Discipline Analysis:
Final Report
(SY 2010-11 through SY 2013-14 School Safety,
SY 2009-10 through SY 2012-13 Hearings Cases,
and SY 2011-12 through SY 2013-14 Parent Feedback data)

May 2015
Fairfax County Public Schools
Discipline Analysis - Final Report

Executive Summary

Monitoring of discipline-related data before and after changes implemented in August 2011 indicates that overall school safety was unaffected while discipline consequences successfully transitioned to be less disruptive for students going through the hearings process. Furthermore, some student outcomes for those involved in the hearings process improved while other outcomes were unchanged. Parent feedback about the hearings process was consistently positive after the changes. Among students receiving school-level consequences (a group that was not the target of the August 2011 changes), some positive trends were seen. These findings played out as decreasing numbers of students were involved in state-reported violations and discipline hearings.

Context of Discipline Changes

1. Students continued to report high levels of school safety following the August 2011 changes, indicating that the system’s greater focus on individual students did not impede students’ overall sense of safety in school.

2. The number of students involved in the discipline process decreased approximately 20 percent during the monitoring (from approximately 5,000 to 4,000 students) even while FCPS’ overall population was increasing. Hearings cases decreased in an almost parallel fashion during this same time period.

3. After the August 2011 changes, schools more frequently assigned consequences to students committing state-reported violations that did not involve suspension than they had previously. The percentage of students recommended for expulsion and consequently entering the hearings process remained the same.

Students Going through the Hearings Process

4. Parents’ perceptions of the hearings office were consistently positive. The overwhelming majority of parents responding to a feedback survey reported that school and Hearings Office staff members were helpful in preparing for the hearings process.

5. After August 2011, students involved in hearings cases received shorter suspensions on average, suggesting that adjustments to the Hearings Office processes may have benefitted students by providing them with less loss of instructional time.

6. Students involved in hearings cases were more often allowed to return to their enrolled (base) schools.

7. Academic and behavioral outcomes in the year following the discipline incident for students who had gone through the hearings process were mixed. The percentage of students remaining on track for graduation improved slightly after the changes, as did the overall recidivism rate. This
may have been related to the provision of extended academic and social supports as part of the August 2011 changes to the discipline process.

8. Attendance rates and high school GPA of students did not change after August 2011, indicating that the adjustments to the discipline process did not impact these two outcomes.

**Students Receiving Short-term Suspension and Other School Consequences**

9. Students receiving short-term suspension or Other consequences from a school demonstrated little change in the number of days suspended, which is not surprising given that the August 2011 changes did not target this group of students.

10. Students disciplined with Other consequences showed more shifts in behavioral and academic outcomes during the monitoring period than students receiving short-term suspensions. Behavioral outcomes (recidivism, attendance) for students receiving "Other" consequences were less favorable after the changes, while one of the two academic outcomes (on-track-for graduation) was more favorable after the changes.

**Suggested Next Steps for Continued Monitoring of Discipline Data**

Discipline reform requires understanding which conditions impact specific outcomes and changing those conditions to achieve better outcomes for children. Collecting, analyzing and responding to data are central to doing the right thing for students. Accordingly, the changes put into place in August 2011 included a monitoring component to establish a formal mechanism for reflective practice to support ongoing review and refinement of the discipline process. As the division continues to review and refine its discipline procedures, it will be critical to engage in the following activities:

1. Determine who will monitor data and how frequently;
2. Include both process and outcome metrics to allow observations to be more systematically linked to specific activities;
3. Disaggregate data by individual and school-level demographics (i.e., Special Education, Free and Reduced Lunch, English Language Learners, and Gender, as well as Race/Ethnicity); and
4. Develop an alert notification and response system that spells out when action should be taken and the steps involved in taking such action.
Since 2011, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) has been engaged in efforts to improve the student disciplinary process to better balance the interests of individual students and the division’s responsibility to maintain a safe environment for all students. Two sets of changes, driven by input from various stakeholders, have been implemented by FCPS. The first set of changes, introduced in August 2011, focused primarily on the hearings process and the students going through it. The changes included: a) Improved communication, particularly in the Student Rights and Responsibilities (SR&R) Grades K-12 Handbook; b) Extended academic and emotional support for students involved in cases handled by the Hearings Office; c) Adjusted Hearings Office processes; and d) Expanded discipline-related data collection and monitoring.¹

As part of the expanded discipline-related data collection and monitoring begun in August 2011, FCPS' Office of Program Evaluation issued a baseline report and three annual monitoring reports of discipline-related data (school safety, discipline violations, consequences, student outcomes, and parent feedback on the hearings process). This final report, intended as a high-level summary for FCPS' School Board and leadership, looks across the four prior data reports to draw summative conclusions about what, if any, trends were found when comparing functioning before and after the 2011 changes. Thus, the primary purpose of this document is to compare the final year of data available for this report with data prior to the changes.

Report Organization

The Discipline Analysis: Final Summary Report is divided into five sections:

Section 1: Discipline-Related Contextual Findings

The first section of the report summarizes the context in which the discipline process was implemented before and after the August 2011 changes. Three specific questions are answered in this section of the report:

1. Did students' feelings of school safety change after the August 2011 changes to the discipline process?
2. Did the number of students involved in discipline violations change after the August 2011 changes to the discipline process?
3. Did the type of school-assigned consequences received by students committing state-reported violations change after August 2011?

¹ FCPS implemented additional changes in August, 2013, which were not covered in the monitoring reports and are omitted from this report as well. This latter set of changes included: 1) faster parental notification processes by school administrators, 2) expedited review of the written record for first-time marijuana possession and for first-time possession of certain weapons, 3) adjustments to FCPS' regulation due to statutory changes regarding weapons offenses, 4) reduction of offenses with mandated recommendations for expulsion, and 5) new options for principals to recommend a student’s reassignment to an alternative program, rather than recommend expulsion. Additional details on the changes implemented in SY 2013-14 can be found here: http://commweb.fcps.edu/newsreleases/newsrelease.cfm?newsid=2303
Section 2: Findings about Students Going Through the Hearings Process
The main focus of the discipline changes in August 2011 targeted students going through the hearings process. This report considers three questions about the process and the students participating in it before and after the changes:

4. What were parents’ perceptions about the hearings process following the August 2011 changes to the discipline process?
5. Did August 2011 changes to the discipline process minimize disruption (i.e., decrease in suspension length and school reassignment), whenever possible, for students going through the hearings process?
6. Did behavioral (recidivism, attendance) and academic (GPA, on-track for graduation) outcomes for students involved in the hearings process improve following the addition of extended emotional and academic services?

Section 3: Findings about Students Receiving School-Based Consequences
The second section of the report summarizes the results for students who received only school-based consequences, such as short-term suspension. Though not the focus of the August 2011 changes to the discipline process, this report investigates two questions about these students:

7. Were August 2011 changes to the discipline process associated with changes in suspension length for students receiving school consequences?
8. Did behavioral (recidivism, attendance) and academic (GPA, on-track for graduation) outcomes for students receiving school consequences remain the same following the August 2011 changes?

Section 4: Summary of Monitoring Findings
The fourth section of the report summarizes the results about context for students going through the hearings process and for those receiving school-based consequences.

Section 5: Suggested Next Steps for Continued Monitoring of Discipline Data
The final section of the report describes next steps regarding continued monitoring of discipline data by FCPS.
Section 1: Discipline-Related Contextual Findings

Question 1: Did students’ feelings of school safety change after the August 2011 changes to the discipline process?

_Students continued to report high levels of school safety in the third year following the August 2011 changes, indicating that the changes to the discipline process did not impede students’ overall sense of safety in school._

The changes implemented in August 2011 were intended to provide better support for the interests of individual students while simultaneously maintaining the safety and security of all FCPS students. While such a delicate balance may have proven difficult, students’ feelings of safety remained steady following the August 2011. This means that FCPS was effective in balancing the two potentially competing concerns of individual students and all students when implementing the August 2011 changes. Overall, the findings suggest that FCPS was able to maintain as effective a disciplinary framework in its schools after the changes as it had before the August 2011 changes. And following the changes, the vast majority of students continued to perceive the schools they attend as safe environments.

More specifically, during the third school year after the August 2011 changes, FCPS students reported approximately equal levels (within three percentage points²) of feeling safe at school in three of four grade-levels surveyed (94, 85, and 89 percent for grades 6, 8, and 12, respectively) as during the baseline year (94, 86, and 91 percent, respectively). At the other grade level surveyed, a slightly lower level of safety was reported than in the baseline year (grade 10: 88 at baseline vs. 84 in Year Three). [Additional details about school safety are available in Figure 2 of the Year Three Discipline Analysis Report.]

Question 2: Did the number of students involved in discipline violations change after the August 2011 changes to the discipline process?

_The number of students committing discipline violations declined approximately 20 percent following the August 2011 changes, dropping from approximately 5,000 at the start of monitoring to approximately 4,000 in the final year of monitoring. The number of hearings cases during the monitoring period also declined from approximately 570 to 470._

The basis of the monitoring reports was discipline violations that FCPS was required to report to the state. State-reported discipline violations are a subset of those that schools document in student records, since some discipline information recorded in student records does not require reporting. State-reported discipline offenses typically do not result in a hearing. Rather, the vast majority of cases are handled by schools with Short-Term Suspension or other, lesser consequences.

² This approach to pass rate differences is used in FCPS to interpret year-to-year changes in Student Achievement Goal data. It is not based on statistical significance but instead represents a general rule of thumb that accommodates expected small levels of variation either up or down over time.
The changes implemented in August 2011 were not specifically targeted towards changing the number of students involved in discipline offenses. Nonetheless, by the final year of monitoring (SY 2012-13), fewer students at both the middle and high school level committed such violations, even with a growing population of students. By the final year of monitoring, 3,999 of 83,415 middle and high school students (4.8 percent) were involved in state-reported discipline offenses, a decrease from the 4,948 of 81,142 middle and high school students (6.1 percent) involved before the changes in the first year of monitoring. During this same period, the number of students entering the hearings process also declined, from 572 in the first year of monitoring to 469 after the August 2011 changes (in the final year of monitoring). Thus, although the August 2011 changes did not specifically target decreasing the number of students involved in discipline violations, the monitoring period coincided with a downward trend of approximately 20 percent in students involved in violations, including a decreasing number of cases that were required to go through the hearings process. [Additional details about the number of discipline offenses are available in Figure 3 of the Year Three Discipline Analysis Report.]

Question 3: Did the type of school-assigned consequences received by students committing state-reported violations change after August 2011?

The types of consequences received by students committing discipline violations shifted during the monitoring period. Before the August 2011 changes, the majority of state-reported violations resulted in short-term suspensions meted out by schools. By the end of the monitoring period, short-term suspensions had decreased to less than a majority and were only slightly larger than violations resulting in "Other" consequences from the school. The percent of violations leading to a hearing remained the same after August 2011.

Prior to the August 2011 changes, 69 percent of state-reported violations resulted in a school assigning a short-term suspension to the student. At that time, 25 percent resulted in "Other" consequences (e.g., substance abuse seminar, detention, parent conference) and six percent resulted in a recommendation for expulsion (which requires the student to enter the hearing process). By the end of the monitoring period, schools were almost equal in their assignment of short-term suspensions (48 percent of discipline violations) and "Other" consequences (45 percent of discipline violations). Recommendations for expulsion (i.e., those leading to a hearing) remained six percent of consequences at the end of the monitoring period, the same as they had been before the August 2011 changes. Thus, during the monitoring period, schools increasingly assigned students "Other" consequences and decreasingly assigned short-term suspension for state-reported offenses. [Additional details about the distribution of consequences are available in Figure 4 of the Year Three Discipline Analysis Report.]
Section 2: Findings about Students Going Through the Hearings Process

Question 4: What were parents’ perceptions about the hearings process following the August 2011 changes to the discipline process?

*Parents’ perceptions of the hearings process and available hearings-related resources were consistently positive, with an overwhelming majority reporting that available resources, including school and Hearings Office staff, were helpful in preparing for the hearings process. Most parents also felt they understood the hearings process and were treated fairly during it.*

For the three years following the August 2011 discipline process changes, parents or guardians of students who participated in a hearing were asked to complete a feedback survey regarding the helpfulness of available resources for parents getting ready for the disciplinary hearing, as well as parental perceptions and understanding of the disciplinary process. Seventeen percent of parents (approximately 100 of 600) completed the survey each year. Although there is no comparison from before the changes occurred, during the final year of this survey 90 percent or more of responding parents reported they found all available FCPS resources helpful in preparing for the hearings process, felt they were treated fairly during the hearing, and understood what would happen during and after the hearing. [Additional details about parent feedback are available in Figures 14 and 15 of the Year Three Discipline Analysis Report.]

Question 5: Did August 2011 changes to the discipline process minimize disruption (i.e., decrease in suspension length and school reassignment), whenever possible, for students going through the hearings process?

*Following the August 2011 changes, students going through the hearings process received shorter suspensions and were more often allowed to return to their enrolled schools at the conclusion of the hearings process. Thus, after August 2011, it appears that FCPS successfully focused more on minimizing disruption for students going through the hearings process.*

**Suspension Length**

For students involved in the discipline process, minimizing time out of school is important because out-of-school time is generally associated with loss of instructional time. The number of suspension days for a student going through the hearings process reflects the sum of days suspended prior to the hearing and those given as part of the hearings consequence decision. Factors such as parental requests to delay hearings, procedures related to students with disabilities, student detention or incarceration, appeals of Hearings Office decisions, etc., can prolong the length of a student’s suspension. As part of the changes implemented in August 2011, Hearings Office processes were adjusted to shorten the timeline between the incident and the hearing decision. As a result, FCPS expected the number of days suspended to be

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3 This report includes most but not all cases handled by the Hearings Office. Only students recommended for expulsion by schools and committing state-reported offenses are included. Other Hearings Office cases are not included.
fewer following the August 2011 changes. Findings indicate that suspension length for students going through the hearings process did, in fact, trend downward after the changes.

Thus, in the second year after the August 2011 changes, the median (midpoint) length of suspension among students going through the hearings process had decreased to 12 days as compared to the 20 days observed prior to changes. The overwhelming majority of students received suspensions between 0 and 20 days following the changes, which was lower than the 11 to 30 days missed by most students in the years before the changes. Furthermore, the maximum length of suspensions also decreased, from a high of 103 days in the years before the changes to a high of 73 days two years after the changes. Thus, the overall amount of suspension time was reduced, lowering the amount of instruction missed by students involved in the hearing process following the August 2011 changes. [Additional details about length of suspension are available in Figure 7 of the Year Three Discipline Analysis Report.]

School Reassignment

The relatively small proportion of students allowed to return to their enrolled school following a hearing and the associated disruption this consequence might cause students was also a concern prompting changes in August 2011. Thus, another expectation of the August 2011 changes was to minimize the use of school reassignment as a hearing consequence, whenever possible, so that more students would be allowed to return to their enrolled schools. Thus, in the second year after the changes, the percentage of students allowed to return to their enrolled schools rose from 10 before the changes to 27 after the changes, a 17 percentage point increase. [Additional details about length of suspension are available in Figures 7 and 8 of the Year Three Discipline Analysis Report.]

Question 6: Did behavioral (recidivism, attendance) and academic (GPA, on-track for graduation) outcomes for students involved in the hearings process improve following the addition of extended emotional and academic services?

FCPS’ provision of extended emotional and academic services after August 2011 to students going through the hearings process was associated with fewer students re-offending, especially when allowed to return to their enrolled school, and more students remaining on track for graduation. Provision of the extended services was not associated with improved attendance or high school GPA after the 2011 changes.

Following the August 2011 changes, students entering the hearings process received extended academic and emotional support services (known as "Out of School Support"), which strive to keep students as engaged with classroom instruction as possible in order to minimize academic loss. The services provide support and follow-up to help students keep up with content and complete assignments. In addition, supports were intended to help students and families establish connections with new settings in cases where students were reassigned to other schools as a discipline consequence. As a result, one might expect student outcomes such as recidivism, attendance, high school GPA, and being on track for graduation to be improved among students going through the hearings process after the August 2011 changes.
Behavioral Outcomes

Recidivism. Overall, among students who had gone through the Hearings process during the final year of monitoring, nine percent committed another discipline offense within the same year (recidivism rate). This was slightly lower (three percentage points) than the recidivism rate among students going through the hearings process prior to the August 2011 changes, when 12 percent of students re-offended. Thus, the provision of extended support after August 2011 may have had a slight positive impact on students’ avoiding additional discipline offenses.

Further analyses that looked separately at recidivism based on the type of school students were assigned to after the hearing, found differences in what occurred before and after the addition of extended support services to students going through the hearings process. More specifically, students placed in another regular school demonstrated the lowest rate of recidivism both before and after the August 2011 changes (0 and 6 percent, respectively). Rates observed for students sent to an alternative setting and those who returned to their enrolled school nearly reversed before and after the August 2011 changes. Among students who were allowed to return to their enrolled school, recidivism decreased after the August 2011 changes by nine percentage points (from 20 to 11 percent), while for students sent to an alternative setting recidivism increased by 7 percentage points (from 11 to 18 percent). Given that one purpose of the extended support services is to provide continuity and connection for students as they begin their post-hearing school assignment, this finding suggests the services may be working better for some students (students returning to their enrolled school) than for others (students assigned to an alternative setting). [Additional details about recidivism are available in Figure 10 of the Year Three Discipline Analysis Report.]

Attendance. The attendance of middle and high school students disciplined two years after the August 2011 changes indicated that students going through the hearings process had approximately equal attendance rates before and after the changes were implemented. More specifically, at both time points (before and after August 2011 changes), attendance was lower in the year after the discipline incident than it had been prior to the incident. That is, the attendance rate of students going through the hearings process before August 2011 demonstrated a seven percentage point drop (92 percent before the incident, 85 percent after). Students going through the hearings process after August 2011 in the last year of monitoring demonstrated an approximately equal nine percentage point decrease in attendance rates (94 percent before the incident, 85 percent after). These findings indicate no relation between the August 2011 changes and attendance rates of students going through the hearings process. [Additional details about attendance are available in Figure 11 of the Year Three Discipline Analysis Report.]

Academic Outcomes

GPA. Findings suggest that students involved in the hearings process demonstrated GPAs statistically equivalent to those prior to the implementation of the extended emotional and academic support services in August 2011. More specifically, both before and after the implementation of the extended support, students going through the hearings process demonstrated slightly improved GPA one year following discipline incidents. Prior to the addition of extended services, the improvement amounted to a GPA of
1.83 before the incident and 1.96 in the year after the incident, an increase of .13 GPA points. Two years after the extended services were added, the improvement amounted to a GPA of 1.87 before the incident which increased to 1.95 in the year after the incident, an increase of .08 GPA points, which was statistically equivalent. Given the relative similarity of the GPA patterns both before and after the implementation of extended support, it does not appear that the provision of these services was associated with better student outcomes. Students going through the hearings process either before or after August 2011 struggled academically, with an average GPA equivalent to approximately the letter grade C at both time points. [Additional details about GPA are available in Figure 12 of the Year Three Discipline Analysis Report.]

On Track for Graduation. A comparison of performance in being on track for graduation before and after extended supports were implemented revealed that students who took part in the discipline process after its implementation more frequently remained on track for graduation than students who had taken part in the process before the support services were offered. More specifically, two years after the support services began, the change in percentage of students remaining on track for graduation decreased 7 percentage points to 12 percent when compared to the 19 percent seen before the August 2011 changes. More specifically, 55 percent of students going through the hearings process were on track for graduation a year after the discipline incident (with 67 having been on track prior to the incident). In contrast only 50 percent of students going through the hearings process before the support services were implemented were on track for graduation (with 69 percent having been on track in the year prior to the incident). Thus, the support services may be helping more students remain on track. An alternative possibility is that the shorter suspension lengths described above are also helping more students stay on track. In either case, it appears that something about the changes is associated with improved outcomes for students when it comes to being on track for high school graduation. [Additional details about on track for graduation data are available in Figure 13 of the Year Three Discipline Analysis Report.]

Section 3: Findings about Students Receiving School Consequences

Question 7: Were August 2011 changes to the discipline process associated with changes in suspension length for students receiving school consequences?

The August 2011 changes did not appear to have an impact on consequences assigned by schools, as evidenced by the same median number of suspension days assigned to students through school-level consequences before and after the changes.

The changes made to the discipline process did not focus at the school level (i.e., students receiving short-term suspension or other, typically lesser, consequences assigned by the school, such as alcohol and drug seminars, parent conferences, etc.). Thus, no effects were anticipated for students receiving these consequences. Findings for students receiving only short-term suspension or Other consequences matched this expectation, with no shift in the average (median) length of suspension after the August 2011 changes. More specifically, prior to the changes students receiving suspension averaged two days
of suspension with a range from one to ten days, as was true after the changes. Similarly, prior to the changes students receiving Other consequences averaged one day of suspension with a range from zero to ten days, the same as after the changes. Therefore, as would have been expected, the changes that targeted hearings cases were unrelated to suspensions received by students who did not go through the hearings process. [Additional details about suspension data are available in Figure 7 of the Year Three Discipline Analysis Report.]

Question 8: Did behavioral (recidivism, attendance) and academic (GPA, on-track for graduation) outcomes for students receiving school consequences remain the same following the August 2011 changes?

Students receiving short-term suspension for an offense showed approximately equal levels of behavioral and academic outcomes before and after August 2011. Students assigned "Other" consequences by their schools showed less favorable recidivism and attendance after the changes but more favorable on-track-for graduation rates after the changes.

The changes made to the discipline process in August 2011 did not specifically target improving students' behavioral or academic outcome. As a result, one might expect student outcomes to be relatively the same before and after the August 2011 changes. Given that many more students received "Other" consequences for state-reported offenses after August 2011 than prior to the changes, the observed differences may be more consistent with changes in who was receiving this type of consequence. It may be that the overall intent of the school division to find the least disruptive consequences for students involved in the hearings process had a trickledown effect on school administrators, who also assigned less disruptive consequences (i.e., did not suspend, whenever possible). These data, however, may indicate that the non-suspension consequences being used do not have the same impact on students as being suspended might have. Alternately, the students themselves who might have been suspended previously but who are now receiving Other consequences at the school may be qualitatively different from the students who had been receiving Other consequences prior to the August 2011 changes.

Behavioral Outcomes

Recidivism. Overall, among students who received school consequences, there was a difference between those who received suspension and those who received "Other" consequences (e.g., alcohol and drug seminars, parent conferences, etc.). Before and after the August 2011 changes, approximately one-third of students receiving suspension committed another offense within the same school year. In contrast, the level of recidivism among students receiving Other consequences increased ten percentage points over the monitoring period from 39 percent to 49 percent. This finding might suggest that more lenient “Other” consequences are not so effective at preventing reoffending behaviors as the more severe short-term suspensions and that the steady increase in reoffending behavior for students who receive an Other consequence may be attributable to the August 2011 changes. [Additional details about recidivism are available in Figure 9 of the Year Three Discipline Analysis Report.]
**Attendance.** The attendance of middle and high school students receiving school level consequences of suspension again indicates similar discipline patterns after the August 2011 changes as before. At both time points, students receiving school suspensions demonstrated a 94 percent attendance rate in the year prior to the discipline incident and a 90 (before the changes) or 89 (after the changes) in the year following the incident. Thus, for students receiving a consequence of school suspension, the changes did not appear related to their attendance rates. For students receiving Other consequences, there was a slight downward trend in attendance when comparing before and after the changes. Prior to the changes, students receiving Other consequences demonstrated a 95 percent attendance rate in the year prior to the incident and a 92 percent attendance rate in the year following the incident. In contrast, after the August 2011 changes, students receiving Other consequences demonstrated a 94 percent attendance rate in the year prior to the incident and an 89 percent attendance rate in the year following the incident. [Additional details about attendance are available in Figure 11 of the Year Three Discipline Analysis Report.]

**Academic Outcomes**

**GPA.** Findings suggest that students receiving school level consequences of suspension or Other consequences demonstrated similar patterns before and after the August 2011 changes. More specifically prior to the August 2011 discipline process adjustments both students receiving Other consequences and those receiving short-term suspensions from a school showed approximately equal GPAs before and after the year in which the incident occurred. Among students receiving short-term suspension at a school, GPAs prior to the changes were 1.99 in the year prior the incidents and stayed approximately the same at 1.98 in the year after. For those receiving Other consequences, the GPA was 2.06 in the year prior to the incident and 2.07 in the year after the incident. At the end of the monitoring period, students receiving short-term suspension showed a GPA of 1.95 in the year before the incident and a statistically equivalent 1.89 GPA in the year following the incident. The GPAs of those receiving Other consequences were approximately the same at 2.01 before and 2.03 after the incident year. Thus, GPA did not change following the institution of the discipline process changes in August 2011. Both before and after the August 2011 changes, students receiving school consequences showed an average GPA approximately equivalent to the letter grade C. [Additional details about GPA are available in Figure 12 of the Year Three Discipline Analysis Report.]

**On Track for Graduation.** Students receiving school consequences differed somewhat in their remaining on track for graduation. Those receiving suspension saw little change in the shift from before to after the incident year before, with approximately 16 percent of students falling off track for graduation from the year before the discipline incident to the year after the incident both before and after the August 2011 changes (before August 2011: 16 percent drop in on-track for graduation status (66 to 50 percent); last year of monitoring: 15 percent drop in on-track for graduation status (69 to 54 percent)). In contrast, slightly more students receiving Other consequences remained on track for graduation after the August 2011 changes (before August 2011: 14 percent drop in on-track for graduation status (71 to 57 percent); last year of monitoring: 11 percent drop in on-track for graduation status (74 to 63 percent)). Thus, although no specific discipline-related changes that should have resulted in a shift in the on track for
graduation rates of students were put in place during the monitoring period, improved outcomes for students receiving Other consequences were found over this time when it comes to being on track for high school graduation. [Additional details about on track for graduation data are available in Figure 13 of the Year Three Discipline Analysis Report.]

**Section 4: Summary of Monitoring Findings**

Monitoring of discipline-related data before and after changes implemented in August 2011 indicates that overall school safety was unaffected while discipline consequences successfully transitioned to be less disruptive for students going through the hearings process. Furthermore, some student outcomes for those involved in the hearings process improved while other outcomes were unchanged. Parent feedback about the hearings process was consistently positive after the changes. Among students receiving school-level consequences (a group that was not the target of the August 2011 changes), some positive trends were seen. These findings played out as decreasing numbers of students were involved in state-reported violations and discipline hearings.

**Context of Discipline Changes**

1. Students continued to report high levels of school safety following the August 2011 changes, indicating that the system’s greater focus on individual students did not impede students’ overall sense of safety in school.
2. The number of students involved in the discipline process decreased approximately 20 percent during the monitoring (from approximately 5,000 to 4,000 students) even while FCPS’ overall population was increasing. Hearings cases decreased in an almost parallel fashion during this same time period.
3. After the August 2011 changes, schools more frequently assigned consequences to students committing state-reported violations that did not involve suspension than they had previously. The percentage of students recommended for expulsion and consequently entering the hearings process remained the same.

**Students Going through the Hearings Process**

4. Parents’ perceptions of the hearings office were consistently positive. The overwhelming majority of parents responding to a feedback survey reported that school and Hearings Office staff members were helpful in preparing for the hearings process.
5. After August 2011, students involved in hearings cases received shorter suspensions on average, suggesting that adjustments to the Hearings Office processes may have benefitted students by providing them with less loss of instructional time.
6. Students involved in hearings cases were more often allowed to return to their enrolled (base) schools.
7. Academic and behavioral outcomes in the year following the discipline incident for students who had gone through the hearings process were mixed. The percentage of students remaining on track for graduation improved slightly after the changes, as did the overall recidivism rate. This may have been related to the provision of extended academic and social supports as part of the August 2011 changes to the discipline process.

8. Attendance rates and high school GPA of students did not change after August 2011, indicating that the adjustments to the discipline process did not impact these two outcomes.

**Students Receiving Short-term Suspension and Other School Consequences**

9. Students receiving short-term suspension or Other consequences from a school demonstrated little change in the number of days suspended, which is not surprising given that the August 2011 changes did not target this group of students.

10. Students disciplined with Other consequences showed more shifts in behavioral and academic outcomes during the monitoring period than students receiving short-term suspensions. Behavioral outcomes (recidivism, attendance) for students receiving “Other” consequences were less favorable after the changes, while one of the two academic outcomes (on-track-for graduation) was more favorable after the changes.

**Section 5: Suggested Next Steps for Continued Monitoring of Discipline Data**

Discipline reform requires understanding which conditions impact specific outcomes and changing those conditions to achieve better outcomes for children. Collecting, analyzing and responding to data are central to doing the right thing for students. Accordingly, the changes put into place in August 2011 included a monitoring component to establish a formal mechanism for reflective practice to support ongoing review and refinement of the discipline process.

Although the monitoring period for the August 2011 changes ends with this final report, FCPS has continued to modify its disciplinary practices over the past two school years. Currently the Hearings Office, Department of Information Technology, Department of Special Services and schools all monitor different aspects of discipline-related data and they do so largely independently. Centralizing monitoring of these data to reduce redundancy and allow a look across multiple aspects of the data would provide FCPS with an efficient, comprehensive view of discipline-related issues. Moreover, it would streamline the work from each unit so data are produced and interpreted once, with input from all relevant offices prior to circulation in the division. More coordinated efforts could also reduce confusion and allow more targeted questions and answers to have more meaningful and timely impacts to program decisions. The scheduled monitoring could take the form of a data dashboard that shows current and past years’ performance on the set of performance metrics mentioned. A dashboard would also allow for more frequent “check-ins” on the data and by subsets of group.
If centralized monitoring is deemed inappropriate, a coordinated sharing of information across units involved in monitoring might be helpful. In this situation, clearly delineating which type of data are monitored by whom to avoid redundancy, as well as a mechanism for sharing across units via regularly occurring check-in meetings would be critical.

In addition to centralizing and coordinating data for monitoring, administrators may also wish to consider that the following characteristics are incorporated into discipline monitoring activities in FCPS:

1. Determine who will monitor data and how frequently;
2. Include both process and outcome metrics to allow observations to be more systematically linked to specific activities;
3. Disaggregate data by individual and school-level demographics (i.e., Special Education, Free and Reduced Lunch, English Language Learners, and Gender, as well as Race/Ethnicity); and
4. Develop an alert notification and response system that spells out when action should be taken and the steps involved in taking such action.