

Introduction

Since 2010, Young Voices has been supporting students across the state to have an authentic voice in improving their high schools. Youth conduct research, surveying a majority of students and also leading focus groups, where they ask their peers what should be done to increase graduation and attendance rates. They use this data to create policy recommendations to make their schools more student-centered places that effectively engage students, and work closely with school leadership to implement these policies.

This is a new resource for policy-makers---comprehensive data collected by students themselves, from extensive dialogue with their peers, giving new information on what can be done to increase attendance and graduation rates. Students themselves, the ones who experience the impacts of education policies on a daily basis, have become policy experts who offer data-driven recommendations to key decision-makers at the school and district level.

Methodology

Youth from Young Voices conducted surveys and focus groups with students from their own communities. Young Voices students from 7 different Providence high schools reached 1,256 of their peers with surveys, and conducted focus groups with 167 youth. Young Voices students from Tolman high school in Pawtucket reached 464 of their peers with surveys, and conducted focus groups with 34 youth. Central Falls high school students had just completed a very similar survey, so that data was used for this report, and focus groups were conducted with an additional 16 youth to get more data on responses to the survey questions.

Youth then entered the data into SurveyMonkey to generate the charts in this report. Because the Central Falls survey was slightly different, there were no answers to some of the questions; this is indicated by N/A**. Additionally, because Central Falls uses restorative practices, detention and suspension are rarely used to address behavior issues. Therefore, other questions do not apply in their case; this is indicated by N/A*.

Recommendations

Using the data from their research, the youth have made the following recommendations:

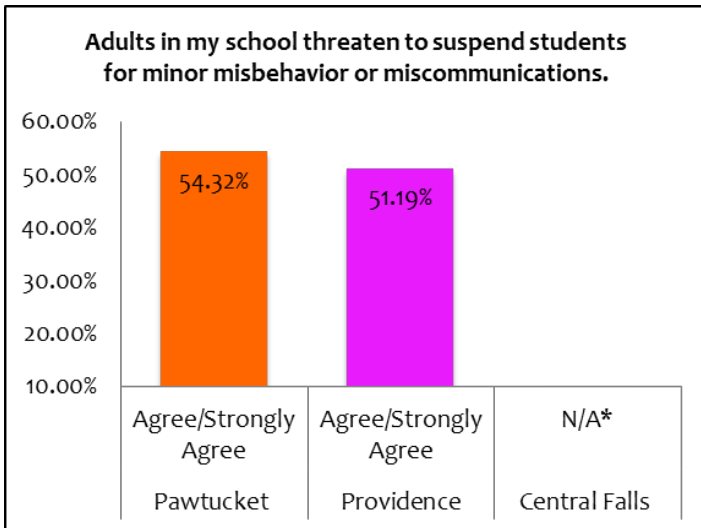
- Providence and Pawtucket schools should follow the example of the Central Falls district, and institute restorative practices at the school and district level.
- This includes training all staff in de-escalation techniques, and funding extra staff or “behavior specialists” to support students to work through conflicts and change behaviors.

Summary of Results

The results indicate serious issues in how discipline is handled in Pawtucket and Providence schools:

- 59% of students at Tolman agreed or strongly agreed that “some adults in my school tend to escalate conflicts”, and 52% of Providence students agreed or strongly agreed.
- 54% of students at Tolman answered agree/strongly agree to the question: “Adults in my school threaten to suspend students for minor misbehavior or miscommunications”, while 51% of Providence students answered agree/strongly agree.

The study also showed that discipline practices are more effective at Central Falls high school, with 64% of students agreeing that discipline is handled effectively at the school. This represents a huge turnaround for the high school, which implemented restorative practices more than four years ago. Restorative practices focus on providing support to students and helping them to change negative behaviors. The example of Central Falls high school, which is located in one of our state’s poorest cities, shows that the culture and climate can indeed be transformed at our urban schools.

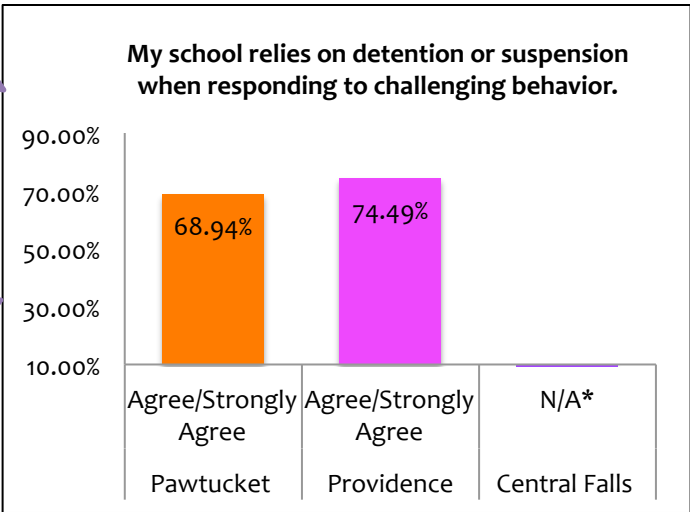


The teachers don't really handle problems effectively. Like just today, one of my teachers threatened a student that if he kept talking he would be suspended and that wasn't the right way to handle it.
 ---Providence student

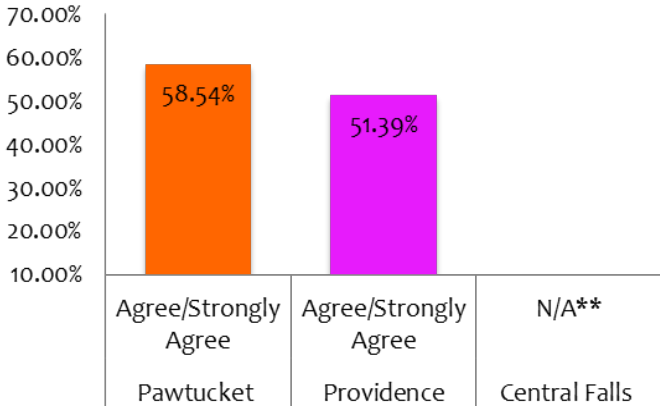
Instead of taking care of the issue they are threatening you with suspension. And you get suspended for the dumbest things ever like having headphones in or having your phone out or walking out of campus and then walking back in and coming with a bag. Like why would you get suspended for that?
 ---Providence student

We get in a lot of trouble for coming in a certain amount of times late – they will start with detention. And if you don't show up for detention, you get suspension automatically. Once I couldn't even walk in the building because they were telling me to get right back out. They are like "You're trespassing", but I go to school here. ---Pawtucket student

They're just jumping to this kind of radical discipline for things that are menial. Just last year things we'd get detention for little things you can now get easily suspended for. You used to get detention if you left campus, but now they are automatically suspending people. ---Providence student



Some adults in my school tend to escalate conflicts.



I feel like most teachers when they argue they just argue to continue it and to get a reaction out of you. They want you to get in trouble, they want you to get suspended. It seems like their first reaction is to escalate the situation, not calm it down and I never understood why.
--Pawtucket student

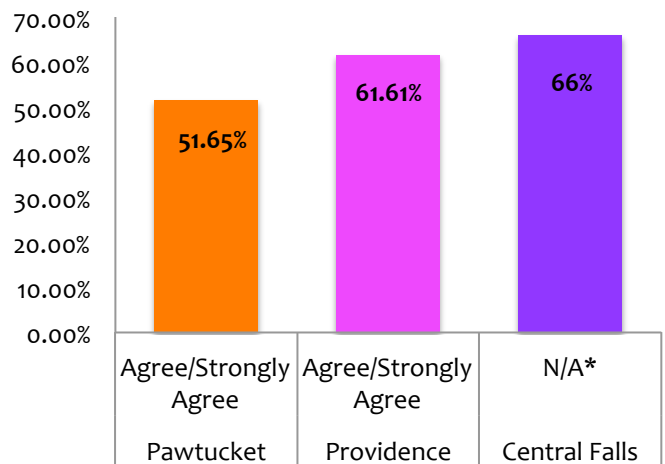
[The Principal] is chill. He doesn't yell at us. He talks to us with a calm voice. He does it in a calmer voice that makes people like him. [Teacher] is respectful because he is always fair to us. He helps us a lot, he's always been fair. He gives us the respect he wants to see from us. ---Central Falls student

It's not like behavior specialists or other adults are fighting each other or other students. If somebody is yelling, they're not gonna start yelling. Sometimes they will start yelling back, but usually they remain calm and just do their job.

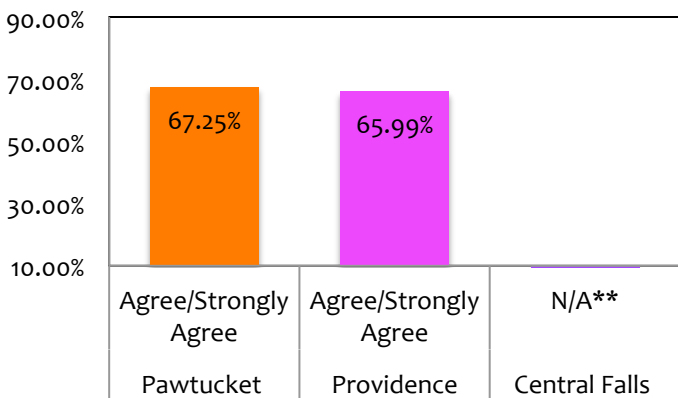
--Central Falls student

I won't even open my mouth – and they yell at me. And they will tell you to leave the class as soon as you do something wrong, but they are supposed to call an administrator down. They are so quick to kick you out of class. They don't even give me a chance. ---Pawtucket student

Discipline is handled effectively at my school.



Some students at my school get labeled as "bad kids."

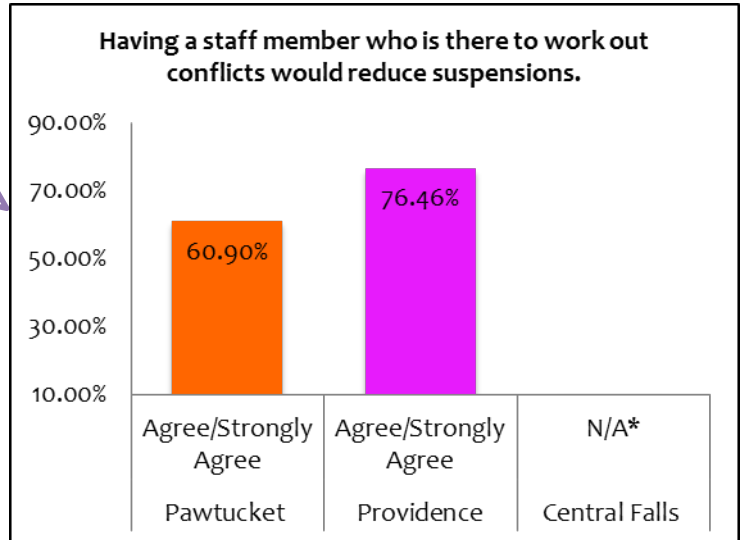


The second you screw up once, the teacher holds it against you. They yell at you once, they are going to yell at you all the time. It seems like they're out to get you after that.
--Pawtucket student

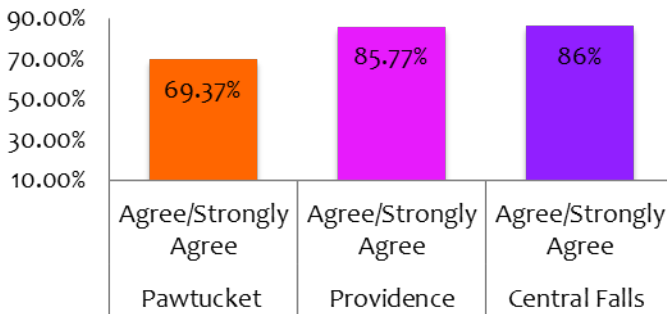
If you've been bad, they still give you the chance to be good. I can't think of any teachers that expect you to be bad and don't give you a chance.

--Central Falls student

I feel like students are treated unfairly – one, because of the color of their skin or two because of the fact that teachers or like administrative people in general they feel like they don't have the time to deal with students and their disciplinary action. So they don't take the time to understand the student's situation and why they're sitting in the office in the first place. –Providence student



I feel physically safe outside of the classroom (in restrooms, lockers, hallways, cafeterias, etc.).



There is a behavior specialist who calms me down when I walk out of class. Another behavior specialist and I get along good too. The behavior specialists help me calm down, and they help me with work when I need it. ---Central Falls student

N/A*: Since Central Falls utilizes restorative practices, detention and suspension are rarely used to address behavior issues. Therefore, some of the questions do not apply in their case.

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