

Study: Reasons for suspension and expulsion complex, race still central

April 13 2012



This is Russ Skiba. Credit: Indiana University

An Indiana University study presented on Friday at the American Educational Research Association meeting in Vancouver shows that race continues to be an important factor in determining who receives out-of-school suspension and expulsion, and that racial disparities in school discipline are most likely due more to school characteristics than to the characteristics of behaviors or students.

Russ Skiba, professor in counseling and [educational psychology](#) at the Indiana University School of Education, led the study, exploring factors affecting disproportionate rates of [suspension](#) and expulsion for African-American [students](#). Skiba is director of The Equity Project, offering

evidence-based information on equity in special education and school discipline, based in the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy at IU Bloomington.

"For overall rates of suspension and expulsion, the study found that discipline is not just a function of difficult students receiving punishment but is more complex," Skiba said.

Type of misbehavior, student characteristics including race and socioeconomic status, and school characteristics, such as the principal's views on school discipline, all predict which students will be suspended or expelled. In particular, the study found race to be a key factor.

"It continues to be a powerful predictor of the severity of school punishment, independent of poverty status or the type of behavior students engage in," Skiba said. "In particular, schools with more African-American students are more likely to use more exclusionary forms of discipline such as suspension or expulsion."

He said the researchers found that [poverty rates](#) and more [disruptive behavior](#) didn't account for the [racial disparities](#). Instead, the characteristics of schools themselves, including principal attitudes regarding discipline, are most important in accounting for racial differences.

Here are some of the findings:

- After controlling for both poverty and the seriousness of behavior, African American students remain 1.5 times more likely than white students to receive an out-of-school suspension.
- Students in schools with higher proportions of black students are almost 6 times more likely to receive an out-of-school

suspension.

- Students in schools where a principal supports preventive alternatives to suspension are 30 percent less likely to receive an out-of-school suspension, and more than 50 percent less likely to receive an expulsion.

Skiba said the results are consistent with other recent reports, including a report released last month by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights that found national data indicate African-American students are far more likely than peers to be suspended.

"It is especially troubling that these results support previous research in showing that schools with higher proportions of African-American students use more punitive procedures, regardless of the socioeconomic level of the schools," Skiba said.

"It's no surprise that schools face tough and complex decisions in trying to keep schools safe and orderly," Skiba said, but he added that the results also have important implications for addressing racial differences in discipline. "If we really wish to make a difference in reducing racial and ethnic disparities in suspension and expulsion, these findings suggest that we would do better reflecting upon [school](#) policies and practices than focusing on characteristics of students or their behavior."

More information: Skiba is presenting "Parsing Disciplinary Disproportionality: Contributions of Behavior, Students, and School Characteristics to Suspension and Expulsion" at 5:15 p.m. EDT Friday, April 13. The article can be viewed at [www.indiana.edu/~equity/docs/S... sproportionality.pdf](http://www.indiana.edu/~equity/docs/S...sproportionality.pdf) .

Provided by Indiana University

Citation: Study: Reasons for suspension and expulsion complex, race still central (2012, April 13)
retrieved 24 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2012-04-suspension-expulsion-complex-central.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.