



What the Research Tells Us About Disproportionality

Disproportionality Starts in Preschool

Boys are expelled at a rate more than 4.5 times that of girls¹

Black children account for almost 50% of public preschool suspensions but represent less than one-fifth of all preschoolers ²

Students most likely expelled from preschool include being black, being male and looking older than their classmates³

Black children are also estimated to be 2 times as likely to be expelled as Latino and White children and more than 5 times as likely to be expelled as Asian-American children ⁴

Externalizing behavior patterns in young children (e.g., physical and verbal aggression) are also risk factors for increased involvement in exclusionary disciplinary practices in school and in the criminal justice system ⁵

Disproportionality in Middle School and High School

Black students, students who are economically disadvantaged, and special education students are three demographics subgroups that are disproportionately suspended, both in the frequency of suspensions and the duration in number of school days lost in 9th grade ⁶

¹ OCR, 2016, Gilliam, 2005

² OCR, 2016, Gilliam, 2005

³

⁴Gilliam, 2005

⁵ Barnes, & Boutwell, 2012

⁶ Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox 2014

A single suspension in the 9th grade considerably lowers the odds that a student will graduate from high school or enroll in college⁷

Being suspended even once in 9th grade is associated with a two-fold increase in the risk for dropping out⁸

Studies have suggested that White students are suspended more for observable behaviors such as smoking and cutting class and Black students are suspended more for subjective actions such as disrespect suggesting racial bias⁹

Approximately 34% of Black high school students experiencing a suspension/expulsion in any year, in contrast to 13% of White high school students¹⁰

Students with Disabilities Face Disproportionality

Black students with disabilities are almost three times as likely to experience out-of-school suspension or expulsion as their White counterparts¹¹

Black students with disabilities are twice as likely to experience in-school suspension or expulsion¹²

Factors that may contribute to higher suspension rates of students with disabilities include having less developed social skills, impulsive decision making, or simply being less adept at avoiding detection compared with their peers without disabilities¹³

Disproportionality Impacts Education

Black students spend less time in the classroom due to discipline, which further hinders their access to a quality education¹⁴

Black students are nearly two times as likely to be suspended without educational services as white students¹⁵

⁷ Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014

⁸ Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014

⁹ Skiba et al., 2002

¹⁰ Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox 2014

¹¹ NCLD, 2014; Zhang, Katsiyannis & Herbst, 2004

¹² Gilliam, 2005

¹³ Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst, 2004

¹⁴ Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014

¹⁵ Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014

Black students were more likely to be referred to the principal's office. This action led to Black students being suspended more than their non-Black peers¹⁶

Exclusionary school punishment hinders academic growth and contributes to racial disparities in achievement – achievement gap¹⁷

Gender and Disproportionality

Black boys face higher rates of school discipline than anyone else¹⁸

Black girls are six times as likely to be suspended as White girls, while Black boys are three times as likely to be suspended as White boys¹⁹

Disproportionality is Complex

Black and White student differences in suspension rates have been found in virtually every published study across school districts regardless of the methodological and analytic strategies used²⁰

Research has largely concluded that disparities in suspensions and expulsions are not explained by differences in misbehavior²¹

Racial disparities in discipline can occur even when the behavior of the students is the same²²

Large schools have higher suspension rates for Blacks than small schools.²³

Schools with more students qualifying for free and reduced-price meals, a proxy for poverty, have higher African-American suspension rates than schools in wealthier communities²⁴

Schools enrolling a greater percentage of Black students exhibit higher suspension rates for Black students than schools with fewer Black students²⁵

¹⁶ Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014

¹⁷ Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014

¹⁸ Adamu & Hogan, 2015

¹⁹ Crenshaw, et al, 2015

²⁰ Wright, et al, 2014

²¹ Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014

²² Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015

²³ Tefera, Siegel-Hawley, & Levy, 2017

²⁴ Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014

²⁵ Tefera, Siegel-Hawley, & Levy, 2017

Research has shown evidence of systematic bias in teacher expectations for African American students and non-Black teachers were found to have lower expectations of Black students than Black teachers²⁶

Only 10 percent of public-school principals were black, compared to 80 percent white. Eighty-two percent of public-school educators are White, compared to 18 percent teachers of color²⁷

Black male teachers only constitute two percent of the teaching workforce²⁸

Research revealed that the more experienced a teacher was, the less the likelihood that they would recommend the suspension of students ²⁹

Findings in a multilevel analysis also indicated that administrator perspectives on discipline may be a stronger predictor of suspension disparities than students' behaviors or sociodemographic characteristics ³⁰

²⁶ Tefera, Siegel-Hawley, & Levy, 2017, Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015

²⁷ US DOE, 2016

²⁸ US DOE, 2016

²⁹ US DOE, 2016

³⁰ Skiba, et al., 2012

References

Adamu, M., & Hogan, L. (2015). *Point of entry: The preschool-to-prison pipeline*. Retrieved online

from <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/10/07133457/PointOfEntryreport-SUMMARY.pdf>.

Balfanz, R., Byrnes, V., & Fox, J. (2014). Sent Home and Put Off-Track: The Antecedents, Disproportionalities, and Consequences of Being Suspended in the Ninth Grade. *Journal of Applied Research on Children*, 5(2). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1188519.pdf>

Barnes, J. C., & Boutwell, B. B. (2012). On the relationship of past to future involvement in crime and delinquency: A behavior genetic analysis. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 40(1), 94–102.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2011.12.003>

Crenshaw, K., Ocen, P., Nanda, J., Columbia University., & African American Policy Forum,. (2015). *Black girls matter: Pushed out, overpoliced, and underprotected*.

Frey, K. S., Hirschstein, M. K., & Guzzo, B. A. (2000). Second Step: Preventing aggression by promoting social competence. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 8(2), 102–

112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106342660000800206>

Gilliam, W.S. (2005). *Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Child Study Center. Retrieved

from http://www.ziglercenter.yale.edu/publications/National%20Prek%20Study_expulsion_tcm350-34774_tcm350-284-32.pdf

Gilliam, W.S. (2005). *Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Child Study Center. Retrieved from http://www.ziglercenter.yale.edu/publications/National%20Prek%20Study_expulsion_tcm350-34774_tcm350-284-32.pdf

Gopalan, M., & Nelson, A. A. (2019). Understanding the Racial Discipline Gap in Schools. *AERA Open*, 5(2).

Huang, F. L. (2018). Do Black students misbehave more? Investigating the differential involvement hypothesis and out-of-school suspensions. *Journal of Educational Research*, 111(3), 284–294. <https://doi-org.ccnj.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/00220671.2016.1253538>

Okonofua, J. A., & Eberhardt, J. L. (2015). Two strikes: Race and the disciplining of young students. *Psychological Science*, 26, 617-624.

National Center for Learning Disabilities (2014). *The State of Learning Disabilities 3rd Edition*, <https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2014-State-of-LD.pdf>

Skiba, R.J., Michael, R.S., Nardo, A.C., & Peterson, R.L. (2002). The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. *Urban Review*, 34, 317-342.

Skiba, Trackok, Chung, Baker, & Hughes (2012) Parsing disciplinary disproportionality: Contributions of infraction, student and school characteristics to out-of-school suspension and expulsion. *American Educational Research Journal*. 51(4). 640-670.

SRI Education. Preventing Suspension and Expulsions in Preschool Settings
<https://preventexpulsion.org/overview/>

Tefera, A., Siegel-Hawley, G., & Levy, R. (2017). Why do racial disparities in school discipline exist? The role of policies, processes, people, and places. Richmond, VA. Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium.

The Brown Center Report on American Education (2017). Race and school suspensions. Part III. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/2017-brown-center-report-part-iii-race-and-school-suspensions/>

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights. (2016, June). 2013-2014 *Civil rights data collection: Key data highlights on equity and opportunity gaps in our nation's public schools*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-2013-14.html>

U.S. Department of Education, (2016). The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce.

Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf>

Wright, J. P., Morgan, M. A., Coyne, M. A., Beaver, K. M., & Barnes, J. C. (2014). Prior problem behavior accounts for the racial gap in school suspensions. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 42(3), 257–266. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2014.01.001>

Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Herbst (2004). Disciplinary exclusions in special education: A 4 year analysis. *Behavioral Disorders*, 29(4): 337-347. DOI: [10.1177/019874290402900402](https://doi.org/10.1177/019874290402900402)