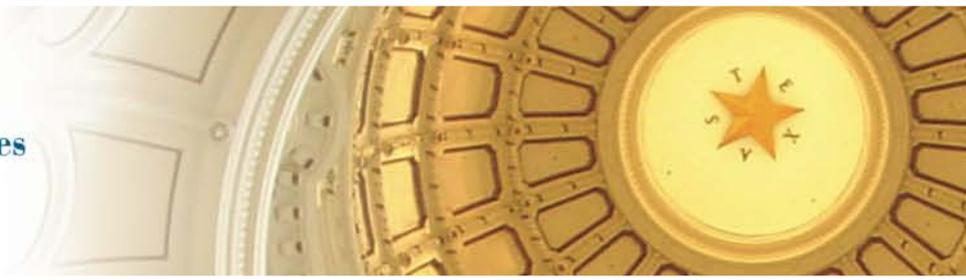




Center for Public Policy Priorities



# School Discipline and Students in Foster Care: A Texas Case Study

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# Presentation Overview

- Why do we care about school discipline outcomes?
- Getting the data
- Outcomes in Texas
- Recommendations

# Children in Foster Care Are Exposed to Chronic Stress

- Initial abuse or neglect
- Subsequent removal and separation from family and community
- Move around a lot in foster care



# Chronic Stress Changes a Child's Brain, Creating Problematic Behavior

- Abnormal secretions of cortisol
  - Interferes with impulse control and sleep
  - Difficulty in navigating social interactions with peers because may view positive or neutral situations as hostile
  - Provoke fights to assert control
  - Always on alert so never achieve attentive “calm” necessary for learning



# Current School Discipline System May Exacerbate Problematic Behavior

- Children exposed to chronic stress need frequent, consistent 'replacement' experiences so that the brain can begin to incorporate a new environment—one that is safe, predictable, and nurturing
- Current system, at least in Texas, focuses on punitive actions and removal from classroom
- If already see the world as hostile, frightening place, system reinforces this view, which may create more stress and more problematic behavior



# **Challenges in Getting Data for Students in Foster Care**

- **School database may not identify which students are in foster care**
- **Data may not be available statewide**
- **Lack of standardization among school districts**
- **Students in foster care frequently change schools**
- **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) may make disclosure of information difficult**

# What We Did in Texas

- In response to request from state Legislative Committee, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) provided the Texas Education Agency (TEA) with a list of children in foster care (name, date of birth and social security number)
- TEA matched DFPS list to children in its database to identify which students were in foster care
- TEA created aggregate reports regarding outcomes for children in foster care with comparison numbers for general student population
- Subsequently, DFPS and TEA entered into agreement to share data going forward



# Data We Looked At

- **Aggregate discipline reports for 2007-08 school year for both foster care and the general student population**
- **Percentage of students with at least 1 discipline action (overall and by race)**
- **Type of behavior resulting in discipline**



# Data We Looked At

- **Type of Discipline Actions**

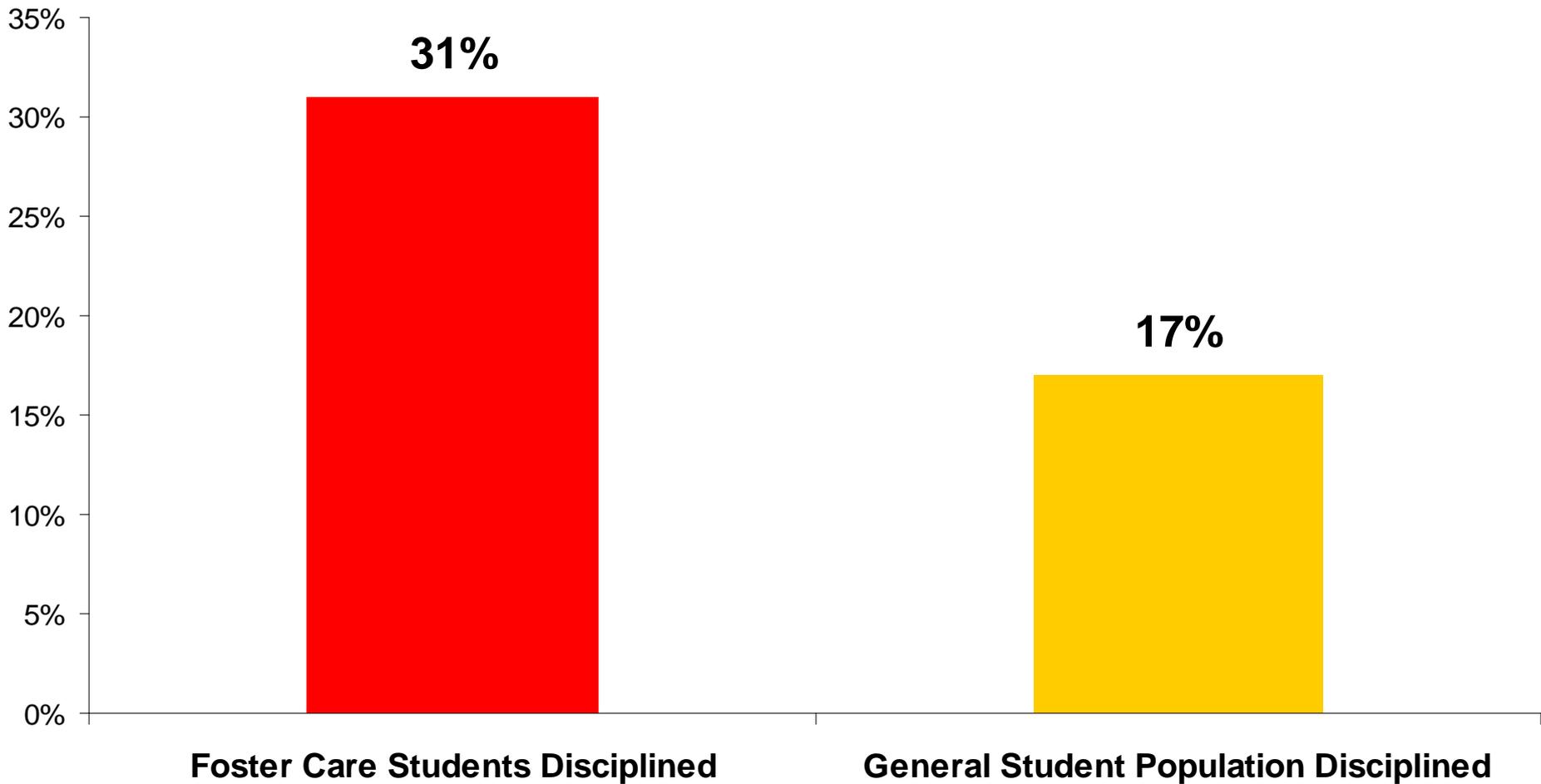
- In-School Suspension (ISS)
- Out-of-School Suspension (OSS)
- Disciplinary Alternative Education Placement (DAEP)
- Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Placement (JJAEP)
- Expulsion

- **Discipline Actions That Are Not Tracked**

- Misdemeanor criminal citations for violations of school policy
- Corporal punishment
- Informal discipline (detention, community service)
- “In-house” discipline at residential treatment centers

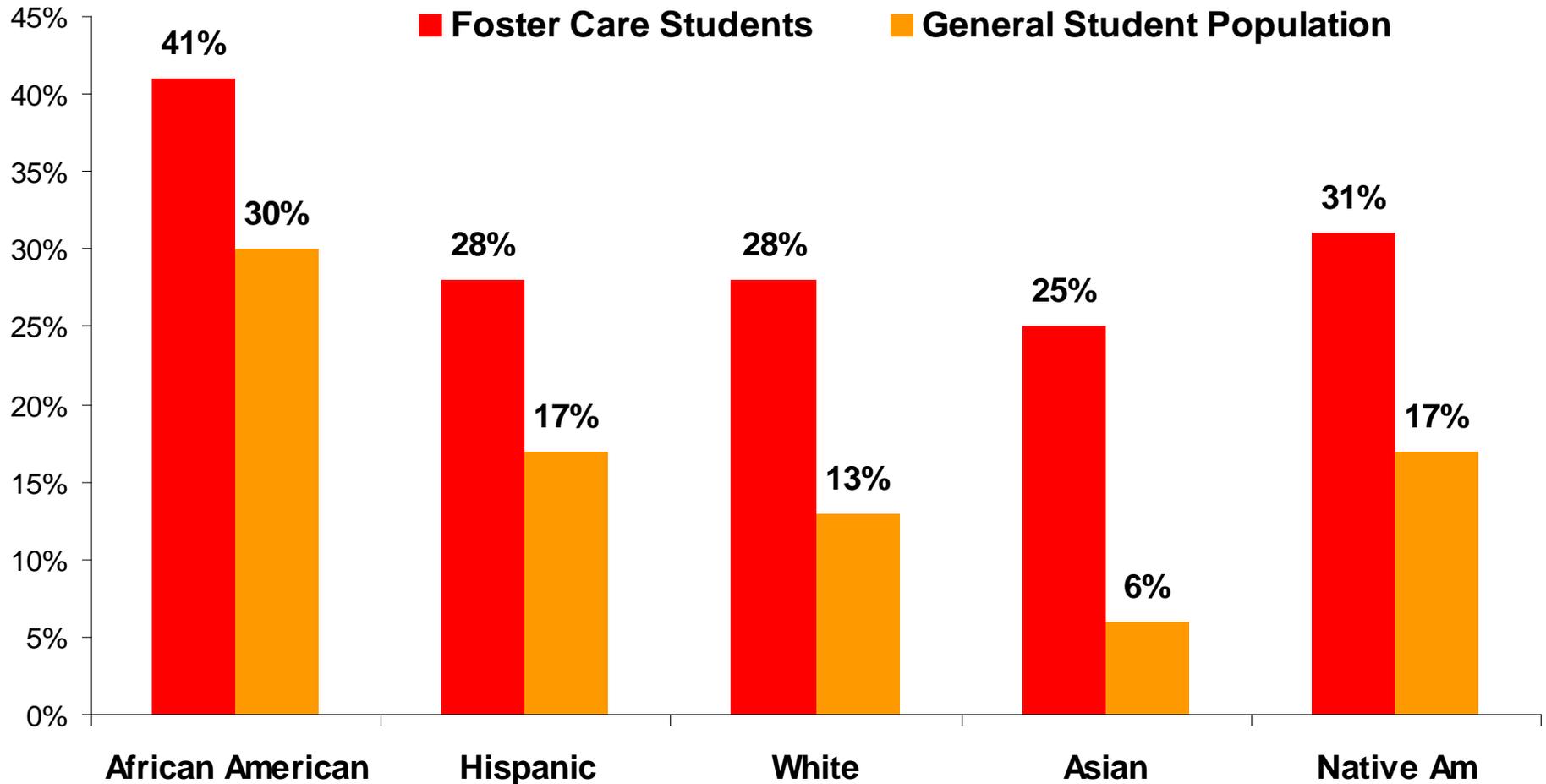
# Foster Kids Are Almost Twice as Likely to Be Disciplined

(Percentage of Students Disciplined at Least Once During Year)



# Foster Kids of All Races Are Disproportionately Disciplined

(Percentage of Students Disciplined at Least Once During Year)

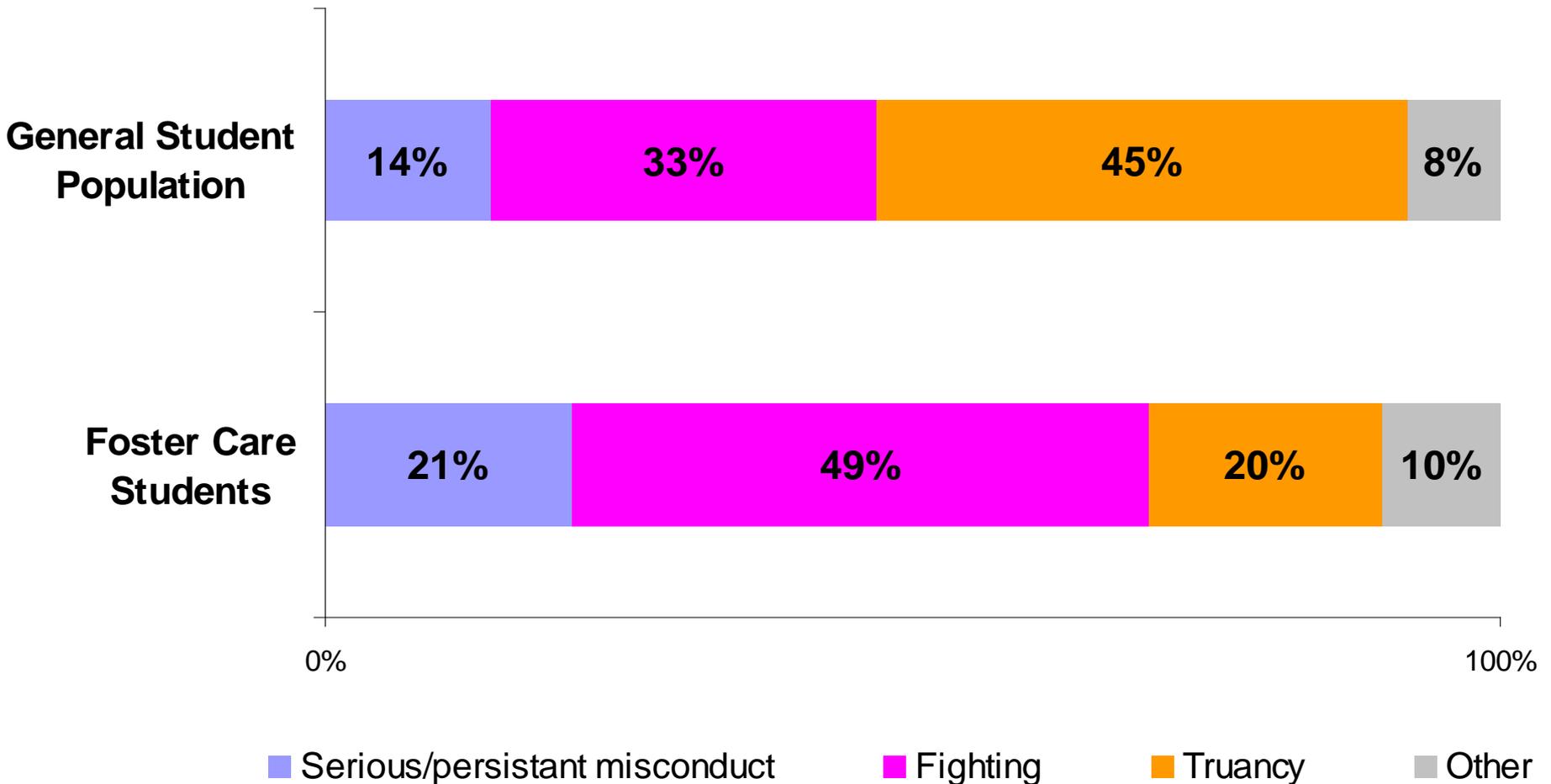


# Are Foster Kids' Behaviors Different? It's Hard to Tell

- 1.5% of both populations engage in most serious behavior (mandatory DAEP, JJAEP or expulsion)
- 91% of behavior for both populations falls into general category of a violation of local code of conduct
  - Significant variation among school district
- Of the remaining 7.5% of behaviors resulting in discipline . . .

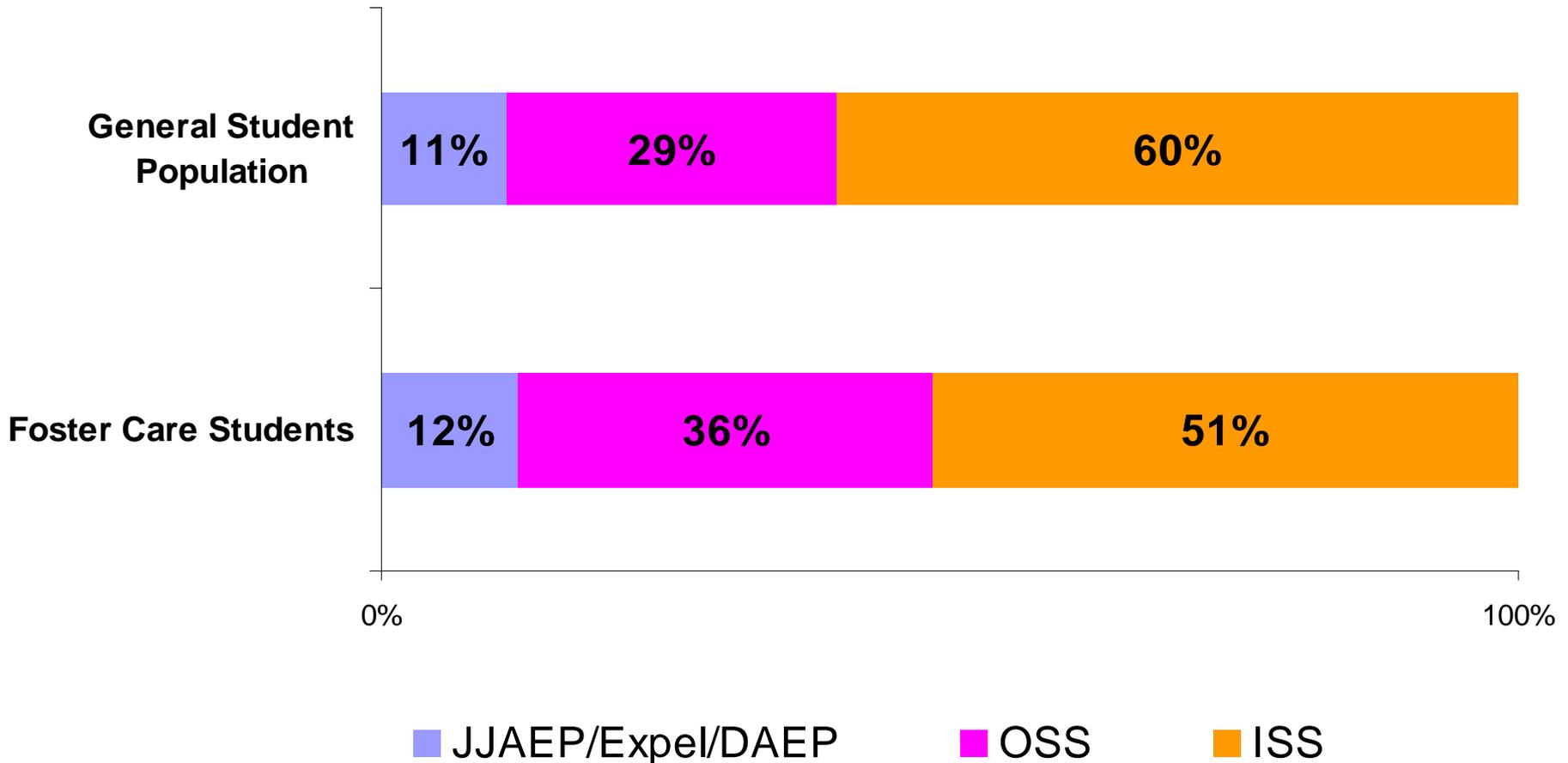
# Foster Kids Have More Fights and Serious or Persistent Misconduct and Less Truancy

(Breakdown of Discipline Behaviors)



# Foster Kids More Likely to Get an Out of School Suspension

(Breakdown of Discipline Actions among Students Disciplined)

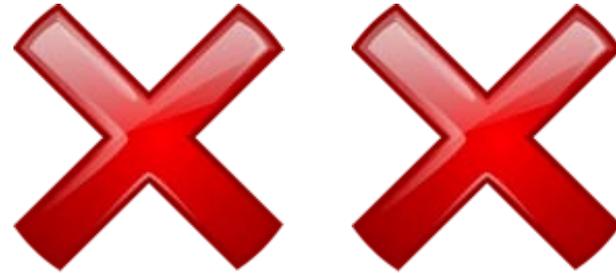


# Actions per Incident

- One discipline incident can involve multiple actions
  - More than one student involved in incident (e.g., fighting)
  - More than one action for each student (e.g., out-of-school suspension and DAEP)

# Foster Kids Get Twice as Many Actions per Incident

- Foster Care Students:



- General Student Population:



# Conclusions

- Foster kids get disciplined more often and more severely
  - Unclear exactly why this is happening
- Analysis is first step in understanding whether current discipline system is actually helping or exacerbating problematic behavior

# Recommendations

- State education and child welfare agencies need to collaborate on school data regarding foster kids
- State education agencies need to collect more data
  - Capture all important discipline actions
  - Ensure can identify type of behavior resulting in discipline
- Research to explore reasons for disparities



# Recommendations

- Adapt disciplinary system to meet special needs of students in foster care
  - More students in foster care should be assessed for special education services, especially for an emotional disturbance
  - Possibly create special discipline procedures for students in foster care
- Implement school wide positive behavioral supports



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