

# Schools failing to address biased student discipline

June 2 2015

---



School districts are failing to address the discipline gap between students of color and white students—in some cases even blocking researchers from gathering data on the troubling trend, a Michigan State University scholar argues in a new paper.

Muhammad Khalifa set out to collect student discipline information from a handful of large school districts in Texas but said he was met with resistance from district administrators who viewed his efforts as a threat.

His findings, published in the academic journal *Teachers College Record*, highlight a larger national issue. The United States, Khalifa said, cannot solve the problem of black and Latino students being suspended at higher rates than whites if school districts don't even acknowledge the gap exists.

Nationally, black students are three times more likely to be suspended than white students, according to a [2014 report](#) from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights.

"School districts are deeply complicit in the oppression of some groups of students," said Khalifa, assistant professor of educational administration. "District administrators are perpetuating racism by not noticing or addressing the school factors that lead to the disproportionate suspension of students of color."

Khalifa, in attempting to examine whether individual school districts are addressing the issue, said he was met with roadblock after roadblock during his research, which took more than two years.

Two school districts repeatedly blocked his requests for student discipline data under the Freedom of Information Act, and then charged prohibitive fees of as much as \$10,000 to obtain the information. Another district gave him unusable data. Administrators from a fourth district provided the data and met with researchers, but then were defensive about the problem in their schools.

"Essentially, district administrators were not comfortable engaging in

discussions about race," the study says. "They interpreted it as a threat, and this likely prevented them from actually addressing the problem."

To attack the discipline gap, Khalifa recommends [school districts](#):

- Raise awareness of the problem. This includes being transparent with the data and communicating regularly with the community.
- Create teams of stakeholders to address the issue. Participants should include students, parents, teachers, administrators and community members.
- Work to create culturally responsive schools that are sensitive to all students' identities and backgrounds. Khalifa said students of color are often disciplined over their speech, dress or non-harmful behavior that link back to their neighborhoods

"Being culturally responsive means learning how to create space in schools that will accommodate multiple student identities—not just identities that accommodate white, middle-class kids, but [students](#) that are black, brown, immigrant and second-language," Khalifa said.

Provided by Michigan State University

Citation: Schools failing to address biased student discipline (2015, June 2) retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-06-schools-biased-student-discipline.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.