Chapter 6
Separate and Still Unequal:
An Analysis of School Discipline

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will examine the disproportionate rate of minority school suspensions relative to race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, grade level, and school population size. Although Black students account for 20% of the school population for this chapter's study, the rate of in-school discipline for Black students far exceeded the rates for White and Hispanic students. Notably, the authors find that race, gender, socioeconomic status, and grade level are correlated with the disproportionate disciplinary practices imposed upon minority students regardless of grade level. In this chapter, the authors review the previous research on race, gender, poverty, grade level, and school discipline before laying out their methodological approach for understanding suspension disparities. After analysis, they conclude with recommendations for improvement.

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ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES AND SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS

Prior research highlights the ineffectiveness of zero-tolerance school disciplinary policies (Cramer et al., 2014; Noguera, 2010). These policies - established to create safer learning environments for all students - have negatively and disproportionately impacted students of color, the economically disadvantaged, and those classified for special education. This is evidenced by the over-representation of Black, poor, and developmentally challenged students disciplined within schools. School-based zero-tolerance policies were originally derived from federal drug policies designed to deter drug trafficking through immediate, harsh, and legally mandated punishments and initially focused on weapons and substance use. However, many schools nationwide later expanded these policies to include infractions which have relatively negligible impact on school safety (Smith & Harper, 2015; Wallace Jr et al., 2008). The continued implementation of zero-tolerance policies for all infractions, including discretionary ones, has marginalized students of color, the economically disadvantaged, and those classified for special education, and led to these groups overrepresentation in the school discipline system. The high rate at which racial minority students receive multiple suspensions is the clearest evidence against these zero-tolerance policies. An analysis of Texas student suspension data demonstrated African American students were four-times more likely to receive suspensions than White or Hispanic students for similar behavioral infractions (Fabelo et al., 2011). While the suspension rates are disproportionately high for Black, poor, and developmentally challenged or special education students, it is important to note that some students may fall into more than one of these categories (Texans Care for Children, 2019).

The current research examines reasons for school discipline and the influence of student's racial classification. To do so, a convenience sampling of 262 students from a small, rural Texas school district were analyzed. Convenience sampling was used due to time constraints and was retrieved from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). In the school district we examined, Black students accounted for almost 20% of the students in Grades 3 - 12 during the 2016 – 2017 academic year; however, the rates at which they were suspended were disproportionately higher than White and Hispanic students. Though, of the three racial groups, Hispanic students had the lowest suspension rates.

Our study also shows that high school students - in grades nine through twelve - represent the highest percentage of all students suspended, at 47 percent. Additionally, middle school students - in grades six through eight - represent the lowest percentage of the student suspension population at 21 percent. Moreover, 33 percent of students in grades 3 - 12 were suspended, and 17 percent of all students were disciplined, 47 percent of which were Black. We argue that this school district's zero-tolerance

policies contribute to these suspension frequencies and the racial disparity observed in the school discipline system.

RACE AND SUSPENSIONS

Across the United States, Black and Hispanic students are more likely than their White classmates to be suspended (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). According to the United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three-times greater than White or Hispanic students. On average, 5 percent of White students are suspended, compared to 16 percent of Black students (OCR, 2014). Research shows that White and Asian students are more likely to be given in-school suspension (ISS), whereas Black and Hispanic students have higher rates of out-of-school suspension (OSS) (Besse & Canastota, 2018; Kamenetz, 2018; Losen et al., 2015). Further, Black high school students are twice as likely (12.8%) to be suspended as White (6.1%) or Hispanic (6.3%) high school students (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019; Kamenetz, 2018).

Approximately 2.6-million public school students (5.3%) received one or more OSS in an academic year. A higher percentage of Black students (13.7%) than any other race of students received an OSS. Hispanic students represented 4.5% of OSSs, while White students accounted for 3.4%. Asian and American Indian or Alaska Native students represented 1.1% and 6.7% of OSSs population, respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The percentage of all Black students (4%) who were expelled was higher than the percentages for students of all other racial groups. Among other racial groups, 2% of White students and 1% of Hispanic students were expelled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

Black students are more likely to be referred for discipline or suspended as well as experience more severe forms of discipline, like corporal punishment (Lundberg, 2020; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). Research shows Black and Hispanic youth are often sent to the office for distinctive and subjective reasons, such as disrespect and perceived threat. Conversely, White students were more likely to be referred for more objective reasons, including smoking, vandalism, and leaving school without permission (Wallace Jr et al., 2008). Black students are also more likely to receive multiple suspensions than their White counterparts.

As the data shows, school suspensions and expulsions disproportionately affect students of color. Examining a small rural Texas city's school district, our study found Black students are suspended at similar rates to Black students around the state and the country, which prompted examining underlying patterns of behavior or official responses to that behavior. What we find interesting is that Hispanic

students in this school district had the lowest rate of suspension compared to the Black and White racial/ethnic groups.

GENDER AND SUSPENSIONS

Male students are more likely to receive suspensions than female students, irrespective of race or age. An examination of 2.6-million public schools showed male students received twice as many (7.3%) OSS when compared to female students (3.2%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Male students when compared to female students received more out-of-school suspensions in all the racial groups. Approximately 18 percent of Black male students received one or more OSS compared to 9.6 percent of Black female students. The percentage of Black male students (17.6%) who received OSS was the highest of male students from any racial group. A similar pattern was observed among female students, with Black female students (9.6%) receiving the highest percentage of OSS (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). As such, Black female students are two times more likely to receive office discipline referrals, and five times more likely to experience expulsion than their White and Hispanic counterparts (Lundberg, 2020; Wallace Jr et al., 2008). While males receive more than two-thirds of suspensions, Black females are suspended at higher rates (12%) than female students of any other race or ethnicity and most Hispanic/White boys (OCR, 2014).

ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED AND SUSPENSIONS

Students coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are disciplined at disproportionate rates compared to their more economically stable counterparts (Balfanz et al., 2014). Economically disadvantaged students come from households with incomes that are below average for either the State or the United States of America. Non-White youth are often less economically advantaged than White youth (Wallace Jr. et al., 2009). Black economically disadvantaged students have higher rates of suspension than their White and Hispanic counterparts. Male students from disadvantaged families have higher rates of disciplinary problems, lower achievement scores, and fewer high school completions than female students from comparable backgrounds (Autor et al., 2019). Moreover, lower social class children are more likely to experience traumatic and frightening experiences which influence their behavior - likely contributing to their overrepresentation in the school discipline system (Morsy & Rothstein, 2019). In our study of the small rural Texas cities' discipline reports, we found 95 percent of the suspended Black students were

economically disadvantaged. Conversely, 58 percent of the White students suspended were economically disadvantaged, and 79 percent of the suspended Hispanic student population were economically disadvantaged.

GRADE LEVEL AND SUSPENSIONS

Studies have shown middle school students are disciplined more than elementary and high school students. Skiba et al. (1997) reported 41 percent of students from 19-midwestern middle schools were involved in disciplinary actions, and 33 percent of those disciplinary actions were OSS. Additionally, 32 percent of suspensions were high school students. Moreover, research suggests these suspensions peak in 9th grade (Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002). Within the current research, the highest frequency of school suspensions was recorded for Grades nine through twelve, with 52-Black students representing the largest population. The lowest number of school suspensions was recorded for Grades six through eight, with Hispanic students representing the smallest population.

CURRENT STUDY

The current research examines reasons for school discipline and the influence of student's racial classification. To do so, a convenience sampling of 262 students from a small, rural Texas school district were analyzed. Convenience sampling was used due to time constraints and was retrieved from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). In the school district we examined, Black students accounted for almost 20% of the students in Grades 3 - 12 during the 2016 – 2017 academic year; however, the rates at which they were suspended were disproportionately higher than White and Hispanic students. Though, of the three racial groups, Hispanic students had the lowest suspension rates.

The student behavior used to justify disciplinary action during the 2016 and 2017 academic year was controlled for. This was done by analyzing the reasons for suspensions and coding the data. By doing so, our study was able to better understand which behaviors motivated school disciplinary actions. We evaluated the *Race/ Ethnicity, Grade Level, Gender*, *Economic Disadvantage, and Reasons for Suspension* of each student disciplined. To better understand the nature of multiple suspensions and the ability of suspensions to deter subsequent suspensions, we examined how often multiple suspensions occur. As such, our study aimed to address the following research questions: 1) do student suspensions vary based on student race? and 2) does racial grouping predict the number of student suspensions?

Table 1. Suspension Types

ISS	OSS	DAEP
In School Suspension	Out of School Suspension (3 Day Limit)	Continue Other Districts DAEP
Partial Day ISS	Partial Day OSS	Continue Prior Year DAEP
Partial Day Time Out		DAEP Placement (Student Not Expelled)
School Detention		
Time Out		

METHODOLOGY

Participant and Setting

Secondary data was collected and analyzed to determine if there are racial disparities in school discipline of a Texas school district. School discipline was measured by tracking the number of school suspensions and classifying them into distinct types. From the various suspension types, related suspension types were grouped into three major categories: In-School Suspension (ISS), Out-of-School Suspension (OSS), and Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP). Table 1 displays the three major suspension categories (ISS, OSS and DAEP) and their respective subcategories to directly compare the suspension categories.

The current sample comprised of students from a small rural Texas school district, between Grade 3 through 12. In Table 2, the total student population for Grades 3 to 12 was 1,588. White students represented the highest subsample (n) within the sample (N), n = 715, and Hispanic students (n = 550) were the next highest population. Black students represented the lowest population with 323 students, which accounts for 20.3% of the student population; however, Black students also represented 48 percent of the student suspension population. During this academic year, 722 suspensions were documented, and 262 students were reportedly suspended. Therein suggesting some students were suspended multiple times. Despite being the smallest racial minority, Black students were overly represented in the student suspension population.

Throughout the research article, ISS, OSS, and DAEP grouped together are referred to as suspensions. We ran a cross tabular analysis to determine if *Race/Ethnicity*, *Gender, Economic Disadvantage*, *Number of Times Suspended* were correlated. We

Table 2. Student Population Demographics

Race	Student Population n (%)
White	715 (45)
Hispanic	550 (35)
Black	323 (20)
Total	1588

Source: Texas Education Agency

also examined the degree to which students were suspended multiple times. Then, we calculated the percent differences of the students to determine the comparative percentages of Black, White, and Hispanic student suspension. Aggregate data were used for this study, and the focus of the study was on students suspended, not the suspension occurrences. As such, the percent difference is critical in determining the comparative percentage of suspensions for each student in each racial/ethnic group.

Two separate datasets comprised the current sample of student suspension information. The first contained information regarding 262 students which had been suspended. The second dataset contained categorical suspension information for each of the 722 instances wherein these 262 students were suspended. The first dataset contained the following variables: 1) student ID; 2) gender; 3) race; 4) grade level; 5) economically disadvantaged status; 6) number of suspensions; and 7) multiple suspension occurrences. Dataset two contained the subgroup discipline types, and three-major group discipline types amongst the variables mentioned in dataset one.

Measures

Several variables in the study were coded with subcategories to provide the structure for subsequent statistical analysis. The race variable was coded as follows: Black = 1, White = 2, and Hispanic = 3. Gender was coded as Male = 0 and Female = 1. For grade levels, Grades 3 through 5 = 0, Grades 6 through 8 = 1, and Grades 9 through 12 = 2. Economically disadvantaged students, those who qualify for free and or reduced priced lunches, were classified with a code of "1", and non-economically disadvantaged students with "0". The major discipline categories of ISS, OSS, and DAEP were coded "0", "1", and "2" respectively. The response variable for both analyses is the number of suspensions that occurred.

Statistical Analysis

The statistical analyses conducted in this study include calculating percent difference, Relative Rate Index (RRI), a standard multiple regression, and ANOVA.

The percentage difference is usually calculated to find the difference in percentage between two numbers/values. Percentage difference equals the absolute value of the change in value, divided by the average of the 2 numbers, all multiplied by 100. The percent difference is calculated using equation one below.

$$\% \text{ Difference} = \frac{NewValue - InitialValue}{\left(\frac{NewValue + InitialValue}{2}\right)} \times 100 \quad (1)$$

The percent difference was used to determine the difference in suspension between Black, White, and Hispanic students.

The RRI provides a single index number indicating the likelihood with which school suspensions differ for minority (Black and Hispanic students) and White students. To determine the difference between the rates of suspension for the different races and ethnicity in this school district, we calculated the RRI of the student suspended population. There are two steps to take when calculating the RRI. First, the rate of the index group (each race) needs to be determined, followed by the rate of the minority group(s) that need to be divided by the rate of the White group. Equation two below represents the formula for the Relative Rate Index.

$$RRI = \frac{Rate\,of\,Index\,Group}{Rate\,of\,Reference\,Group} \quad (2)$$

The Relative Rate Index provides a picture of the disparity in school discipline across races.

A standard multiple regression was conducted for the variables contained in the dataset to determine their impact on the number of suspensions. The predictors involved in the multiple regression included race, gender, grade level, economic disadvantage, and discipline type. All the predictors-were dummy variables coded to provide a reference variable for the analysis. The reference variables for the predictors used were White, males, Grades 3 through 5, not economically disadvantaged, and ISS for discipline type. A total of eight-variables were entered into the regression analysis. The standard multiple regression was conducted to determine which predictors had a significant impact on the number of suspensions that occur.

After conducting the regression analysis, a two-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there were significant differences among race and discipline types. These two variables were used as outputs from the regression analysis. The two independent variables, race and discipline type, could be used in the analysis using the original codes for the race variable and discipline type. The response variable remained as suspensions for the analysis.

Results

In Table 3, student suspensions are displayed by grade level and race. In the three levels consisting of Grades 3 through 5, 6 through 8, and 9 through 12, Black students account for the most suspensions as compared to White students and Hispanic students (47%). Across the racial groups, grade levels 9 through 12 have the highest percentage of suspensions when compared to the lower grade levels.

Table 3. Student Suspensions by Grade Level and Race

Grades	Black n (%)
3 - 5	39 (31)
6 – 8	33 (27)
9 - 12	52 (42)
Total	124 (100)

Note. *indicates percentages that exceed 100% due to rounding of percentages, but represent 100%

Table 4 shows how student suspensions differ by gender and race. Black, Hispanic and White male students tend to have more suspensions than all female students (63%). The largest gap between males and females in each group occurs among Hispanic students (46%), with the lowest gap between Black males and females (12%).

Table 4. Student Suspensions by Gender and Race

Suspension Occurrence	Black n (%)
Male	69 (56)
Female	55 (44)
Total	124 (100)

Source: Texas Education Agency

In Table 5, students that were economically disadvantaged were compared with those that were not. For each race, it is evident that economically disadvantaged students have a higher percentage of overall suspension as opposed to those not economically disadvantaged (80%). Black students have the highest percentage of suspensions among the races (95%) for economically disadvantaged students. The next highest within their race is Hispanic students (79%), followed by White students (58%).

Table 5. Student Suspensions by Economically Disadvantaged Students and Race

Status	Blacks n (%)
Not Economically Disadvantaged	5 (5)
Economically Disadvantaged	115 (95)
Total	120 (100)

Source: Texas Education Agency

Single and multiple suspension occurrences are compared in Table 6. The percentage of multiple suspension occurrences is greater than 1.5-times the number of single suspension occurrences (63%). As such, the same students tend to have multiple offenses, with 262 students accumulating 722 suspensions. Of these, Black students had the highest percentage of multiple suspensions at (68%).

Table 6. Single and Multiple Suspension Occurrences

Suspension Occurrence	Black n (%)
Single	40 (32)
Multiple	84 (68)
Total	124 (100)

Source: Texas Education Agency

In Table 7, suspensions by discipline type are displayed relative to race. Among the discipline types, ISS is the most common type (72%) administered to students, followed by OSS and then DAEP. When comparing the racial gap by discipline type, Black students experience more suspensions than White and Hispanic students. For ISS, Black students exceed White students at about three-times the occurrences and Hispanic students by about five-times. With OSS, Black students exceed their White classmates by five-times and Hispanic classmates by more than 10-times.

DAEP for Black students exceeds White students and Hispanic students by three-times for both races.

Table 7. Suspension by Discipline Types and Race

Race	ISS n (%)
Black	177 (49)
White	124 (34)
Hispanic	61 (17)
TOTAL	362 (100)

Note: *indicates percentages which exceed 100% due to rounding of percentages, but represent 100%
Source: Texas Education Agency

The percentage difference of students suspended by race was calculated using the three races included in the study. The percent difference of Black to White students suspended is 31.80%, while the percent difference of Black to Hispanic Students Suspended is 88.37%. The percent difference between Black students suspended and Hispanic students suspended (88.37%) is higher than the percent difference between Black students and White students (31.77%). This suggests Black students are 88 percent more likely to be suspended than Hispanic students and 31 percent more likely to be suspended than White students.

The relative rate index was calculated for Black and Hispanic students to compare suspension rates relative to White students. The rates of the White, Black, and Hispanic students were 12.6%, 38.4%, and 8.7%, respectively, leading to a RRI of 3.05 for Black to White students and 0.69 for Hispanic to White students. The RRI's show Black students are three-times more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts. Hispanic students are about half as likely to be suspended as White students. Black students make up only 20% of the student population, but they are three-times more likely than White students (45% of the student population) to receive school suspensions.

The standard multiple regression procedure was used to test whether a relationship exists between race, gender, grade level, economic disadvantage, discipline type, and

Table 8. Standard Multiple Regression for Factors Impacting Number of Suspensions

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t	*p*
(Constant)	2.019	.399		5.062	.000
Black	.889	.399	.187	2.169	.009*
Hispanic	-.261	.409	-.042	-.637	.524
Female	-.413	.302	-.084	-1.369	.172
Grade 6-8	.026	.416	.004	.062	.950
Grade 9-12	.413	.330	.087	1.252	.212
EconDisAdv	.290	.383	.049	.756	.451
OSS	-.733	.438	-.101	-1.674	.095
DAEP	2.387	.565	.267	4.224	.000**

Note: R = .402; R Square = .161; Adjusted R Square = .135; F = 6.058; DF = 8,252; p = .000
*Significant at the .01 level
*Significant at the .001 level

the number of suspensions. As shown in Table 8, the regression model produced a multiple correlation coefficient of .402. Predictors in the model accounted for 16.1 percent (Adjusted = 13.5%) of the variance in the number of suspensions. A linear relationship was found to exist between all predictors and the number of suspensions (F (8, 252) = 6.058; p = .000). Black race is .889 points higher than White race in the number of suspensions. DAEP is 2.387 points higher than ISS in the number of suspensions for the discipline type. Black (t(252) = 2.169, p<.009) and DAEP (t(252) = 4.224, p<.000) were independent predictors of the number of suspensions among students in Grades 3 to 12.

A two-way ANOVA was used to test whether there were differences between race and discipline type on the number of suspensions. As shown in Table 9, the ANOVA analysis produced a significant difference based on the main effect of

Table 9. Differences in Suspension Occurrence Based on Race and Suspension Type

Source	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	F	*p*
(Intercept)					
Race	26.020	2	13.010	2.639	.073
Discipline Type	65.231	2	32.615	6.615	.002**
Race*Discipline Type	13.997	4	3.499	.710	.586
Error	1242.421	252	4.930		

R Squared = .159 (Adjusted R Squared = .132)
***Significant at the .001 level

Discipline Type (F(2, 252) = 6.615; p = .002). Race did not produce a significant difference (F(2, 252) = 2.639; p = .073), although the results were slightly above the significance criterion. The interaction between Race and Discipline Type did not register a significant result (F (4, 252) = .710; p = .586).

As a result of the Two-Way ANOVA, a Scheffe test was conducted to determine where the significance lies regarding Discipline Type. The post-hoc comparison test indicated a significant difference between DAEP and OSS, p=.001, and DAEP and ISS, p=.001. There was a greater difference between DAEP and OSS which means more students were likely to receive OSS than DAEP.

Table 10. Multiple Comparisons of Suspension Type

(I) Discipline Type	(J) Discipline Type	Mean Difference (I – J)	Std. Error	Sig.
ISS	OSS	.59	.421	.376
	DAEP	-2.78*	.520	.000
OSS	ISS	-.59	.421	.376
	DAEP	-3.37*	.633	.000
DAEP	ISS	2.78*	.520	.000
	OSS	3.37*	.633	.000

*Significant at the .05 level
** Significant at the .001 level

Utilizing data relevant to n = 262 suspended students, two Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) analyses were conducted to estimate the proportion of variance in the number of suspensions accounted for by economic disadvantage, gender, Hispanic/Latino, Grade, and race.

Prior to conducting the MLR, assumptions testing was performed to examine the dataset for normality, outliers, and multicollinearity, as well as normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity of residuals. Histograms indicated all variables were normally distributed and free from outliers. A bivariate Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPC) matrix was created to inspect for the absence of multicollinearity, and this assumption was violated for the race variables of White and Black/African American. Because these variables could not be merged and still calculate interpretable findings, multiple MLRs were conducted. Inspection of a histogram for standardized residuals and a scatterplot for standardized residuals against standardized predicted values indicated assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity of residuals were violated. One identified outlier was removed (.38%), and afterward, the sample met these assumptions. Table 11 summarizes the results of the MLR wherein White

Table 11. Standard Multiple Regression for Factors Impacting Number of Suspensions, including Black/African American Race

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t	*p*
(Constant)	1.49	.09	0	17.31	.00*
Economic Disadvantage	.09	.08	.07	1.05	.29
Sex	-.12	.06	-.12	-1.85	.07
Hispanic/ Latino	-.02	.09	-.02	-.27	.79
Grade	.07	.03	.13	1.98	.05*
Black/African American	.07	.07	.08	.99	.33

Note: R = .18; R Square = .03; Adjusted R Square = .02; F = 1.8; DF = 5, 255; p = .144

race as a dummy-coded variable was removed, but Black/African American race was included.

Table 12 summarizes the results of the MLR wherein Black/African American race as a dichotomous variable was removed, and White race was included.

Table 12. Standard Multiple Regression for Predictors of Number of suspensions, including White Race

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t	*p*
(Constant)	1.57	.11	0	14.86	.00
Economic Disadvantage	.09	.08	.07	1.05	.29
Sex	-.12	.06	-.12	-1.85	.07
Hispanic/ Latino	-.10	.09	-.08	-1.16	.25
Grade	.07	.03	.13	1.98	.05*
White	-.07	.07	-.07	-.99	.33

Note: R = .18; R Square = .03; Adjusted R Square = .02; F = 1.8; DF = 5, 255; p = .144

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to establish whether the practices in levying suspensions were disproportionate regarding race, gender, economic disadvantage, and discipline type in a small rural Texas school district. While previous research

covers such topics, our study is unique in that reported reasonings for student suspensions within a single Texas school district were consistent with more robust findings. As such, our study constitutes somewhat of a case-study for school suspensions within this small, rural Texas school district. When first looking at the number of suspensions by race and grade level, we found that suspension levels were consistently higher for students in grades 9-12. Also, Black students incurred a greater number of suspensions than other races (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2019; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019) while their Hispanic counterparts had the lowest rate of suspension compared to the Black and White racial/ethnic groups. This was an interesting discovery because while Hispanic students represented the second highest student population in the school district, they are still a minority population. Therefore, how do the Hispanic students differ from the Black students and why do they have the lowest student suspended population while Black students with the lowest student population represent the highest number of students suspended? This is a question that can be evaluated in future research.

For gender and race, males tend to have higher rates of suspension than females. Black males and females are relatively balanced in the number of suspensions experienced, while Hispanic males and females have a much greater difference in the number of males suspended versus Hispanic females (Angton, 2020; Kamenetz, 2018; Losen & Skiba, 2011).

Economically disadvantaged students have more suspensions than those students not economically disadvantaged. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds often do not have the pre-academic skills and advantages that their peers do; therefore, they are set up for low academic performance, which in turn lowers their teachers' expectations of them. This negative bias of teachers towards their economically disadvantaged students increases the chances of economically disadvantaged students being suspended (Jennings, 2020). Also, our research shows that Black students make up a higher percentage of suspensions among students who were economically disadvantaged. There appears to be a relatively strong correlation between Black students and economic disadvantage (Loveless, 2017; Welsh & Little, 2018).

Multiple suspension occurrences are significantly higher than the occurrences with single suspensions. This parallels the fact that Black students, in comparison to their White and Hispanic counterparts, have more multiple suspensions than single suspensions (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019; Losen & Skiba, 2011). Overall, some students tend to consistently have multiple suspensions, which contributes to the high ratio of suspension occurrences to students suspended (722:262).

Comparing the three-major category discipline types of ISS, OSS, and DAEP, Black students appear to have more suspensions as compared to other races. In fact, Black students are suspended in the range of 1.5 to 3-times more than Hispanic and White students, respectively. As predicted by the statistical analysis, race and

discipline types are relatively strong predictors of the number of suspensions. The discipline type of DAEP goes along with the occurrences for Black students among the other races. This suggests, on average, Black students not only are suspended more, but they are levied greater penalties in terms of suspensions with more DAEP for discipline.

In the first two MLR models, economic disadvantage, gender, Hispanic/Latino, Grade, and race accounted for 18% of the variability in suspensions among white and Black/African American students; however, both models were non-significant. This means it is uncertain if the variance explained by either model is due to chance. Moreover, none of the predictors in either model was significant using alpha .01. While the variance explained may be due to chance, the strongest predictor in both models was Grade. In both models, students having more-than-one suspension could be predicted by a .13 increase in grade level.

Despite the value of this research, there are limitations to the study that we must consider. The data used in this research was derived from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and was only relevant to a small, rural Texas school district. As such, the findings herein are not representative of a larger population but do offer an insight into the specific Texas school district. Moreover, from our study, future research can begin to infer and examine whether the relationships found within our study exist more broadly. Additionally, while the secondary data collected from this agency is concise, it does not allow researchers to follow individual students' history. As such, the data is without detailed information about either the pathway to an exclusionary discipline event or students' background. There is no information about the mental and behavioral status of the students. Existing literature posits students who have experienced trauma or *adverse childhood experiences (ACE)*, and students with mental impairments like *attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)* tend to act-out at school. Suspensions seem like quick fixes to these student outbursts and serve as an incentive for continued unruly behavior (Patrick Skahill et al., 2019; Ford et al., 2017; Iselin, 2011). That is, knowing the behavioral and mental make-up of suspended students is vital to the study of disproportionate school discipline. The behavioral data of the students suspended can help policymakers assess and understand how exclusionary discipline is used at individual schools and what areas of policy and practice need changing (Weinstein, 2019; Acevedo, 2016). Behavioral data of students disciplined also provides insight into the mindset of the students and alternative perspectives of why some students are more likely to receive multiple suspensions. The analysis of discipline data in conjunction with behavioral data provides a more in-depth overview of the specific challenges students and teachers face. Moreover, this presents school administrations and policymakers with reliable data they can use to implement more effective policies (Weinstein, 2019).

The sample used within this study comprised of high populations of White students and a low population of Black and Hispanic students. As such, when analyzing the school discipline data, the overrepresentation of the Black students in the school discipline population highlights racial disparities; however, no discipline data from predominantly Black schools were analyzed. Such schools may have differing disparities, and White students as racial minorities may be overrepresented in the school discipline population (Acevedo, 2016). That is, observations made from the current sample are not generalizable beyond the current case study.

This study is not able to directly measure and account for school or administrators' propensity to offer students Restorative Interventions instead of Exclusionary Discipline in response to a discipline incident (Anyon et al., 2020; Gordon, 2018). The high number of multiple suspensions may be a consequence of not enough Restorative Interventions. More data on this factor of school discipline may help us determine if Restorative Interventions influence the rates of suspension (Kline, 2016).

The dataset used in this project was three-years old. Many changes in school discipline and school policies may have occurred in the past three-years. For example, the school district for this dataset placed a moratorium on discretionary suspension and has seen a reduction in the total number of suspensions and the racial and ethnic disparities in school suspensions. As such, whatever observations are made from this data may no longer be applicable to the school district currently (Anyon et al., 2020; Gordon, 2018; Marchbanks III & Blake, 2018). In 2019, the 86th Texas Legislature passed several bills that made changes in the education code dealing with issues of school safety and student discipline. Some of these changes may alter how schools in Texas are disciplined moving forward. One such change bans schools from issuing exclusionary discipline to students at the elementary level and below. Recent school discipline statistics show that exclusionary discipline has decreased overall, however school suspensions are still high in K – 12 grades (Anderson & McKenzie, 2022: Rafa, 2022). Colorado's largest school district has implemented and evaluated restorative practices at several school sites since 2003 and over the period of implementation, suspension rates have decreased, racial disparities have reduced, and test scores have improved for all student groups in nearly every subject, every year (Rafa, 2022).

Another important limitation of this study is the narrow assessment of disproportionality in school discipline. This study compares the discipline rates across races and assesses the differences in economic disadvantage among the students disciplined population, but the study does not assess the disproportion of school discipline among those with disabilities and those of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) community (Anyon et al., 2020; Marchbanks III & Blake, 2018). Other disproportionalities in the school discipline of this small

Texas school district may account for the uneven frequency of disciplinary actions against certain students.

Existing literature on school discipline focuses on suspension categories, and not the reasons given for individual student suspensions (Acevedo, 2016; Losen & Skiba, 2011). The lack of access to disaggregate data forced previous researchers to focus on group suspensions and suspension categories as opposed to individual student suspensions and reasons for suspensions. However, with access to disaggregate data, our study was not only able to observe the disparities in school discipline, but also able to ascertain the reason each student was suspended (Losen, 2011). Also, in this study, we observed that 69.25% of all suspensions were for discretionary reasons like failure to comply, dress code violations, cell phone usage, missed assignments, tardiness, parking issues, false reports, and cheating. Black students accounted for 57.8% of the suspensions resulting from discretionary reasons above, and they were over 20-times more likely to receive In-School Suspensions (ISS) for Verbal Altercations and Stealing compared to their White and Hispanic classmates (Gordon, 2018).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the well-documented history and current status of racially and ethnically disparate school discipline, there remains a lack of research on the behavioral justifications for the use of school discipline. Just as there are many school districts who have yet to identify and properly implement tested approaches, only a few states, such as California and Texas, are implementing reliable approaches such as a moratorium on discretionary suspensions (Agrawal, 2019; Texans Care for Children, 2019; Washburn, 2018; Michels, 2016). Our results indicate that despite motivation to address school discipline, the manner in which it is expressed is 17-times more likely to be utilized on Black students. We also found that 63% of the students suspended had multiple suspensions within an academic year. As a result, we conclude this report with a few recommendations that will assist school districts seeking to reduce disparities, increasing student compliance, and improving the overall school-community relationship.

Our first recommendation is a moratorium placed on discretionary suspensions. Our results indicated that 69.25% of all suspensions were for discretionary reasons. Black students account for 57.8% of the suspensions resulting from discretionary reasons beyond those experienced by their White (25.4%) and Hispanic (16.8%) counterparts. Black students were over 20-times more likely to receive ISS for Verbal Altercations and Stealing compared to their White and Hispanic classmates. As a result, classroom removals for these behaviors must be weighed against the

immediate and long-term impact of suspension. Exclusionary discipline should never be administered for discretionary infractions/behaviors.

A review of the previous research has demonstrated that by placing moratoriums on discretionary suspensions, school districts have been able to significantly reduce suspensions. California, Florida, New York, and Texas have recently banned suspensions of kindergarten through second-grade students for discretionary reasons such as willful defiance. With time, the effectiveness of the program will be determined (Berwick, 2016; Michels, 2016). California passed a new bill in September 2019 that placed moratoriums on suspensions from kindergarten through 8th Grade. This new bill went into effect in July 2020.

In 2015, the Seattle School Board placed a moratorium on out-of-school suspensions (OSS) for elementary grade students. A district-wide plan was also developed to further reduce OSS for all Grades. Between 2015 and 2017, there was only a 0.69% reduction in suspensions in the district. Texas has had more luck with the suspension ban on kindergarten through 2nd Grade with a 30% reduction in suspensions (Texans Care for Children, 2019; Zelinski & Bureau, 2019).

Second, we recommend the implementation and use of focus groups to grapple with the school disciplinary concerns. Focus Groups are a viable option for examining disparate discipline and safety problems. There are two-studies which applied the use of focus groups to implement school discipline reform (Griffith & Tyner, 2019; Davis, 2016; Flannery et al., 2013). The first study, Suspended Students Experiences with In-School Suspension: A Phenomenological Investigation" by Katherine Rene Evans of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, highlighted the use of focus groups to determine the effectiveness and consequences of exclusionary discipline. The study found participants - middle and high school public school teachers - expressed frustration with administrators' inconsistent application of suspension and expulsion. The study also found most reported threats to school safety reported by teachers was a lack of cohesive culture and relationships between staff and students. The second study, "Translating Research into Effective Practice: The Effects of a Universal Staff and Student Intervention on Key Indicators of School Safety and Discipline," by the University of Oregon faculty highlighted the use of focus groups to describe the effects of a universal intervention package. The package aimed at improving the safety and social behavior of students in elementary and middle schools. Nine-treatment and six-comparison, or no-intervention elementary and middle schools in three-communities participated. In a focus group interview across some treatment and comparison schools, treatment school personnel generally reported improved operation of their schools and motivation to continue with the intervention. Comparison schools cited the need for school-wide intervention and technical assistance as a top need.

By creating focus groups, schools are better able to collect qualitative information that can be used to improve upon the school's disciplinary approaches. These focus groups may also be used to improve communication and help move the conversation from observation to solution in real-time. Such an approach could lead to greater official responses for change and essentially close the racial gap in school disciplinary practices.

Utilizing findings from the focus groups in conjunction with external evaluators, our third recommendation, is for school districts to formulate a strategic task force that reports directly to the school board and superintendent. This task force should be charged with examining the school district's disciplinary policies, practices, and procedures. The overall goal would be to determine the impact of these practices and provide recommendations for reducing unnecessary disciplinary actions and racial/ethnic disparities. In addition to examining district-level data, the task force would be charged with recommending proven disciplinary models for consideration. Each year the task force would submit a report to the school board and superintendent before releasing the report for public consumption.

Schools that have implemented community-level task forces have been able to increase family engagement and cultivate student learning while at the same time improving attendance, behavior, and development (Duke Children's Law Clinic, 2015). These types of partnerships create a "connected science" in which real-world problems are used as contextual scaffolds for bridging students' community and evidence-based knowledge as a way to provide opportunities for meaningful and intellectual challenges for students (Gross et al., 2015; Bouillion & Gomez, 2001).

Similar to approaches in Maryland, Washington, Michigan, and New Jersey, the task force serves as a unique opportunity for community involvement in a pressing educational issue (Salmon, 2019; Colombi & Osher, 2015; APA, 2008). At a minimum, the task force would serve as a real-time oversight evaluator and recommender of disciplinary policies and practices.

Cultural norms across race, ethnicity, and social class, contrasting with the behavioral norms of teachers and students, may provide fertile ground for misunderstandings that contribute to the race-discipline relationship (Monroe, 2005). As a result, our fourth recommendation is the adoption of regular diversity and cultural competence training for all district teachers, staff, and administrators.

Research has shown the benefits of cultural awareness training as it relates to suspension reductions. In fact, a North Carolina middle school was able to successfully reduce racially disproportionate suspensions after requiring cultural awareness training for its teachers (Moore & Ratchford, 2007). The Boys to Men Program and Cultural Diversity training in North Carolina led to a 59.7% reduction in the discipline referrals for African American male students used in the experiment. Students who participated in the experiment were chosen because they had the highest repeated

offenses. Moreover, their academic achievements reflected the negative effect of the repeated suspensions (Moore & Ratchford, 2007).

As an alternative to suspension or school removal, one plan that has gained traction is the use of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). The PBIS framework is a promising approach for reducing insubordinate student behavior and promoting cohesive and exemplary behavior among children Kindergarten through- 12. PBIS is the application of evidence-based prevention strategies with the use of layered scales of measures and outcomes which support student academic, emotional, social, and behavioral needs (Garbacz et al., 2015).

There is evidence-based support that there is a reduction in behavior problems and improvements in positive behavior and successful emotion regulation after training in PBIS (Bradshaw et al., 2012). Their results indicated positive effects on student behavior problems, student ability to focus, social-emotional functioning, and prosocial behavior. Students in PBIS schools were 33% less likely to receive a disciplinary referral than those in non-participating schools. The effects tended to be greater among children who were first exposed to PBIS in their earlier years. Nearly 46% of North Carolina's schools were PBIS trained or had enacted the program's model. They saw a 72% decrease in the number of in-school suspensions within two years of PBIS implementation. Therefore, we not only recommend using positive behavioral interventions and supports, but the research also supports our fifth recommendation.

Lastly, we recommend the creation of a data collection and analysis portal that would ease the ability to share identified student disciplinary-specific data. Such a system would help school leaders craft a sound blueprint with measurable results for continuously improving schools so that there could be more evidence-informed decisions (American Association of School Administrators - AASA, 2004).

Similar to the Texas Education Agency's Discipline Action Group Summary Reports, most state educational databases lack individual-level disciplinary. For instance, the number of suspensions each child received in a given year. In order to better determine the necessary steps to address disciplinary challenges, researchers need to be able to determine the degree to which individual students are disciplined. In the San Francisco Unified School District, data was at the core of the district's efforts to reduce suspension. They were able to see which schools, classrooms, and teachers were suspending students the most; what interventions specific students received; and how restorative practices have been used to help students (AASA & Children's Defense Fund, 2014).

In order to identify bright spots and challenges, allocate resources effectively and ensure success for all students, educators need to be able to make data-driven decisions. Data do not necessarily evidence students are being discriminated against, but without data, it is difficult to know if all students are being treated fairly. Best

practices may be employed without school or district-specific data, but without data, it will be difficult to know what is working and what needs to be adjusted (AASA & Children's Defense Fund, 2014).

CONCLUSION

Approaches to school discipline are similar to the 'three strikes policies utilized by the criminal justice system. Both have grave consequences, the least of which is that they precipitate the school to prison pipeline. Zero tolerance policies are archaic and thus we suggest re-imagining alternative strategies to discipling children within the school setting. Zero tolerance adversely affects Black and Hispanic students more disproportionately than other students (Cramer et al., 2014, Sealey-Ruiz, 2011). Progressive action is needed to reform discipline policies to negate the racial, gender, socioeconomic, grade level, and school size determinants that sustain systemic disproportionate disciplinary sanctions meted against vulnerable populations. One such example is that of a California-based program that saw a 57%-65% reduction in school disciplinary infractions (Goyer, Parker, Cohen, Master, Apfel, Lew, & Watson, 2019). Exclusionary discipline must be reserved for the most severe disciplinary infractions to protect the student from harm.

Research suggests that students exposed to educators of the same race and similar backgrounds perform better in the classroom and do not experience as disproportionate an experience with school discipline (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Recognizing the value in culturally- sensitive pedagogy has its benefits: 1). It forces school administrators, educators, and staff to confront implicit biases and recognize that culture, learning styles, and behavior go hand-in-hand and 2). understanding cultural differences assists in the development of comprehensive approaches to student disciplinary problems. Therefore, comprehensive knowledge of vulnerable student populations can counter negative perceptions of student culture, behavior, and academic ability.

In closing, this chapter's examination of disproportionate suspensions seeks to build upon the research with the intention of finding solutions to an ever-present problem. It is apparent that current disciplinary practices have negatively affected African American student success and progressive disciplinary practices are needed to ensure a reasonable and fair educational experience.

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