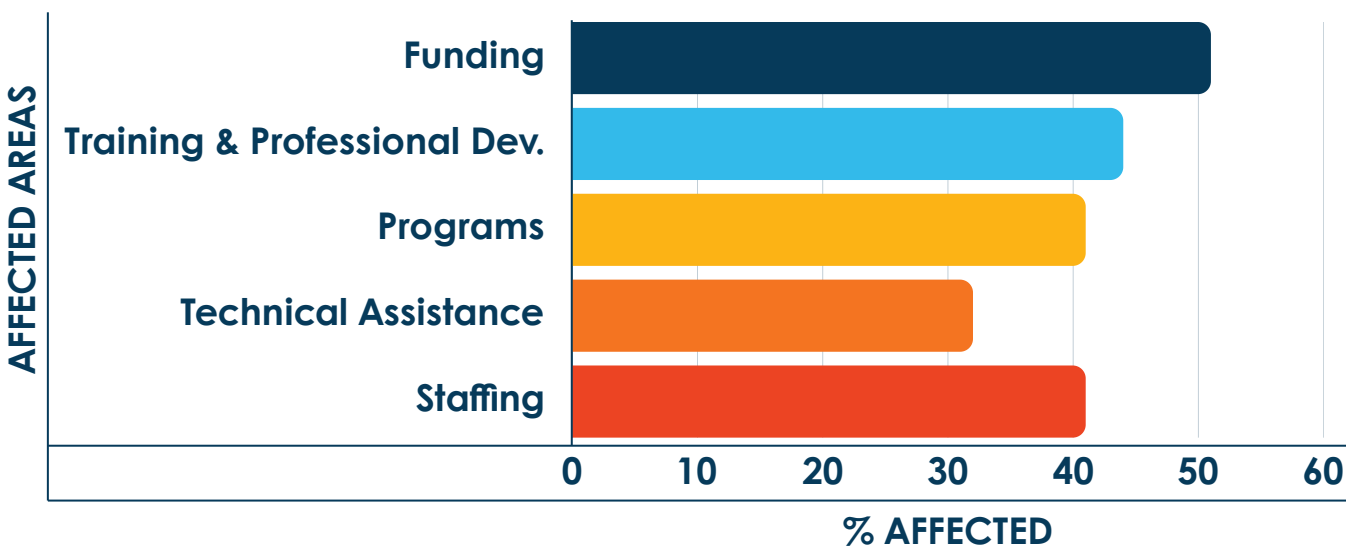
Have any Federal executive orders (EOs) issued as of January 2025 limited your ability to use restorative practices in your school?



A notable share of respondents selected “Unsure.” At the time the survey was conducted in fall 2025, many education professionals were still assessing how policy changes might affect restorative justice practices in their own settings. Because implementation and interpretation often varied by state, district, school, and local context, some respondents indicated that the full impact of these developments remained uncertain.

Have any recent Federal EOs had any of the following impacts specifically on restorative practices in your school or school district?

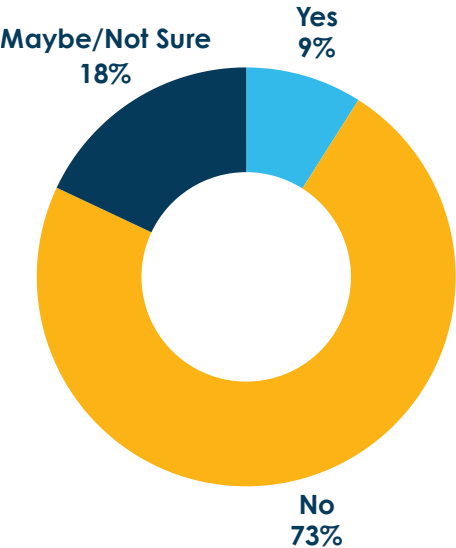
Among respondents who reported impacts, the most affected areas were eliminations or reductions in:



Data Snapshot

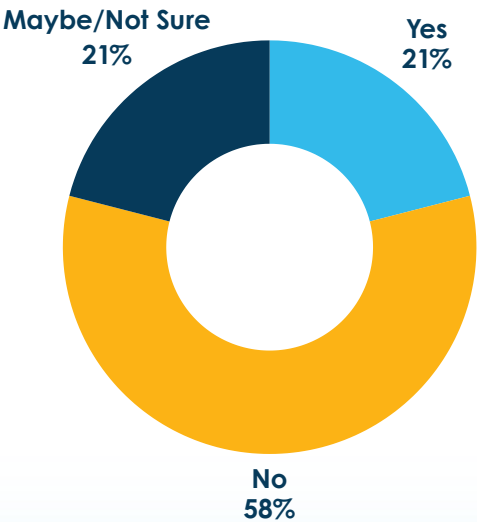
Have required content restrictions on race, color, sex, national origin in recent Federal EOs caused you to:

Amend/remove Restorative Practices classroom materials?

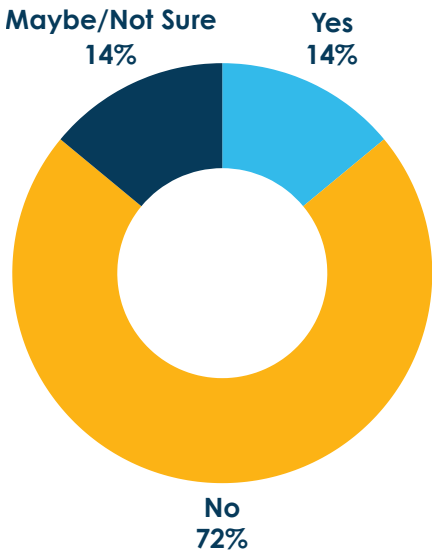


Most respondents reported no content restrictions at the time of the survey in fall 2025, a potentially encouraging indication that many practitioners had not experienced direct limitations in these areas. However, the number of “Not sure” responses could suggest some educators and practitioners were still assessing whether and how policy changes would affect restorative justice practices and related activities in their local contexts.

Limited Restorative Practices training availability or resources?

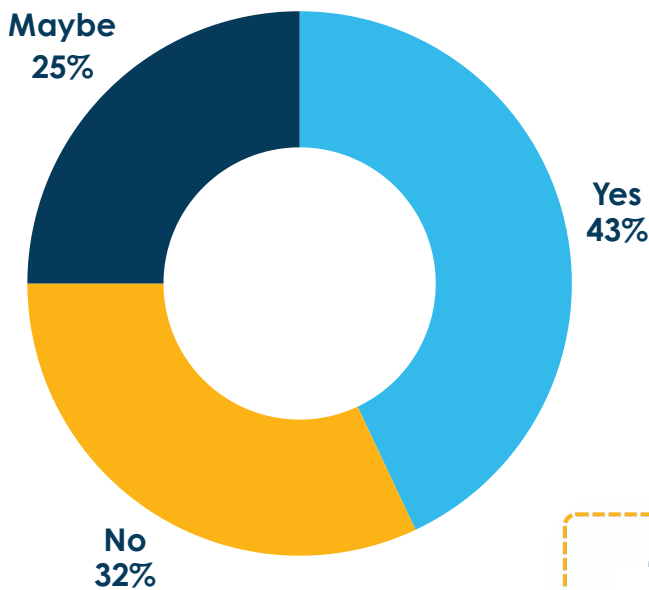


Amend/remove Restorative Programming?



Data Snapshot

Have any developments in your state or school district promoted or supported your ability to use restorative practices in your school?



Comments from the Field

"A bill was passed to create a comprehensive plan for restorative practices in our state."

"The state of Connecticut is very supportive of RP. Other states I work with are not."

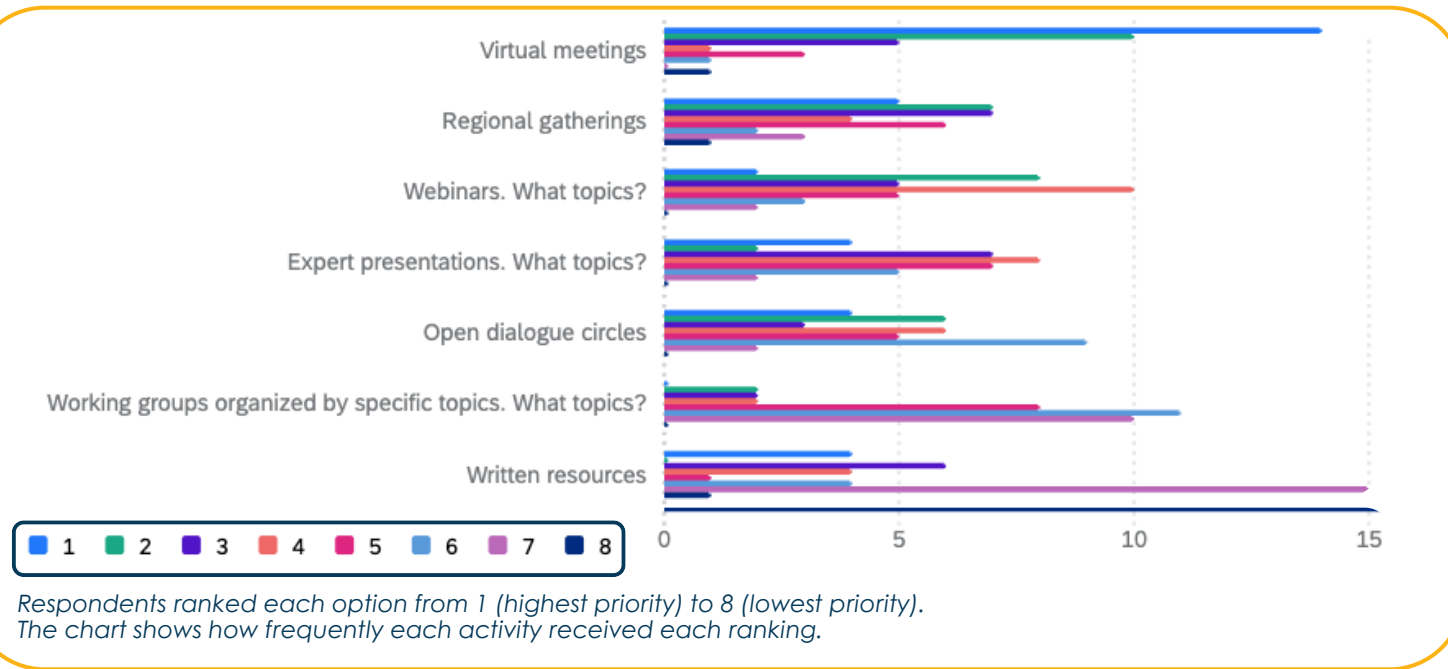
"[Maryland law] passed in summer 2025 requires [the] state Board of Ed to develop a statewide definition of Restorative Schools."

"[New York State] released its [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education] framework in 2019, and [New York City's Office of Safety and Youth Development] is funding restorative justice and [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education] coaching in schools. I work for a nonprofit who is a vendor for this project."

"Our County Board accepted a strategic plan developed in 2020 for cross sector implementation across schools, legal system, and community. This opened the door for this kind of work in our schools and forced the school administration to make space and devote some resources, however meager, to implementing this work."

Data Snapshot

Would you find value in NACRJ facilitating any of the following to strategize responses to recent policy shifts?



Responses suggest interest in multiple forms of support, with virtual meetings and written resources ranking especially highly. The results provide insight into the types of activities and resources respondents believe could be valuable as NACRJ continues to develop and expand support for the field.

COMMENTS

- "Provide more access to studies on the impact of RP in schools, districts, and communities."
- "[B]uild strength in policy advocacy to share policy frameworks that ... support RJ systems change at all levels."
- "Continue to create restorative communities around the country and opportunities for restorative conversations and professional development around policy changes"
- "[S]hare positive impact data. Give tools on how we [as restorative practitioners] can do the same to show value and impact in the work we are doing"
- "[B]uild strategic partnerships and coalitions nationwide that create interconnected circles of care ... that include on the ground accessible peer networks fostering mutual support and healing."

Recommendations *for* Practitioners *from* Practitioners

Lean Into Relationships, Partnerships, and Support Networks

Respondents emphasized the importance of strong relationships and collaboration among educators, administrators, community organizations, and restorative practitioners. Respondents highlighted the value of leaning on peers, teams, coalitions, and statewide networks for support, shared learning, encouragement, and collective problem-solving during periods of uncertainty and change.

Adapt Language and Implementation Strategies When Needed

Respondents described adjusting language, framing, and implementation strategies as a way to continue restorative work within shifting policy environments. This included reframing restorative practices and language in ways that aligned with district expectations while finding practical ways to continue restorative approaches responsive to local conditions.

Be Strategic With Time, Energy, and Resources

Respondents described focusing efforts in schools or districts where leadership support already existed or where there was openness to restorative approaches. Others noted the importance of adjusting programming, staffing, or workload expectations in response to funding concerns and changing conditions. Several also emphasized maintaining strong data and documentation to help demonstrate impact and sustain support over time.

Stay Engaged at the Systems and Policy Level

Respondents highlighted the importance of continued engagement in policy and advocacy efforts at local and state levels. This included participating in coalitions, monitoring legislation and policy developments, educating decision-makers about restorative practices, and working to sustain restorative approaches within educational systems.

Stay Grounded in Restorative Values and Relationships

Respondents frequently emphasized the importance of remaining grounded in restorative values, relationship-centered approaches, and community-building practices during periods of uncertainty. Several described consistency, perseverance, and continuing to show up for students and communities as central to sustaining restorative work over time.

Authors

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Joel Friesz is Executive Director of the National Association of Community and Restorative Justice (NACRJ). A restorative justice practitioner for more than two decades, he has worked directly with schools and educational systems for more than 17 years to implement restorative practices. He previously served on the NACRJ Board of Directors from 2017 to 2021.

Endnotes

^[1] An executive order is a signed, written, and published directive from the President of the United States that manages operations of the federal government. Executive orders are not legislation; they require no approval from Congress, and Congress cannot simply overturn them. See, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/publications/teaching-legal-docs/what-is-an-executive-order/.

^[2] <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/29/2025-01953/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing>

^[3] <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/03/2025-02232/ending-radical-indoctrination-in-k-12-schooling>

^[4] <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/28/2025-07377/reinstating-commonsense-school-discipline-policies>

^[5] Thalia González & Will Martel, Retrenchment, Segregation, and Public Education: A Five-Year Analysis of State Exclusionary School Discipline Legislation, 28.1 N.Y.U. J. Legis. & Public Pol'y 1 (2026)

^[6] <https://www.uclawsf.edu/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/RJ-Legislation-Brief-2026-FINAL-.pdf>

^[7] <https://www.uclawsf.edu/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/RJ-Legislation-Brief-2026-FINAL-.pdf>