

# School Discipline Among Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in U.S. Public Schools

Lauren Wooster, MPH Candidate, CWRU  
Marie Clark, MD, MPH, UH Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital, Practicum Preceptor  
Martina Merrill, MS, CWRU;  
Mandy Neudecker MLIS, UH;  
Danielle Godomski Littleton, JD,  
UH Medical Legal Partnership

## Background

Project conducted remotely with the Department of Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics and Psychology at UH Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital and the UH Medical Legal Partnership

## Population

The patients and clients of the Midtown UH Rainbow Center for Women and Children and the UH Medical Legal Partnership; the deliverables also benefit those conducting research in this field

## Learning Objectives

1. Understand the current literature and research landscape on disparities in school disciplinary tactics among public school students diagnosed with ASD
2. Create written products that summarize findings, promote further advocacy, and make research and policy recommendations
  - A systematic literature review of research on school disciplinary tactics among ASD populations, especially suspensions and expulsions
  - A policy brief presenting key findings from the literature review and offering recommendations for more effective research and advocacy for families navigating special education resources in U.S. public schools

# Students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may be disciplined in school at higher rates than their peers, especially when compared by race, gender, and socio-economic status.

# More research is needed to improve advocacy and support the long-term health of those with ASD.



Brief Poster Presentation  
<https://youtu.be/b1jOEa9t5oo>



Full Literature Review  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EWWj2Yug\\_HFPMN1\\_pzSabA0KcGgDnLwf/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EWWj2Yug_HFPMN1_pzSabA0KcGgDnLwf/view?usp=sharing)



Long Form Policy Brief  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YwsBil4xGRNgWxsHn38fGEwluFDLpT5X/view?usp=sharing>



Short Form Policy Brief  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1snLLtxDUjM5Rx05YePCSBtgMaWrAQcII/view?usp=sharing>

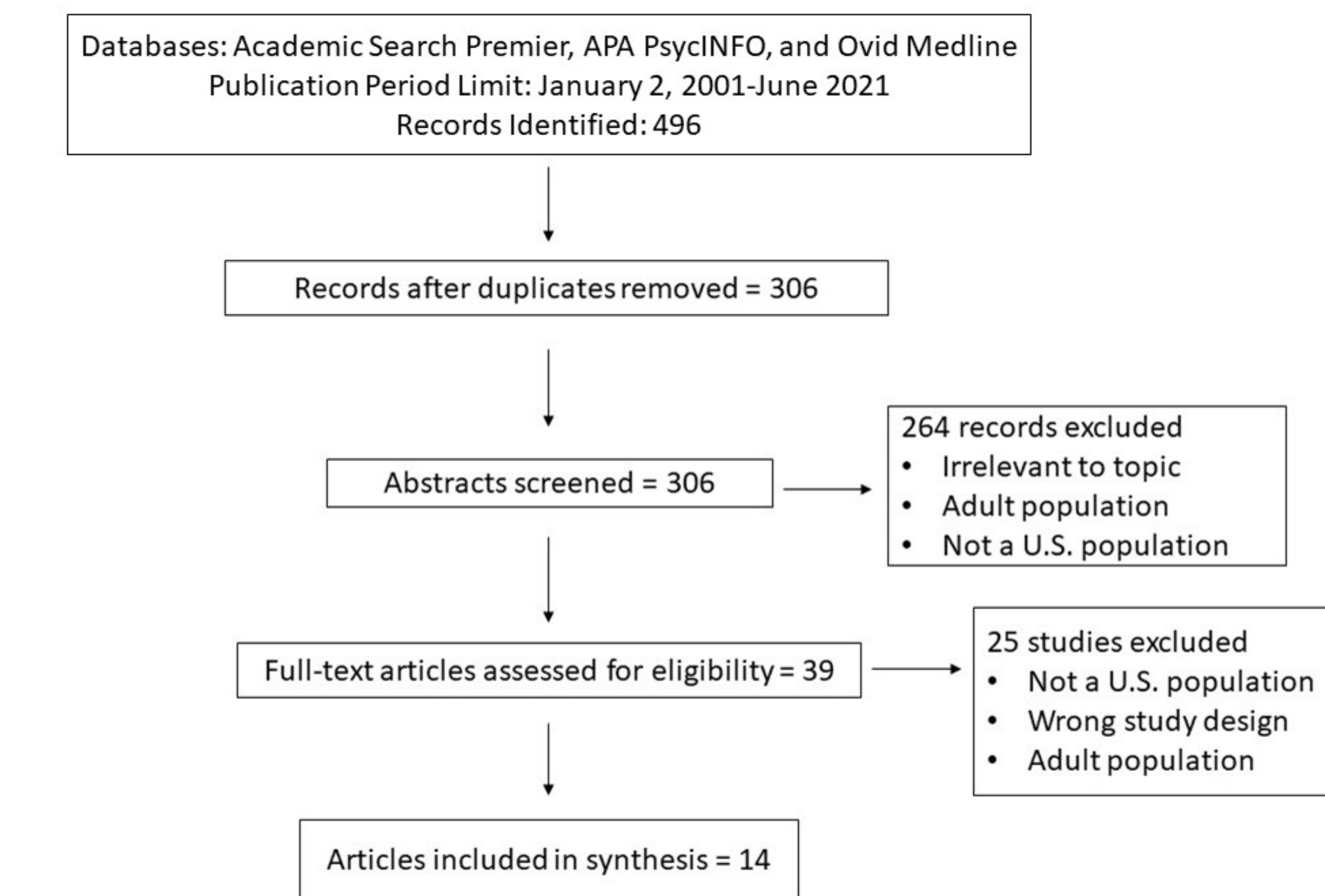
## Deliverables

1. "School Discipline Among Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in U.S. Public Schools: A Literature Review"
2. "Reducing Research Gaps in Special Education: Policy Recommendation to Improve Data Collection Concerning Rates of School Discipline among Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder"
  - Long form policy brief directed at administrators and researchers who work firsthand with the national databases and health surveys discussed in the brief
  - Short form policy brief directed at Ohio federal and state legislators

## Methods and Results

A literature review was conducted following the PRISMA guidelines. Figure 1 outlines the results of the search and review.

Figure 1. PRISMA Process Results



## Lessons Learned

Being able to pivot and course correct in research is an invaluable skill; when data our team expected was not available in the necessary time frame, we needed to readjust our plan. Being flexible allowed us to pursue projects and deliverables that, in the long-term, will aid our continued work and hopefully the work of others in the field.

## Public Health Implications

Studies have demonstrated that the use of certain exclusionary discipline tactics, such as suspension and expulsion, can contribute to what is commonly referred to as the "school-to-prison pipeline," an idea that involvement with school discipline can increase the risk of an adolescent becoming involved with the criminal justice system.<sup>1,2</sup> Research has also demonstrated that "out-of-school suspension and expulsion are in and of themselves risk factors for a range of negative developmental outcomes."<sup>3</sup> Incarceration and education are key social determinants of long-term health outcomes. While some research suggests that students with ASD are disciplined at higher rates than non-disabled peers, more research is needed to know if this is true and to what extent. If disparities exist, research will empower needed advocacy for students and families with ASD.

1. Christie CA, Jolivette K, Nelson CM. Breaking the School to prison pipeline: Identifying school risk and protective factors for youth delinquency. *Exceptionality*. Volume 13, 2005-issue 2. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327035ex1302\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327035ex1302_2)  
2. Mallett CA. The school-to-prison pipeline: a critical review of the punitive paradigm shift. *Child Adolesc Soc Work J*. 33, 15-24 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-015-0397-1>  
3. Skiba RJ, Arrendondo MI, Williams NT. More than a metaphor: the contribution of exclusionary discipline to a school-to-prison pipeline. *Equity and Excellence in Education*. Volume 47, 2014-issue 4. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2014.958965>