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Focus: Fair Discipline

At What Cost?

A Review of School Police Funding and Accountability Across the U.S. South

by Terrence Wilson, J.D.

An 11-year-old girl pushed against a brick wall and shoved to the ground in New Mexico, a 15-year-old girl grabbed by the neck and thrown to the ground in Florida, an 11-year-old boy slammed to the ground twice in North Carolina: These incidents from last year are just a few of the documented instances of school resource officers harming the students they are charged to protect. The experience of these students reflects that of many youth of color across the country.

School’s Police Presence Harm to Students

In a recent report, youth leaders documented over 60 cases since 2010 where students were injured through interaction with their school police (Advancement Project, 2019). School officials often explain that they use police to make schools safer, but the students in the examples above and many other students of color wonder if increased school policing comes at the cost of their safety and well-being.

Research shows that stationing police officers in schools is ineffective and potentially hazardous to the mental and physical health of students, particularly students of color. School-based police officers, often called “school resource officers,” do not make schools safer. In fact, researchers find that schools that add school resource officers fail to see a statistically significant change in the rate of serious violent, non-serious violent or property crime. (Chongmin & Gottfredson, 2011)

The presence of school resource officers is associated with *more* weapon and drug offenses at school and with higher rates of exclusionary discipline. (Fisher & Hennesy, 2016)

The presence of school police negatively impacts students of color in particular. For example, Black students, who only account for 15% of the student population nationally, represent 31% of the referrals to law enforcement. Similarly, students of color, particularly Black male students, are disproportionately impacted by exclusionary discipline. For example, Black male students, who represent only 8% of students, receive 25% of the out-of-school suspensions. (OCR, 2018)

Growing Funding Streams for School Police

Despite these data showing harmful outcomes for students, more and more school districts are *increasing* school policing efforts. Although police officers have been present in schools for decades, the current expansion of school policing arises largely out of a response to school shooting incidents beginning with the 1999 Columbine High School shooting in Colorado (Brock, et al., 2018). Each high-profile school violence tragedy since then has led to a response at the federal, state and local levels to expand the scope and role of school policing operations.

News of school violence prompt calls for more cameras, metal detectors and other equipment
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14 million students are in schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist or social worker for students.

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to heighten police surveillance at schools. For example, after Columbine, the federal government through the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services implemented the Cops in Schools grant program. The program awarded about \$823 million for schools to hire school resource officers, funding 7,242 positions in hundreds of communities across the United States from 1999 to 2005.

Federal investment was not limited to school resource officers. The Secure Our Schools federal grant program provided about \$123 million from 2002 to 2011 to schools to purchase cameras, metal detectors and other security equipment.

The most recent federal expansion was a response to the tragic 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida. Congress passed the STOP School Violence Act, which provided \$75 million in 2018 and will provide \$100 million annually between 2019 and 2028 to expand policing activities and surveillance.

Several states throughout the U.S. South followed the federal government's lead and introduced their own school security grant programs. For example, school policing funding in states across the U.S. South, since 2018 alone included \$6 million in Virginia, \$14 million in South Carolina, \$69 million in North Carolina, \$75 million in Tennessee, \$85 million in Georgia, \$100 million in Texas, and \$400 million in Florida.

Research shows that these policing functions are usually located in communities of color. Low-income students and students of color are much more likely to experience intense security conditions in their schools than other students, even when taking into account neighborhood crime, school crime and school disorder (Nance, 2013). These funding increases will ensure that students will continue to be met with a police presence in

Recommendations for School Safety Policies

To ensure all students have the opportunity to learn in the safest environment possible, IDRA believes that police officers should never be a regular presence inside school buildings. However, if police officers are in schools, IDRA offers the following recommendations for education leaders, policymakers and communities.

- Limit involving police in schools to cases of emergency. If police are called to respond, they should be trained to understand the specific needs of students they interact with in schools.
- Invest in effective research-based alternatives to school policing, such as restorative practices and conflict resolution. And invest in personnel, like school psychologists, social workers, and counselors who create safer, stronger schools.
- Ensure teachers, administrators and staff are fully trained in research-based alternatives that are culturally-sustaining so they do not rely on police officers to address issues that are non-criminal and non-emergencies (Gage, 2015).
- Develop clear policies specifying that police officers should not handle routine discipline issues.
- Ensure counselor-to-student ratios meet recommended levels before spending resources on school-based police.
- Require youth-focused training and continued professional development for school police officers to maintain their licenses.
- Require yearly, state-level data collection about policing activities in every school district, disaggregated by campus, race, gender, offense type and responses used.
- Create systems of accountability that enable parents, teachers, students and communities to review policing policies, incidents, and hiring, firing, and discipline procedures.
- Prohibit the use of tasers, pepper spray, weapons, restraints and corporal punishment on students in schools.

their schools, even as many school leaders fail to invest in the personnel and resources that actually work to keep students safe.

An analysis of federal data showed that 14 million students are in schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist or social worker for students (Whitaker, et al., 2019).

Lack of Training and Accountability

Unfortunately, additional funding for school

police usually does not include appropriate requirements for training and accountability, so those who support students must monitor these systems of policing to ensure that all students are treated equitably.

The federal government requires specific training for school resource officers hired with federal grant funds, but relatively few are funded this way. Most states do not require specific school resource officer training at all.

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How Schools Can End Harmful Discipline Practices

by Morgan Craven, J.D., Nilka Avilés, Ed.D., & Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.

Positive cultures of teaching and learning support students' attendance, academic achievement, engagement and positive self-concept. These cultures depend on effective discipline, which addresses challenging and unsafe behaviors constructively.

Unfortunately, data show the prevalent overuse of ineffective exclusionary discipline measures, such as suspensions and alternative school placements, in schools across the country. Students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students are more likely to be punished, even though they are not more likely to misbehave (Rumberger & Losen, 2016).

IDRA examined disciplinary referrals among students in the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership (VYP) program. The program identifies middle and high school students struggling in school and enlists them as tutors for elementary school students also facing challenges. By taking on a leadership role, the tutors develop self-esteem, confidence, and a greater sense of agency in their academic and social lives. Importantly, teachers and staff in schools also begin to view the students, and their potential for success, differently.

Our analysis of students in the program found that disciplinary referrals decreased by 14% among participating students from the previous year. The findings demonstrate the power of rethinking discipline. When school personnel changed their attitudes about students they originally saw as challenging and unmotivated, they opted to support them, rather than push them away. Results from the study also show that participating VYP students have increased academic performance, have better school attendance, and are more likely to advance to higher education. (IDRA, 2019)

Moving an entire school away from ineffective punitive discipline practices requires many shifts in culture, policy and practice. School and district

teams must review data, examine and respond to inequities revealed by data, engage all adults, and support strong and authentic relationships between students and adults.

IDRA has worked with a number of school district teams who transformed their discipline policies and practices, often in partnership with a community task force or parent group. For schools in the southern United States, the IDRA EAC-South can guide at little or no cost school leaders through the process outlined below.

Examine Data and Policies through an Equity Lens

Examining data through an equity lens helps schools address harmful discipline policies and practices. Schools can do the following.

Collect and analyze disaggregated data regularly. Discipline data should be disaggregated by critical groupings and their intersections, such as race, gender, socioeconomic, special education and English learning status. It is important to understand how all groups of students are impacted in order to change policies and practices that may have a disproportionate and harmful effect.

Make data publicly available and easily accessible. Parents, students and other community members should be able to easily find and understand data so they can engage authentically with their schools.

Provide appropriate and useful context to understand the data. Related data sets, like academic performance, attendance, extracurricular participation and other school climate indicators, should be analyzed, in addition to discipline data. This information provides a more complete review that can lead to important systemic changes in schools.

Enact fair policies, practices and systems that are responsive to data. Data can reveal unfair and inappropriate discipline practices and policies. Schools and districts have a responsibility to change those policies and practices, and to

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Examining data through an equity lens helps schools address harmful discipline policies and practices.

Learn More About the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership Program

The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership is a research-based, dropout prevention program that has kept 98% of its participants in school.



<http://budurl.com/IDRAVYP>

Racial and Gender Disparities in Dress Code Discipline Point to Need for New Approaches in Schools

by Chloe Latham Sikes, M.A.

Recently, two Black high school students in Barbers Hill Independent School District in Texas were disciplined for violating the district dress code by wearing their hair in dreadlocks (per their families' cultural custom). As in this case, while supposedly established to minimize disruption in the classroom, dress code policies and their disciplinary consequences can actually disrupt the learning opportunities and school environment for students, and can be discriminatory against students' gender, religious and cultural expression (NWLC, 2018; Sherwin, 2017), with a disproportionately harmful impact on students of color and girls.

Disparate Impacts of Dress Codes by Race and Gender

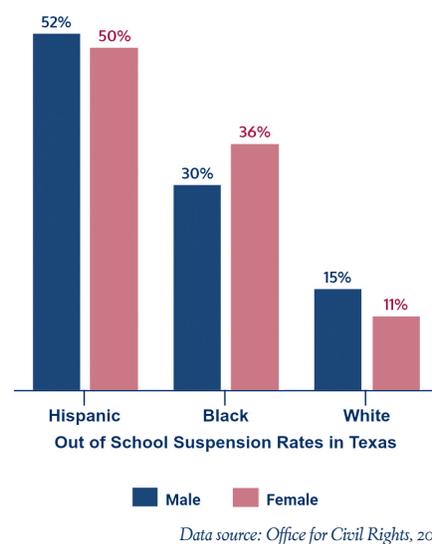
No child should have their body objectified or shamed for what they wear to school or how they stylistically express themselves. Yet, the design and associated consequences of dress code policies can have disparate effects as a result of gender and racial biases.

The consequences of dress code violations contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline that systematically targets students of color. Suspending students or sending them out from the classroom to change clothes – for any reason – can compromise students' learning and instruction (NWLC, 2018).

Black girls experience the greatest racial and gender disproportionally in being suspended or expelled from school than any other group, due in part to disciplinary dress codes (Crenshaw, 2015). One report focused on Washington, D.C., found that schools suspend Black girls at nearly 21 times the rate of White girls (NWLC, 2018).

In Texas, for example, Black girls experience the greatest gender disparity in discipline across racial groups. They are suspended at higher rates than their Black male counterparts through both out-of-school (36% compared to 30%) and in-school suspensions (25% vs. 21%) (OCR, 2018).

Black Girls Experience Greatest Gender Disparity in School Discipline in Texas



Initiatives to Address Harmful Dress Codes and Discipline

However, students have begun to push back against draconian dress code policies (Nittle, 2018; Malik, 2020) and promote fair dress codes that focus on students' safety and civil rights. Fair dress codes uphold respect for cultural expression, prohibit hate speech in accordance with the law, and have no disparate impact based on race or gender nor harmful exclusionary disciplinary responses.

Politicians and advocacy groups have noticed this trend. Federal lawmakers recently introduced legislation that addresses racial and gender disparities in school discipline and dress code enforcement (Speri, 2019).

Several school districts, including Austin ISD, modified their school dress code policies to prioritize the health and safety of students, rather than objectify girls' bodies or discriminate against culturally-significant forms of dress and style.

The momentum is growing as legislators in 21 state are pushing for legislation that bans hair discrimination.

Recommendations

IDRA recommends the following approaches to create and track more fair, safe and respectful dress code policies.

- State policymakers should restrict schools from issuing exclusionary discipline consequences for dress code violations.
- State education agencies should disaggregate discipline rate reports for dress code violations by race/ethnicity and gender.
- Students, families and community members can advocate that their local school districts modify their dress code policies to be fair, safe, and respectful of self-expression without exclusionary disciplinary consequences.
- School districts should modify dress code policies to protect students' civil rights and personal safety without exclusionary disciplinary consequences.

At little or no cost, the IDRA EAC-South can work with school districts in the U.S. South to review their dress codes and their local student codes of conduct to ensure they are equitable and affirming. (See www.idra.org/eac-south for more information.)

Resources

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Why Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs Do More Harm Than Good

by Ana Ramón

Initially in 1995, the Texas Legislature established disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEPs) for students who committed criminal offenses, like gun violations, assault and drug possession in parts of the state that did not have access to juvenile justice facilities. Texas soon expanded the program to allow educators to remove students from the classroom for “discretionary” infractions, stigmatizing hundreds of thousands of students.

IDRA studied the results of the DAEP policies in 1999 and 2009. Both studies found that four of five students sent to DAEPs were sent for non-serious offenses (Cortez & Robledo Montecel, 1999; Cortez, 2009). Some of those referrals were for behaviors as minor as talking back to a teacher or chewing gum.

Data from the Texas Education Agency show that, today, more than half (52%) of DAEP referrals are for discretionary reasons. And across all discipline types, 87% of the disciplinary actions taken against students were for violations of the schools’ student codes of conduct.

Students in DAEP facilities lose numerous regular instruction days and face an increased likelihood of in-grade retention, school disengagement and contact with the justice system. A comprehensive study of nearly 1 million Texas students found that 15% of students were assigned to a DAEP at least once between seventh and 12th grades. On average, those students lost 27 days of regular classroom instruction. And 31% of students who received one or more disciplinary actions (including suspensions and other expulsions) were held back a grade level at least once, compared to about 5% of their peers who received no action. (Fabelo, et al., 2011)

The study also found that 23% of students who received school disciplinary actions had future contact with the juvenile justice system, while only 2% percent of their non-disciplined peers had similar system involvement. (Fabelo, et al.,

2011)

IDRA’s research on attrition rates in Texas showed that increased disciplinary referrals, like DAEP placements, contributed to the high number of students who did not graduate, particularly boys and students of color (Johnson, 2016).

Texas schools sent 80,815 students to DAEPs in 2018-19. DAEP referrals disproportionately impact Black students, who made up almost 23% of the students referred to DAEPs but only 12.5% of the student population. Similarly, special education students comprised 10% of the student population but made up 27% of the students referred to a DAEP in 2018-19. (TEA, 2019)

In the coming months, the Texas Senate Education Committee will hold interim hearings to consider DAEP policy recommendations that could become legislation during the next legislative session. IDRA recommends that the Texas Legislature do the following.

End policies and school practices that create hostile school environments for students.

Schools should work to keep every student in class every day and should never send students to DAEPs for minor student codes of conduct violations. Schools should implement models, like restorative practices, to identify the needs of students and adults and meet the goal of keeping as many students in the classroom as possible.

Increase the presence of counselors, social workers and nurses and decrease the presence of police in our public schools.

Last year, the average academic counselor had 455 students under his or her watch, according to the American School Counselor Association, which recommends a 250:1 ratio. The average in Texas is almost twice that with one counselor for every 442 students (Bojorquez, 2019). Healthcare professionals can recognize the needs of members of a campus community, intervene when potential issues arise, and help teachers and administra-

Texas should prioritize policies that help students stay in the classroom.

tors support students instead of penalizing them.

Direct funds for teachers and administrators at home campuses to support students.

De-emphasizing usage of DAEPs is vital to reducing the harmful and disproportionate impact they have on students. Instead, the legislature should increase funding for research-based supports and programs in schools to help keep students in class and out of DEAPs.

The state should prioritize policies that help students stay in the classroom and help schools forgo sending them to DAEPs altogether.

Resources

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Meet Terrence Wilson, J.D. – IDRA Regional Policy and Community Engagement Director

The IDRA Newsletter will continue to highlight our staff's varied and diverse talents and backgrounds. Terrence Wilson, J.D., is IDRA's regional policy and community engagement director, based in Atlanta. He comes to IDRA with a passion for serving young people, particularly through mentoring. Even as a teenager in high school, Terrence worked with younger students in middle school.



One of his fondest memories from his youth was talking with his elementary school “buddy” through a high school mentoring program and discussing issues of diversity using the Dr. Seuss Book, *The Sneetches*. While in college, he started a mentoring program college for African American third- through fifth-grade boys, lovingly called Boyz II Men.

Terrence found his calling when he began mentoring young people who had come into contact with the juvenile justice system. As a psychology major, Terrence volunteered as a research assistant and performed his honors thesis at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill to investigate what kind of mentor young people need to be successful. He also continues to mentor through his fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. These volunteer experiences led him to choose a career where he could improve our education system to help better the lives of youth before they become involved with the criminal justice system.

Terrence was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia, and attended UNC Chapel Hill as a Morehead-Cain Scholar. He then attended the

University of Georgia where he received his law degree and a master's degree in public administration. At IDRA, Terrence works to advance our policy priorities through research and policy advocacy. He supports this work throughout the U.S. South by building family and community leadership capacity through IDRA's Education CAFE model.

One of his favorite hobbies is to travel and experience new cultures. He traveled to Dubai and Prague last year and has trips planned to Belize, the Dominican Republic, Colombia and Mexico in 2020. He has also traveled around Europe to Italy, Spain and France and spent summers in college conducting research in Trinidad and Tobago and the Dominican Republic.



Terrence loves everything outdoors, especially activities on the water, including fishing and kayaking. His favorite trip of all time included both of his loves, spending 28 days sea kayaking and fishing along the coast and islands of the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska. He looks forward to continuing his travels and experiencing many more cultures across the world in his free time while expanding the possibilities for students through his work at IDRA.

(At What Cost?, continued from Page 2)

According to the National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning, only 29 states and Washington, D.C., had laws or regulations that required school-specific training for school resource officers as of 2019 (NCSSLE, 2020). In the U.S. South, only Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas require specific school-oriented law enforcement training. Georgia indicates that it is a best practice for school resource officers to receive additional training but stops short of mandating it.

In addition to a lack of training, data reporting from school police systems often do not collect all necessary aspects of school policing interactions. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, school districts must collect and report to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights the number and demographics of students referred to law enforcement. The data report-

ing system, while extremely important, usually is published years after it was collected, making monitoring current activities difficult.

Additionally, although some Southern states, such as Arkansas and Kentucky, included reporting requirements in their state laws to ensure compliance with federal reporting requirements, they only collect minimal data on the number of incidents and demographics and often do not collect data thoroughly and accurately across school districts.

This month, the Trump Administration released guidance through its new Federal School Safety Clearinghouse website (SchoolSafety.gov) that emphasizes policies, including threat assessment and reporting, increasing school police, and hardening school buildings through increased use of surveillance and security equipment. Such

recommendations are potentially hazardous to students, particularly students of color, and do not focus on research-based, preventative and supportive interventions that create safe, productive school climates.

See box on Page 2 for IDRA's recommendations for education leaders, policymakers and communities.

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foster campus climates that support all students. For example, if a dress code policy leads to the disproportionate suspension of Black girls, the school should change that policy. Or, if the data reveal that a particular educator is suspending significantly more students than any other educator, a school administrator should intervene to provide professional development and coaching.

Include All Adults in the Building

Every adult in a school has a role to play in maintaining a safe and positive culture. This includes administrators, teachers, counselors, librarians, custodians, bus drivers and other staff. No one should engage in harmful discipline practices.

Administrators, as school leaders, set the tone and articulate the plan for discipline in a school. To be equitable, discipline plans must be fair, consistently enforced, developmentally appropriate, sensitive to student and adult needs, and must prioritize safety.

Meaningful discipline systems are proactive, rather than reactive. To be proactive, school administrators can know and greet students by name and make personal connections with families. Schools can provide training on implicit bias to help teachers build relationships with students and address their own biases that may result in unfair discipline practices. All staff, from secretaries to cafeteria personnel, can actively engage in the supportive culture of a school.

Build Authentic Relationships with Students

Meaningful adult support changes students' lives. IDRA conducted a study in a large urban school district and found that if at least one adult acts as mentor and counselor to a student, that student will complete high school (Robledo Montecel, et al., 1989). Effective discipline requires that adults understand the whole student and build the strong relationships that are the foundation of

School Discipline in Texas
A Web Story

www.idra.org/research_articles/TxDiscipline20

IDRA examined the latest data on multiple types of disciplinary actions in Texas finding much higher disciplinary action rates for students of color and males.

strong school cultures.

Sometimes schools discipline students for behaviors that really are age appropriate or for underlying issues that are out of students' control. For example, preschoolers across the country are suspended or expelled for normal behaviors seen as "disruptive." Or, students who are homeless and come to school stressed and hungry may be punished for behaviors that are simply a normal reaction to their difficult situation. These students should be supported, not punished or pushed away.

When adults in schools seek to understand students, they can support their needs and avoid harmful punishments. Gaining this understanding can require training and access to appropriate responses and supports. It is also critical that adults build strong relationships with students' families to fully understand situations that may lead to challenging behaviors.

By examining school data and policies through an equity lens, involving all school staff, and actively knowing their students, school personnel can create a positive culture that is conducive

to learning in each classroom and throughout the school campus.

Resources

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#IDRAedu #EquityGadfly #Census2020

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through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college*