



# Witnessing Change: Understanding and Addressing Disparities in School Discipline

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Russell Skiba, Ph.D.

The Equity Project at Indiana University

2014 MSAN Institute

Madison, WI

April 14, 2014



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# Is School Discipline Fair?



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161ST YEAR—NO. 200 • CHICAGO TRIBUNE

MIDWEST

Tuesday  
September 25, 2007

TRIBUNE SPECIAL REPORT

## School discipline harder on blacks

Analysis of federal data shows racial inequality in suspensions and expulsions nationwide; locally, the gap is widest in Lake and DuPage

**By Howard Witt**  
*Tribune senior correspondent*

AUSTIN, Texas — In the average New Jersey public school, African-American students are almost 60 times as likely as white students to be expelled for serious disciplinary infractions.

In Minnesota, black students are suspended six times as often as whites.

In Iowa, blacks make up just 6 percent of the statewide public school enrollment but account for 22 percent of the students who get suspended.

Fifty years after federal troops escorted nine black students through the doors of an all-white high school in Little Rock, Ark., in a landmark school integration struggle, America's public schools remain as unequal as they have ever been when measured in terms of disciplinary sanctions such as suspensions and expulsions, according to little-

**FULL COVERAGE**

- Supremacist groups seize on Jena 6 controversy. **PAGE 1**
- Compare the state-by-state racial disparity of disciplinary actions against students at [chicagotribune.com/discipline](http://chicagotribune.com/discipline)

ticed data collected by the U.S. Department of Education for the 2004-2005 school year.

In every state but Idaho, a Tribune analysis of the data shows, black students are being suspended in numbers greater

**Suspensions and expulsions by race/ethnicity**

U.S. Department of Education statistics show that black students are disciplined at a much higher rate than students of other races. In Illinois, this disparity is slightly greater than the national average.

These figures represent the makeup of the student body statewide and nationally.

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
<b>Enrollment</b>				
ILLINOIS	58%	20%	18%	4%
U.S.	58%	17%	19%	6%
<b>Suspensions</b>				
ILLINOIS	35%	47%	17%	1%
U.S.	41%	37%	18%	3%
<b>Expulsions</b>				
ILLINOIS	36%	46%	16%	1%
U.S.	42%	35%	20%	4%

Note: Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.  
Source: Tribune analysis of Department of Education data for the 2004-05 school year.

PLEASE SEE **DISCIPLINE**, PAGE 6

Chicago Tribune



# Education

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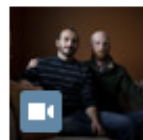
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## Researchers point to racial disparities in school suspension, spotlight new practices

By Donna St. George, Published: March 14 [E-mail the writer](#) 

Two months after [federal officials](#) brought new attention to [how students are disciplined in the nation's schools](#), a group of 26 researchers, educators and advocates released findings Thursday that underscored racial [disparities](#) in suspension and pointed to promising school practices.

African Americans and students with disabilities are suspended at “hugely disproportionate rates,” said leaders of the group, called the Discipline Disparities Research-to-Practice Collaborative. They also noted higher levels of suspension among Latinos and students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.



Federal Court to Consider Utah Ban on Same-Sex Marriage



House Approves Budget With Big Spending Cuts

[House Oversight Committee Censures Former I.R.S. Official](#)



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# School Data Finds Pattern of Inequality Along Racial Lines

By MOTOKO RICH MARCH 21, 2014



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Racial minorities are more likely than white students to be suspended from school, to have less access to rigorous math and science classes, and to be taught by lower-paid teachers with less experience, according to comprehensive data released Friday by the [Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights](#).

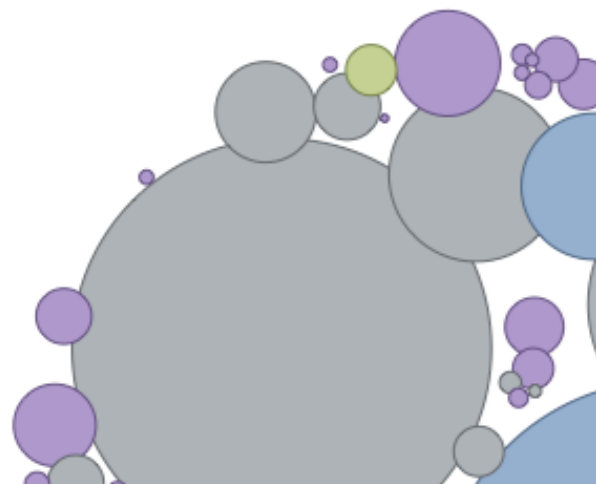
In the first analysis in nearly 15 years of information from all of the country's 97,000 public schools, the Education Department found a pattern of inequality on a number of fronts, with race as the dividing factor.

Black students are suspended and expelled at three times the rate of white students. A quarter of high schools with the highest percentage of black and Latino students do not offer any Algebra II courses, while a third of those schools do not have any chemistry classes. Black students are more

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Students quietly listen in art class at Campbell Elementary School, in Arlington, VA, Jan. 14, 2014. [Melina Mara/The Washington Post/Getty](#)

## Preschool to prison: no child too young for zero-tolerance

03/21/14 12:53 PM — UPDATED 03/21/14 03:46 PM

By [Trymaine Lee](#)



Each year, thousands of American preschoolers are suspended from public schools, a trend that disproportionately impacts black children and sends many of them on a fast track to dropping out or into the criminal justice system later in life.

A [staggering new report](#) released by the Department of Education and the Justice Department on Friday highlights a troubling pattern of zero-tolerance school discipline policies that disproportionately impact minority students in general, but also trickle down to the nation's youngest students.

Overzealous enforcement of school discipline policies and all of the negative outcomes associated with them are often framed around older children and middle and high school students, but the government's report shows just how deeply the disparities extend.



# The National Context: Recent National Efforts & Federal Guidance

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- **U.S. DOJ/DOE (January 8, 2014)**
    - *Federal Guidance on School Discipline Policies and Practices.*
  - **CDF/ AASA (January 21, 2014)**
    - *Partnership to Reform School Discipline Policies/Practices*
  - **President's *My Brother's Keeper* Initiative (February 27, 2014)**
  - **Discipline Disparities RTP Collaborative (March 13, 2014)**
    - *Disciplinary Disparities Briefing Paper Series*
  - **USDOE Office for Civil Rights (March 21, 2014)**
    - *CRDC National Release*
  - **CSG Justice Center (Late Spring, 2014)**
    - *The School Discipline Consensus Project Release*
- 



# State and District Changes

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## ❑ State Level

- California, Maryland, Colorado, Connecticut

## ❑ District Level

- LAUSD, Oakland, Denver, Buffalo, Baltimore
- Anne Arundel County, MD; Eau Claire, WI; Fort Wayne, IN



# Is School Discipline Fair?: 40 Years of Study

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- ❑ CDF (1975): Black students suspended 2-3x as frequently
- ❑ Studies since find disproportionality in:
  - Office referrals
  - Suspension & Expulsion
  - Corporal Punishment







# Has Race Ever Been Neutral?

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- ❑ Thos. Jefferson: “...advance it as a suspicion”





I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.

Thomas Jefferson (1787)  
*Notes on the State of Virginia*



# Has Race Ever Been Neutral?

---

- ❑ Thos. Jefferson: “...advance it as a suspicion”
- ❑ 1853: Margaret Douglass jailed
- ❑ 1897: *Plessy v. Ferguson*
  - Jim Crowe included burning of schools
- ❑ 1900-1930: Development of mental testing *and* eugenics
- ❑ The purpose of education before *Brown*

# Discipline Disparities Research to Practice Collaborative

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- ❑ Expanding research/practice/advocacy for reducing disciplinary disparities
  - Quarterly Meetings: Publication of Findings, Spring 2014
  - National Closing the Discipline Gap Conference
  - Commissioning new research

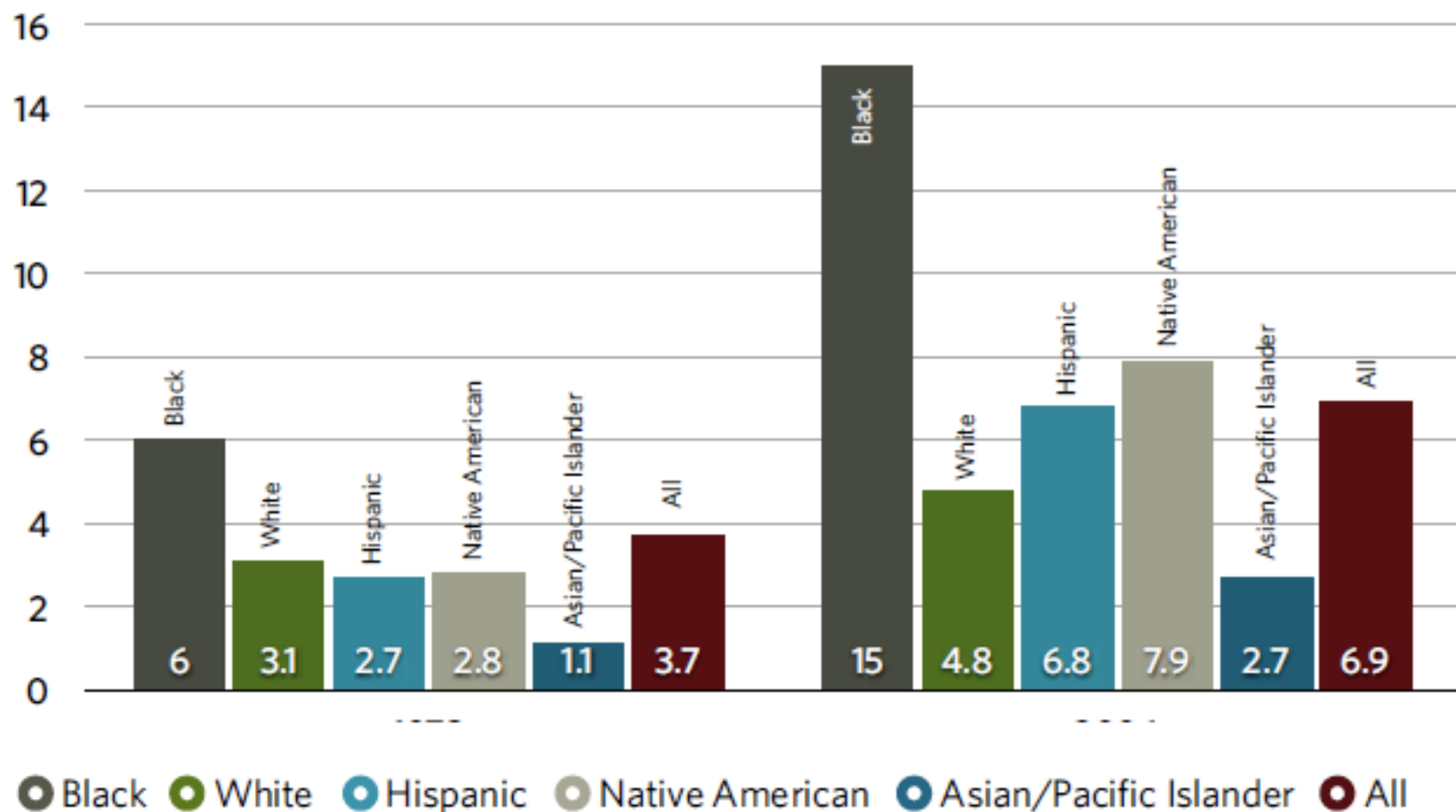
# What Do We Know About Disciplinary Disparities

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- ❑ Enduring and expanding



**FIGURE 1** Increasing Risk For Suspension by Race 1973, 2006





# Other Groups at Risk

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- ❑ Latino students
  - May increase in secondary school
- ❑ Students with disabilities (Losen & Gillespie, 2012)
- ❑ Gender: *Both* male & female (Toldson et al., 2013; Wallace et al., 2008)
- ❑ Emerging data that LGBT students also at risk

# What Do We Know About Disciplinary Disparities

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- ❑ Enduring and expanding
- ❑ Ineffective, and yields increased risk





# Is Disciplinary Removal Effective?

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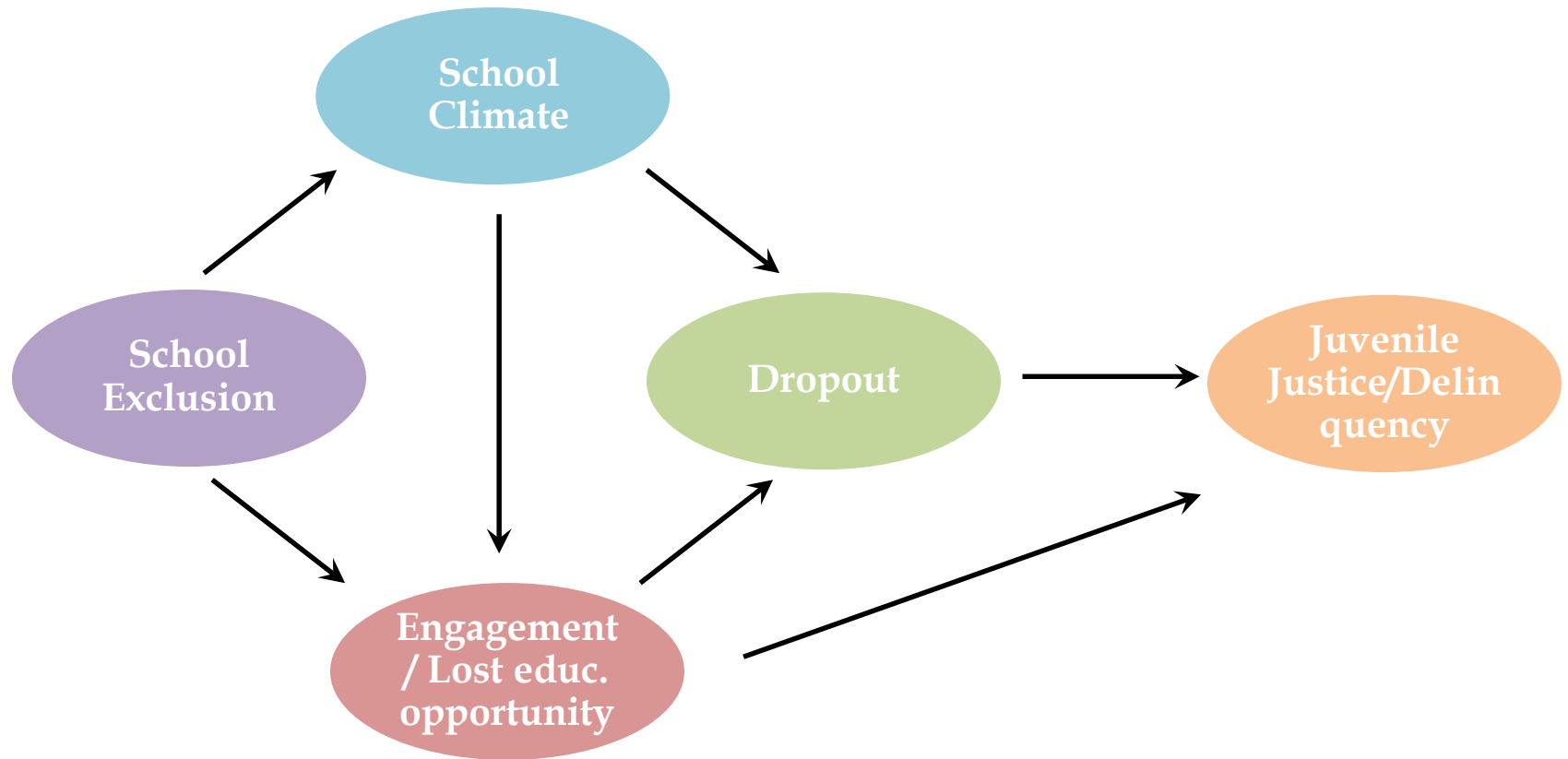
- ❑ 30-50% of students suspended are repeat offenders
  - Students suspended in late elementary school are *more* likely to be suspended in middle school
  - Is suspension a reinforcer rather than a punisher?
- ❑ Schools with higher suspension rates have
  - Poorer school climate
  - More time spent on discipline
  - Higher school dropout rates



# More Than a Metaphor...

- **School Climate:** Schools w/ harsh discipline policies, higher OSS rates  $\approx$  perceived less safe (Steinberg, et al., 2011)
- **School Engagement/Ed. Opportunity:** For African American males, more suspensions predict lower achievement and school engagement (Davis & Jordan, 1994)
- **School Dropout:** Suspended/expelled students 5 times as likely to drop out (CSG, 2011)
  - Black males 2x more likely to dropout for discipline (Stearns & Glennie, 2006)
- **Juvenile Delinquency/JJ Involvement**
  - OSS increases risk of antisocial behavior (Hemphill et al., 2006)
  - Greater contact with Juv. Justice System (CSG, 2011)

# The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Pathways from Schools to Juvenile Justice



# What Do We Know About Disciplinary Disparities

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- ❑ Enduring and expanding
- ❑ Ineffective and yields increased risk
- ❑ Schools can make a difference





# Contributions of Schools

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- ❑ Principal perspective contributes to racial disparities (Skiba et al, 2013)
- ❑ Schools w/ high structure/high support have fewer suspensions/disparities (Gregory et al. 2011)
- ❑ Chicago: Among schools with similar demographics, more suspensions = lower feelings of safety (Steinberg, Allen & Johnson, 2013)
  - *Relationships more important than crime, poverty in predicting safety*

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...so what do we do?

# Prerequisites: Moving from Deficit Thinking to Actionable Variables

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- ❑ Why would we not take immediate action to reduce disparities?
  - If disproportionality was due to poverty
  - If disproportionality was due to different rates of behavior

# What Do We Believe to Be the Cause of Disproportionality?

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*“Is ethnicity the problem or is poverty the problem?”*

*--School Principal  
(Skiba et al., 2005)*

# Can Poverty Explain Disproportionality?

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- ❑ Discipline is related to poverty
  - Poverty makes a significant, but *small and inconsistent* contribution, but...
- ❑ Effects of race remain after taking poverty into account

# Do Black Students Misbehave More?

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*Of 32 infractions, only 8 significant differences:*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ➤ White students referred more for:   | ➤ Black students referred more for:   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Smoking</li><li>• Vandalism</li><li>• Leaving w/o permission</li><li>• Obscene Language</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Disrespect</li><li>• Excessive Noise</li><li>• Threat</li><li>• Loitering</li></ul> |



# What Does Predict Disproportionality in Discipline?

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- ❑ Higher rates of students of color
- ❑ Diversity of staff
  - More teachers of color = lower susp. rates
  - Doesn't hold for administrators
- ❑ Classroom management
- ❑ Cultural mismatch

# How Do We Create Change?

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- ❑ Problem Identification
  - What does the data say?
- ❑ Problem Analysis:
  - What does the data mean?
- ❑ Plan Implementation:
  - How shall we intervene
- ❑ Plan Evaluation:
  - How well did it work?

# How Do We Create Change Using PBIS?

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- ❑ Problem Identification
  - What does the data say?
  - Does it say the same thing for all groups?

# A National Database for Exploring Disproportionality

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- ❑ 2005-06 Academic Year
- ❑ 436 Elementary and Middle Schools in 17 States
  - Implementing PBS at least 1 year
- ❑ 180,670 students
- ❑ 372,642 Office Discipline Referrals

# General Conclusions & Implications

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- ❑ Disproportionality begins at referral
- ❑ Administrative consequences appear to be distributed rationally in general
- ❑ But when disaggregated, see significant disproportionality
- ❑ African American and Latino students more likely to receive harsher punishment for same ODR
  - Esp. for minor misbehavior

# The Big Five: Disaggregated Data

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- ❑ For which groups do disparities occur?
- ❑ In what infractions do we see disparities?
- ❑ In what consequences do we see disparities?
- ❑ Do different infractions receive different consequences for different groups?
- ❑ Are there locations or specific classrooms with greater disparities?



# How Do We Create Change?

---

- ❑ What does the data say?
  - How great are racial/ethnic disparities?
  - In what infractions? In what consequences?
- ❑ Problem Analysis: What does the data mean?

# The Difficulty of Talking About Race

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“When you say minorities, are you, what are you speaking of?...[*INTERVIEWER: Ethnic and racial minorities*]...Oh....OK...Alright...We have like...I guess we have about half and half. I don’t know that I’ve ever really paid attention to it .”

--Classroom Teacher



# “Color-Blindness”

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“I don’t see the color as being the issue. I think that a lot of the issues that they come with perhaps come from the fact that they are in a Black situation over here, where these kinds of attitudes are constant all the time.” (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004)

# Microaggressions Today

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*“I play football, so you know they expect you to be good in sports. But when you are on the ASB (Associated Student Body) council, like I am, and being a school leader, have good grades, and talking about going to college on an academic scholarship, then they look at you like Whoa!! I didn’t think that they (Black males) were into those kind of things. One teacher even told me once, ‘You’re not like the rest of them.’ I didn’t ask her what that meant, but believe me, I knew what that meant.”*

*--(Howard, 2007, p. 907)*



WHY BUSH FAILED • CHILDREN OF THE STORM

# Newsweek®

September 19, 2005

newsweek.msnbc.com

**POVERTY,  
RACE  
& KATRINA**  
Lessons of  
A National  
Shame

By Jonathan  
Alter

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLIE VARLEY—SIPA



1-year-old Faith Figueroa, rescued from her flooded home in the Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans

# *Perspectives on Katrina: Washington Post/ABC News Poll, 9/13/05*

**Q:** Overall, do you think problems with the hurricane relief effort are or are not an indication of racial inequality in this country?



No opinion not shown.

# Technical vs. Adaptive Problems

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*“We talked about it at lunch the other day and one of the black teachers said, ‘You know, sometimes I think some teachers are afraid of the little black boys.’”*

--Classroom Teacher

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*“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”*

--James A. Baldwin





# How Do We Create Change?

---

- ❑ What does the data say?
  - How great are racial/ethnic disparities?
  - In what infractions? In what consequences?
- ❑ What does the data mean?
  - Consider multiple perspectives on causes
- ❑ Plan Implementation: What should we do?



# What Should We Do to Intervene? Emerging Research

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- ❑ Build Relationships
  - Restorative Practices
- ❑ Restructuring Disciplinary Practices
  - Va. Threat Assessment
  - Codes of Conduct
  - SWPBIS
- ❑ Building Emotional Literacy
  - Cleveland Metro School District: SEL, student support teams, and student-centered approach
- ❑ Culturally Responsive Classroom Management



# Restorative Practices

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*Informal and formal processes implemented throughout the school to build relationships and to repair harm after wrongdoing has occurred.*

- ❑ Emerging data base finding:
  - Reduced ODRs, suspension, and expulsion
  - Improvements in perceptions of school safety
- ❑ Gregory (in press): Power to Transform Relationships
  - Higher implementation associated w/
    - Greater perception of teacher respect
    - Lower referrals for Latino and African American students

# Restorative Conferencing in the Denver Public Schools

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- ❑ Initial implementation in Cole Middle School. Now district wide (75% in 2011-12)
  - Restorative dialogue, restorative conferencing , restorative circles
- ❑ Unique aspects:
  - Practitioner driven district wide training
  - Emphasizes use by all in school community
  - Shared responsibility to hear all other parties

# Changes in DPS Suspension Rates

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Year	Total Unduplicated Suspensions	Enrollment	DPS Suspension Rate	African American Suspension Rate	Latino Suspension Rate	White Suspension Rate
2006-07	<b>7090</b>	66,960	10.58%	17.61%	10.18%	5.88%
2007-08	<b>6739</b>	67,324	10%	16.46%	10.16%	4.62%
2008-09	<b>6432</b>	72,005	8.93%	14.79%	8.81%	3.78%
2009-10	<b>5944</b>	76,090	7.81%	15.2%	8.68%	2.94%
2010-11	<b>5969</b>	78,354	7.62%	14.9%	7.35%	2.95%
2011-12	<b>5515</b>	81,392	6.78%	12.7%	5.9%	2.83%
2012-13	<b>4751</b>	84,424	5.63%	10.42%	4.74%	2.28%

# Restructuring School Discipline

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- ❑ SWPBIS
- ❑ Threat Assessment Guidelines
- ❑ Reframing Codes of Conduct
  - Fenning et al (2013): Almost all codes reviewed focused on punishment and removal
  - Recent reform in LAUSD, Chicago, Broward County, [Denver \(print version\)](#)

# School Wide PBIS (SWPBIS): General Results

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- ❑ Key components
  - Outcome-based decision making
  - Alternative methods for development of and instruction in behavior
  - Emphasis on fidelity of implementation
- ❑ Evidence-based research
  - Can be implemented with fidelity
  - Decreased rates of ODRs
  - Some evidence of school climate change
  - Some reductions in suspension and expulsion
  - Weak connection with academic outcomes



# PBIS Implementation and Disproportionality: Mixed Results

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- ❑ Case study successes
  - Canadian study (Greflund, MacIntosh, et al, 2013)
  - Case studies in literature (e.g., Jones et al, Chee-Dodge Elem.)
  - Garfield Middle School
- ❑ But little effect on disproportionality (Vincent et al. 2011, Vincent & Tobin, 2012; Vincent, Sprague & Gau (2013))
  - Suspensions decreased in higher implementing schools, but even there, no reductions in disparities for Afr. Amer. students
  - Some reduction in OSS rates for Hispanic, AI/AN students, but not for African American students





# Building Emotional Literacy: Cleveland Metropolitan School Dist.

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## ❑ Implemented

- Social-emotional learning (PATHS program)
- Student Support Teams: Early identification
- Planning Centers (PATHS & student support)

## ❑ Results from 2009-2011

- Decreased incidents of disobedience/disruption, fighting, harrassment, physical violence
- Drop in suspensions by 58.8%



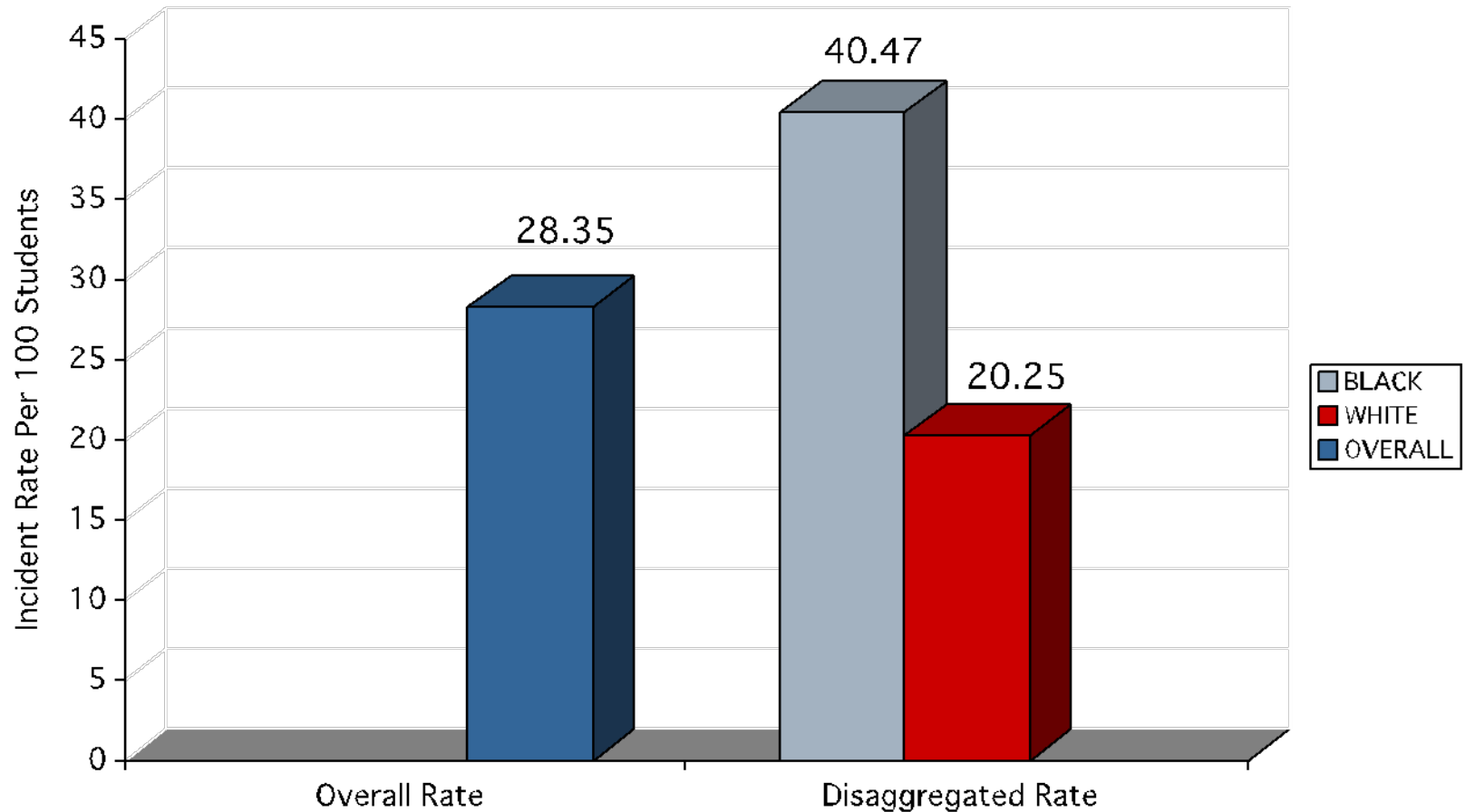
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  - How great are racial/ethnic disparities?
  - In what infractions? In what consequences?
- ❑ What does the data mean?
  - Consider multiple perspectives on causes
- ❑ What should we do?
  - Root cause: Why is this happening?
  - Consider a variety of alternatives
- ❑ Evaluation: How did we do?

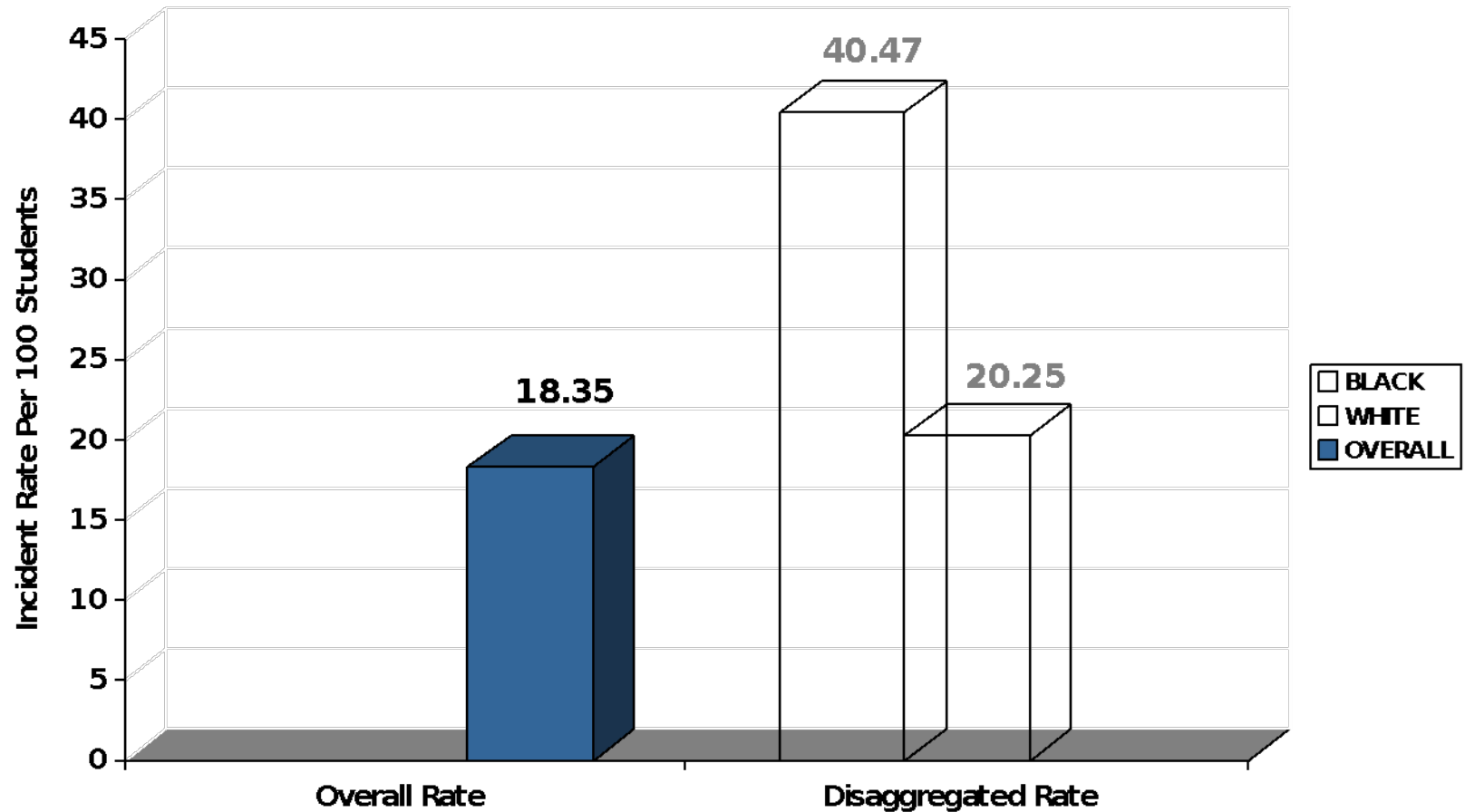
# Discipline Rates

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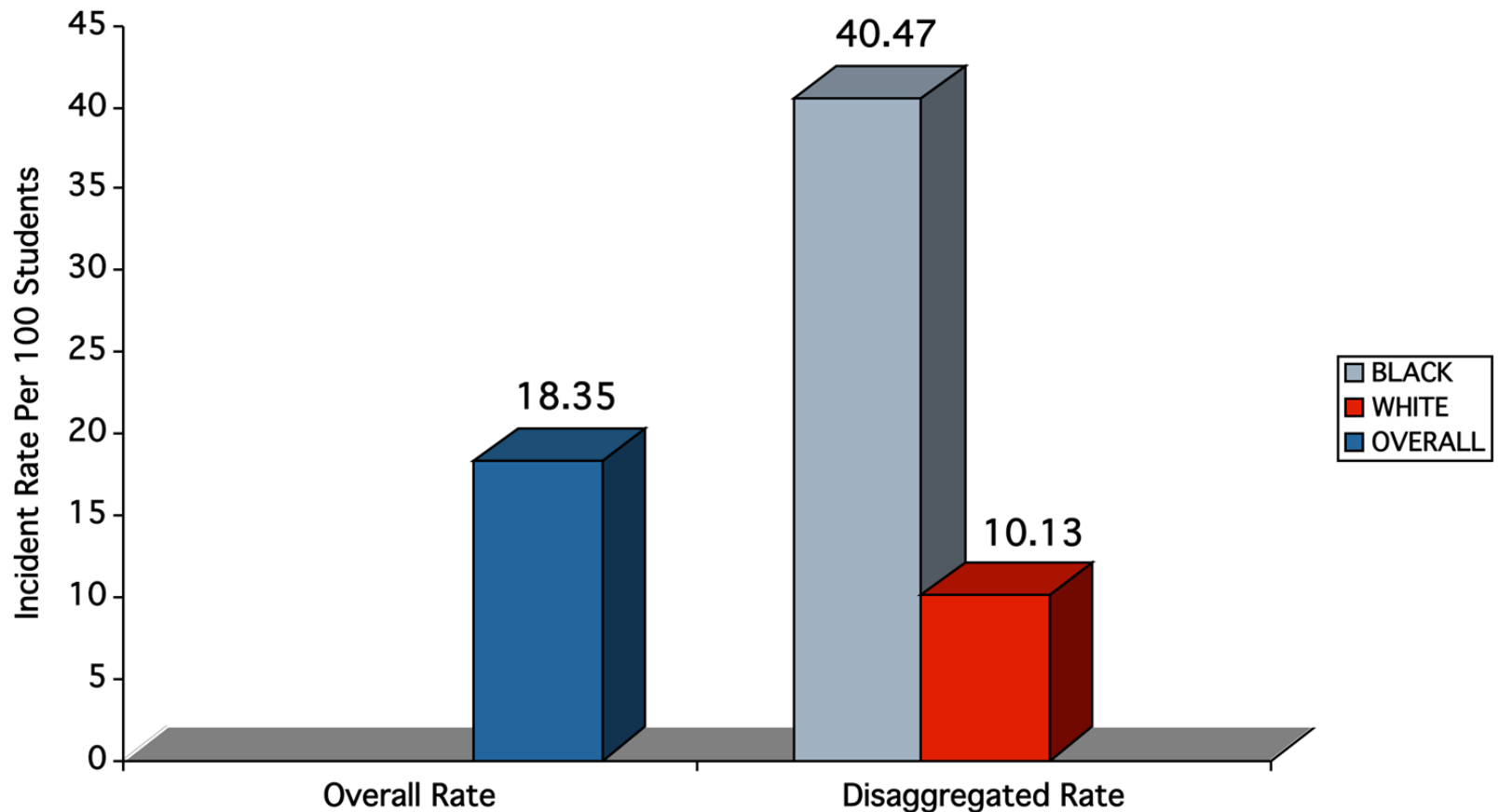


# Discipline Rates

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# Discipline Rates Disaggregated



# Mixed Results in Practice

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	Total ODRs	ODRs per 100 students	Risk Index AA	Risk Index White	RR AA
<b>Middle School #1</b>					
2004-05	1738	204.47	75.90	41.18	1.84
2006-07	1080	124.00	71.43	31.51	2.27
<b>Middle School #2</b>					
2004-05	2150	318.52	85.88	32.39	2.65
2006-07	805	115.83	54.93	26.88	2.04

Data Source: SWIS Ethnicity Reports



# How Do We Create Change?

---

- ❑ What does the data say?
  - How great are racial/ethnic disparities?
  - In what infractions? In what consequences?
- ❑ What does the data mean?
  - Consider multiple perspectives on causes
- ❑ What should we do?
  - Root cause: Why is this happening?
  - Consider a variety of alternatives
- ❑ Evaluation: How did we do?
  - Look at *disaggregated* results

# Overcoming Our History

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- ❑ State sponsored discrimination: 355 years
- ❑ Since its end: 40 years
- ❑ Why would we assume there would not be culturally influenced practices in our educational systems?



# Resources

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- ❑ Equity Project at Indiana University
  - [ceep.indiana.edu/equity/](http://ceep.indiana.edu/equity/)
- ❑ Discipline Disparities Research to Practice Collaborative
- ❑ Closing the Discipline Gap Conference Papers
  - [http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/events/2013/closing-the-school-discipline-gap-conference-research-papers/copy\\_of\\_closing-the-school-discipline-gap-agenda\](http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/events/2013/closing-the-school-discipline-gap-conference-research-papers/copy_of_closing-the-school-discipline-gap-agenda/)

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