Disproportionality in Discipline and African American Males

Addressing Critical Equity Issues

Disclaimer

Disproportionality in Discipline and African American Male Students

Disproportionality in discipline is both a race and gender issue. There is consistent evidence of overrepresentation of boys in school disciplinary sanctions. In virtually every study presenting school disciplinary data by gender boys are referred to the office and receive a range of disciplinary consequences at a significantly greater rate than girls (Jordan & Anil, 2009). A number of studies have found that boys are over four times as likely as girls to be referred to the office, suspended, or subjected to corporal punishment (Brown, 2007). The gender by race interaction is even more startling. Black males are 16 times as likely to be subjected to corporal punishment as white females (Nicholson-Crotty et.al, 2009). At both the middle and high school levels, the likelihood of suspension from most to least are: black males, white males, black females, white females (Fenning & Rose, 2007). The disproportionality in discipline and exclusionary disciplinary practices (suspension, expulsion, and alternative education programs) are part of a greater, and just as disturbing pattern, of inequity. African American males are also disproportionally referred for special education service for emotional and behavioral disorders and more likely to drop out of school (Skiba et.al, 2006; Department of Justice, 2003 & 2007). Despite these disparities, there is no evidence that African American males misbehave at a significantly higher rate. Whether based on school records or student interviews, studies have failed to find racial disparities in

misbehavior sufficient to account for the typically wide racial and gender differences in school discipline (Skiba & Noguera, 2010; McCarthy & Hoge, 1997). If anything, African American males appear to receive more severe school punishments for less severe behavior and for more subjective reasons (Kim et. al, 2010). The universality of these patterns suggests that some form of systemic bias is inherent in the use of school discipline and expulsion.

African American male reactions to a negative climate and classroom management may be exacerbated by cultural discontinuities that place them at a disadvantage in many urban classrooms. Many educators who come from a different background (regardless of race or ethnicity) may be unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the more active and physical style of communication that characterizes African American males (Bireda, 2010). Educators who find African American males as threatening may overreact to relatively minor threats to authority, especially if their perceptions are paired with a misunderstanding of cultural norms of social interaction. This cycle of fear, or as Boykin and Noguera refer to as "not knowing," create tension and conflict between students and school staff (Boykin and Noguera, 2011). Best practices must include professional development for teachers in cultural competency and culturally responsive classroom management. Appropriate training in culturally responsive classroom management, fair and equitable enforcement of

rules that are adequately communicated to students, and the support of families and mental health staff and administration can all assist in developing more engaging and welcoming classroom and school environments. We must work to foster a sense of belonging for those who feel disconnected and rather than isolate these students, offer an opportunity to reconnect with their teachers and the greater school community. Fostering students' feeling of belonging and valued can help African American males see school as a place where they can be successful. The urgency of creating this culture of learning for all students cannot be overemphasized; the alternative of losing more of our best and brightest is not an option.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- **Culturally Responsive Classroom Management Strategies:** http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/uploads/005/121/Culturally%20Responsive%20Classroom%20Mgmt%20Strat2.pdf
- **Toward a Conception of Culturally Responsive Classroom Management:** http://csuprofessionaldevelopment.com/images/pdfs/Weinstein.pdf
- **Safe and Responsive Schools Project: A School Reform Model for Implementing Best Practices in Violence Prevention:** www.indiana.edu/~equity/docs/A_School_Reform_Model.pdf
- **Addressing Ethnic Disproportionality in School Discipline through Positive Behaviors and Support (PBIS):** www.wisconsinpbisnetwork.org/assets/files/resources/1288962747_IPA%20Disproportionality.pdf
- **A Call for Change: A Preliminary Blueprint to Improve Educational Excellence and Opportunity for African American Males in Urban Public Schools:** www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/88/Blueprint%2082312.pdf
- **African American Boys and the Discipline Gap: Balancing Educators' Uneven Hand:** http://drcarlamonroe.com/uploads/EdHorizons.pdf
- **Project EASE (Educational Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsion) Promising Strategies Document:** www.ncdjjdp.org/cpsv/toolkit/acrobat/project_ease.pdf
- **Building Equalizing Schools within Inclusive Communities: Strategies in the Classroom and Beyond that Redirect the School-to-Prison Pipeline:** /www.calendow.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/BMOC/Harvard%20-%20Building%20Equalizing%20Schools%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf.

PUBLICATIONS

- *Eliminating the Achievement Gap: Reducing Minority Overrepresentation in School Discipline.* Juvenile Rights Project, Inc.

- Bireda, M. R. (2010). Cultures in conflict: Eliminating racial profiling. Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

- Boykin, A. W. & Noguera, P. (2011). *Creating the opportunity to learn: Moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

- [Racial disproportionality in school disciplinary practices](#).
  National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems.

- Kim, Y.C., Losen, D.J., & Hewitt, D. T. (2010). *The school-to-prison pipeline: Structuring legal reform.* New York. NY: New York University Press.

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- *Brown, T. M. (2007). Lost and turned out: Academic, social, and emotional experiences of students excluded from school. Urban Education, 42(5), 432-455. doi: 10.1177/0042085907304947.*

- *Fenning, P., & Rose, J. (2007). Overrepresentation of African American students in exclusionary discipline: The role of school policy. Urban Education, 42(6), 536-559. doi: 10.1177/0042085907305039.*

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- *Jordan, J. L., & Anil, B. (2009). Race, gender, school discipline and human capital effects. Journal of Agriculture and Applied Economics, 41(2) 419-429. Retrieved from http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/53089/2/jaaeip7.pdf*

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- *McCarthy, J. D., & Hoge, D. R. (1987). The social construct of school punishment: Racial disadvantage out of universalistic process. Social Forces, 65(4), 1101-1120. doi: 10.2307/2579025.*

- *Nicholson-Crotty, S., Birchmeire, Z., & Valentine, D. (2009). Exploring the impact of school discipline on racial disproportion in the juvenile justice system. Social Science Quarterly, 90(4), 1003-118. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-6237.2009.00674.*

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