

Discipline Reform, School Culture, and Student Achievement

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Motivation

- Schools use **discipline policy** to create environment for students to learn; **suspensions** play a major role
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 - Suspensions associated with **negative outcomes**: test scores, dropout rates, criminal behavior... [▶ In our data too!](#)
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 - Suspensions associated with **negative outcomes**: test scores, dropout rates, criminal behavior... [▶ In our data too!](#)
 - **Racial disparities** in suspension rates
- Policy focus on **reducing suspension rates** in 2010s
 - Effects **theoretically ambiguous**
 - Need for **rigorous empirical evidence**

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- Reform in **NYC middle schools** in 2012 [2011 Code](#) [2012 Code](#)
 - Eliminated suspensions for **non-violent, disorderly behavior** (e.g. cursing or persistent non-compliance)
 - Additional text in discipline code promoting non-punitive interventions (e.g., counseling, mediation)

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- **Methodology:** difference-in-differences
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- High level **takeaways:**
 - The reform **benefited** middle school students (↑ test scores)
 - Not explained by **direct effects** of reducing time misbehaving students spend outside their classrooms
 - Gains associated with **improvements in school culture**

Causal Impact of Suspensions/Discipline Policy

- **Bacher-Hicks et al. (2019)**
 - A. Quasi-random assignment to **school** with more suspensions
- **Lacoe & Steinberg (2019)**
 - A. Control for school, time and individual **fixed effects**
 - B. Change in **discipline code** as IV for individual suspension
- **Other:** Kinsler (2011, 2013); Cobb-Clark et al. (2015); Curran (2016); Lacoe & Steinberg (2018); Perry and Morris (2014); Pope & Zuo (2020); Skiba & Knesting (2001); Noltemeyer et al. (2015)

Related Research

- **Disruptive peers:** Carrell & Hoekstra (2010); Carrell et al. (2018)
- **Racial gaps:** McFadden and Marsh (1992); Rocque (2010); Morris and Perry (2016); Skiba et al. (2002, 2014)

- **District-wide guidelines** with five levels of infractions, each with range of allowable interventions
 - **Level 1** - Uncooperative/noncompliant behavior
Has not been used for some time
 - **Level 2** - Disorderly behavior
e.g., profane, obscene, vulgar language or gestures
 - **Level 3** - Disruptive behavior
e.g., minor altercation/horseplay
 - **Level 4** - Aggressive or injurious/harmful behavior
e.g., altercation and/or physically aggressive behavior
 - **Level 5** - Seriously dangerous or violent behavior
e.g., weapon possession
- **Variation in implementation** across schools and grades, determined by principals and teachers [▶ Decision Tree](#)

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- **Identifying assumption:** treatment groups follow parallel trends in test scores absent treatment

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 - Use **actual average suspension rates** for Level 2 infractions in 2006-2007: \hat{s}_j (recall: reform was in 2012)
2. Split into **two discrete treatment groups**: above-median and below-median \hat{s}_j

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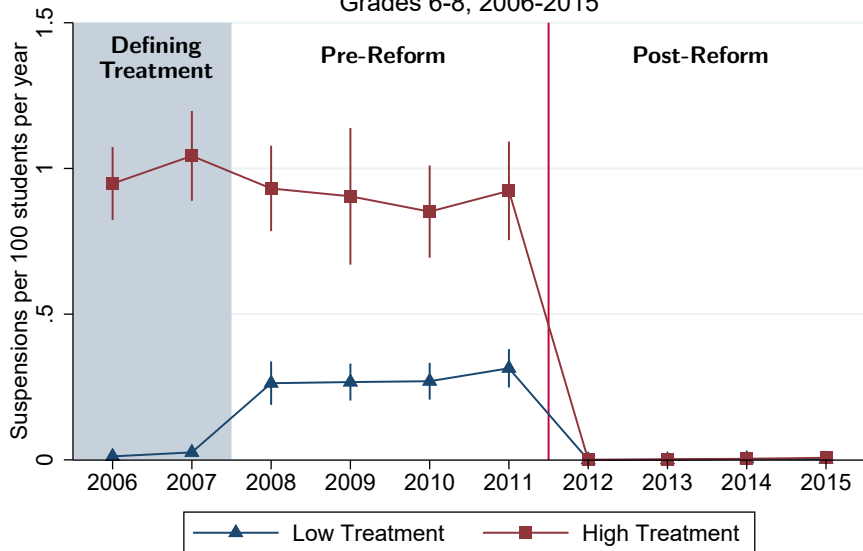
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High Treatment

Low Treatment

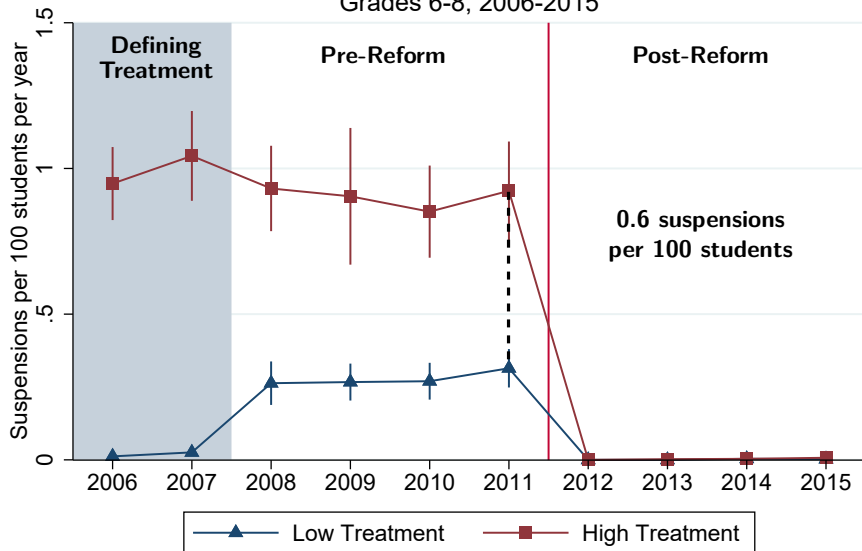
Suspensions for Level 2 Infractions

Grades 6-8, 2006-2015



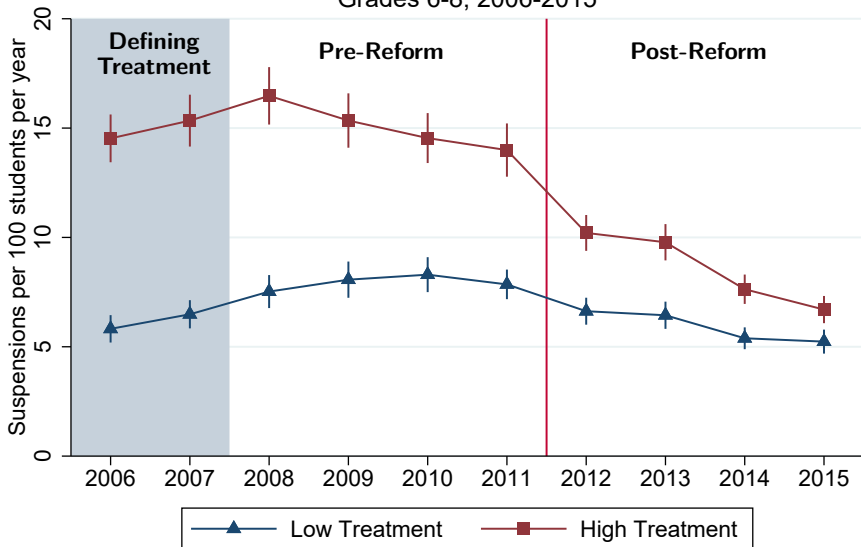
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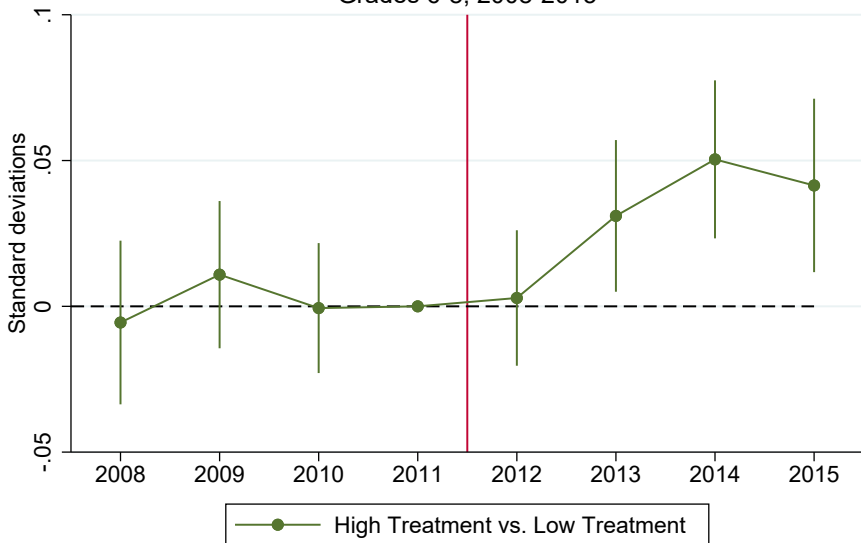
Suspensions for All Infractions

Grades 6-8, 2006-2015



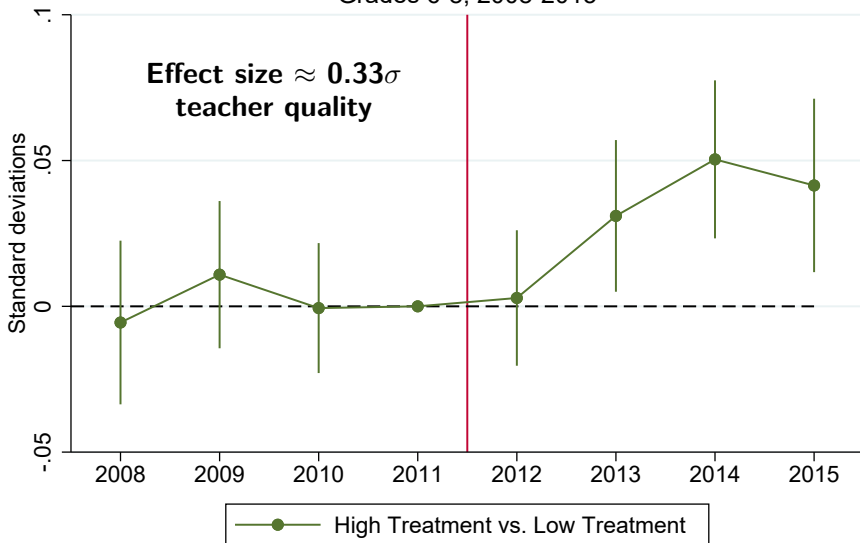
Treatment Effects on Math Scores

Grades 6-8, 2008-2015



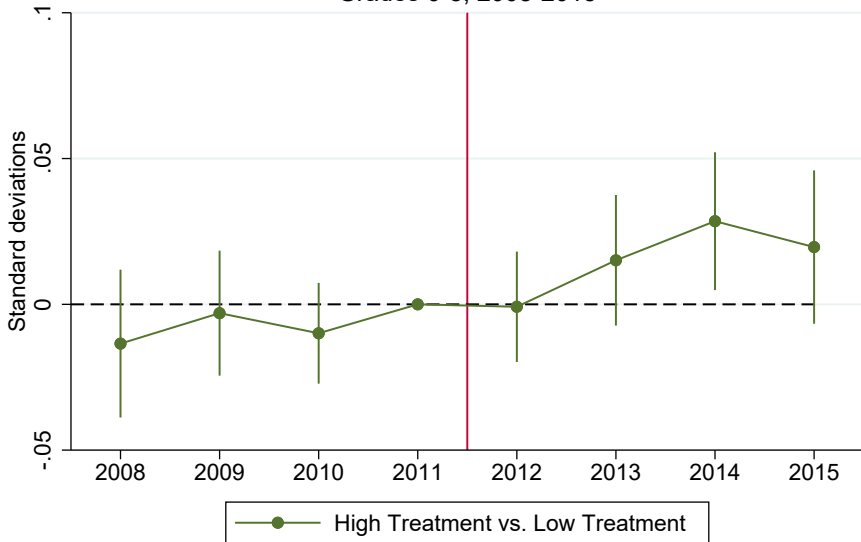
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Treatment Effects on Reading Scores

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1. **Who benefited** from more relaxed discipline?

- Treatment effects nearly identical for boys and girls ▶ Boys/Girls
- Suggestive evidence of larger gains for white students than for black or Hispanic students ▶ Race
- Similar gains for high and low suspension risk students ▶ Graph

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2. Can the test score gains be explained by the **direct effects** of reducing disruption for misbehaving students?
 - Direct effects would have to be implausibly large [▶ Calcs](#)
 - We bound direct effects in the short term [▶ They are small!](#) [▶ Details](#)
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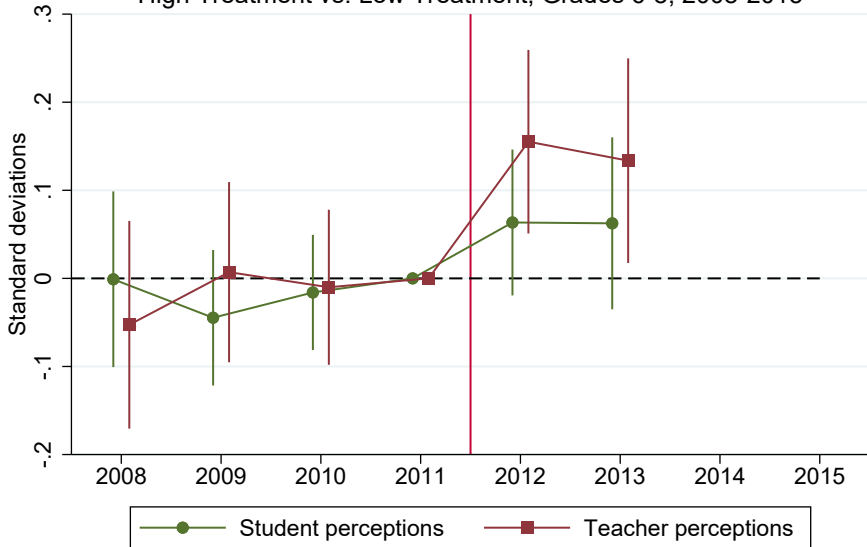
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3. All suggests that the benefits are due to broad changes in **classroom dynamics** rather than lost instructional time etc.
 - Supported by evidence of changes in school culture

How did school culture change in response to the more relaxed disciplinary policy?

- Survey evidence from teachers and students shows **school culture improvements** along three dimensions:
 1. Students treated teachers with **more respect**
 2. Students and teachers felt **safer** at school
 3. Perceptions of **student behavior improved**
- Schools reported **fewer disruptive incidents**
- Improvements in **culture** associated with improvements in **test scores** (and big enough to explain them)

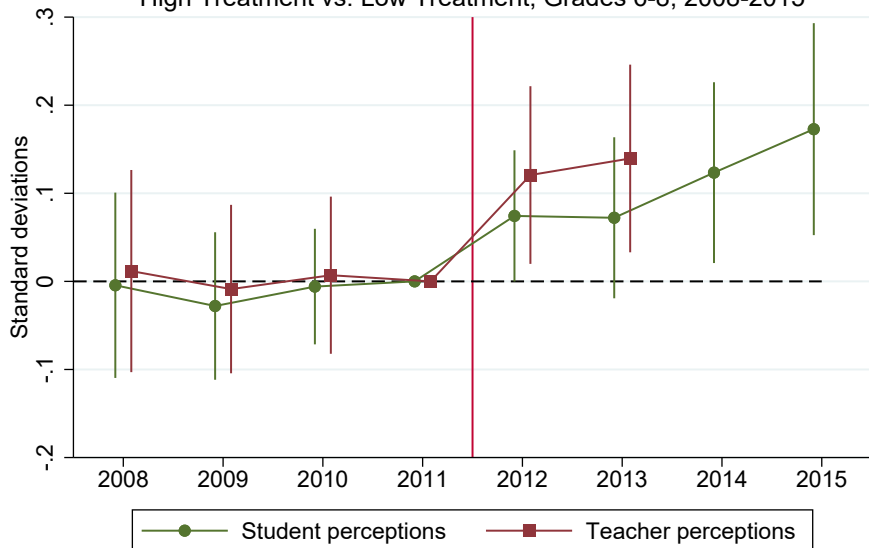
Treatment Effects on Respect for Teachers

High Treatment vs. Low Treatment, Grades 6-8, 2008-2015



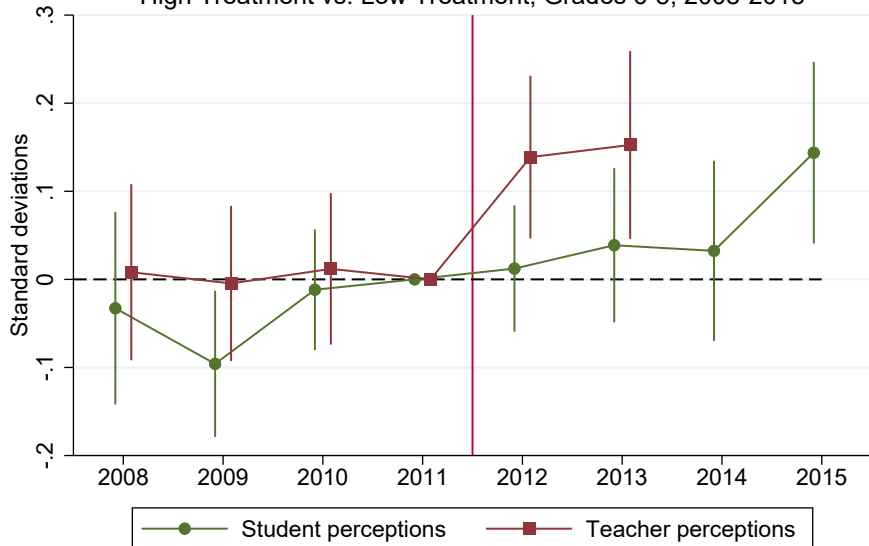
Treatment Effects on School Safety

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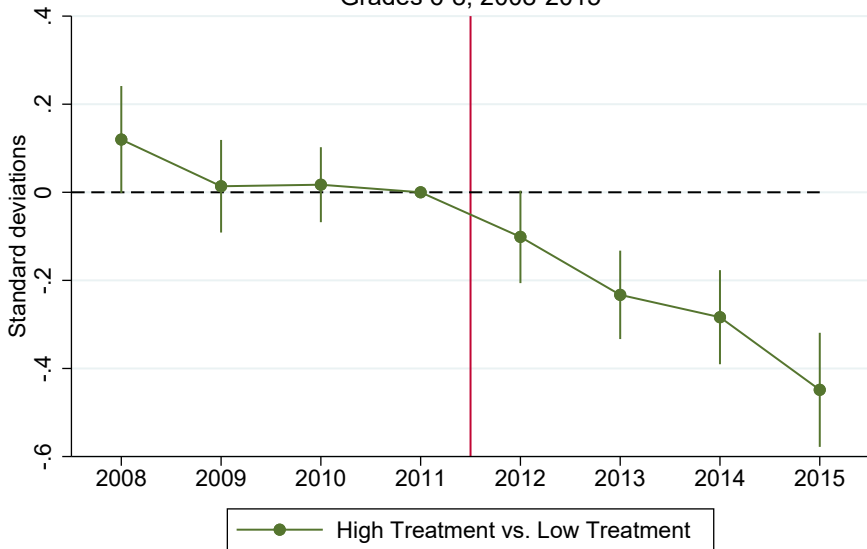
Treatment Effects on Student Behavior

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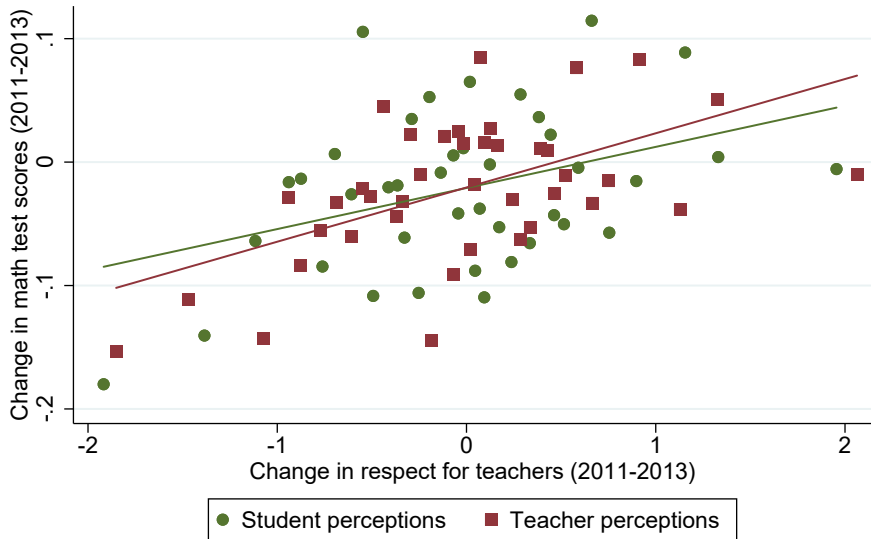
Treatment Effects on Reported Disruptive Incidents

Grades 6-8, 2008-2015



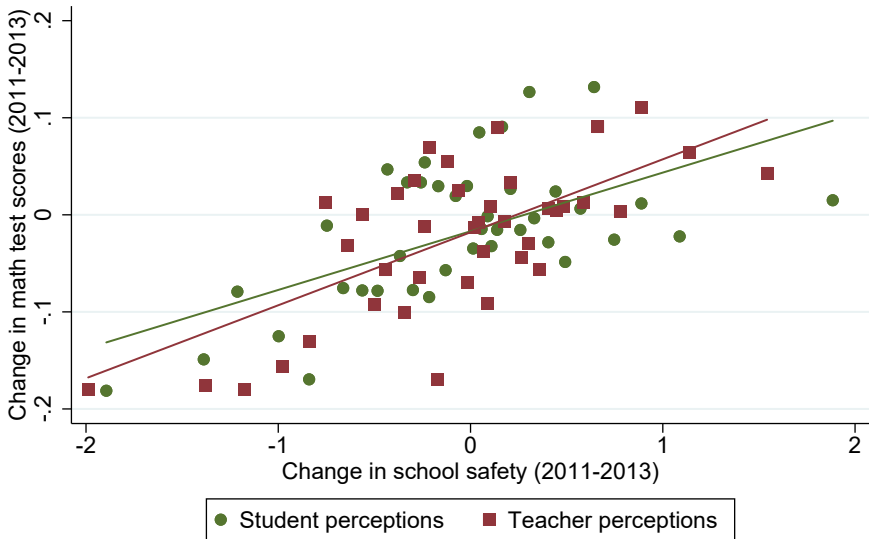
Math Test Scores and Respect for Teachers

Grades 6-8, 2011-2013



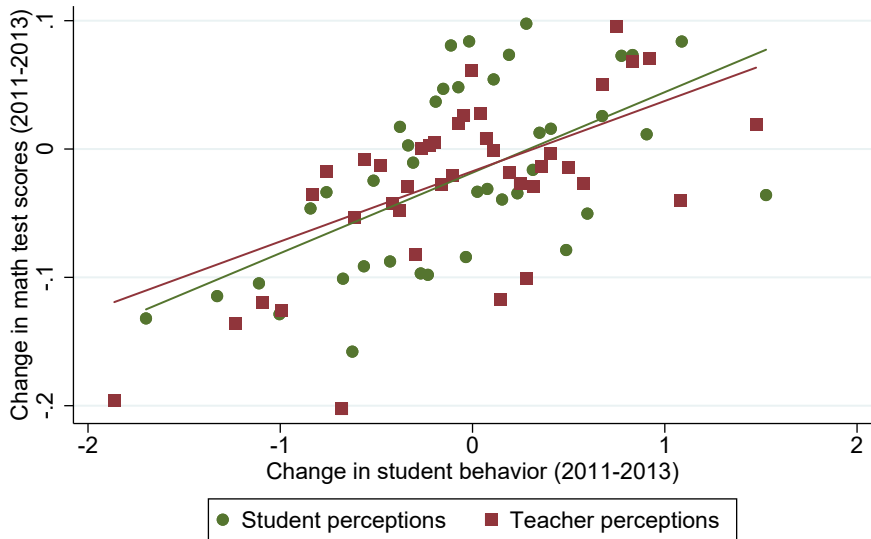
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5. Gains from discipline reform likely to be particularly important for **minority students**

Thank You!
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