

Hiring more minority teachers in schools gives fairer perception of discipline

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Black students in schools with more black teachers have more positive attitudes and higher perceptions of fairness in school discipline, according to a new study that includes a University of Kansas researcher.

The study also found white students who attend schools with a higher number of [minority teachers](#) are more likely to believe discipline from school officials is fair as well.

"Increasing the proportion of minority teachers in a school enhances all students' perceptions of [school](#) discipline fairness," said Don Haider-Markel, professor and chair of the KU Department of Political Science who was a co-author of the study. "Our findings provide empirical support for the arguments of some political theorists that the legitimacy of public institutions is enhanced when those institutions are staffed by people who look like the population more generally."

Because public schools provide [young people](#) with their first real interaction with government, it is important to study these environments and their impact on perceptions; the urgency is even greater in light of protests in Ferguson, Missouri, Baltimore and New York after African-Americans were killed during encounters with police officers, Haider-Markel said.

Haider-Markel co-authored the study with University of Missouri professors Lael Keiser and Rajeev Darolia. They will present their findings in the paper "Race, Gender and Symbolic Representation in

American Schools" on Sept. 4 at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting in San Francisco.

The federal government has found [black students](#) are three times more likely than [white students](#) to be suspended or expelled and the protests earlier this year highlighted the disproportionate harsh treatment of African-Americans within the criminal justice system, the high levels of distrust African-Americans have for police and political institutions in general and the lack of diversity in [public institutions](#), the researchers said.

"Schools teach young people about democracy and being a citizen directly, but schools, through their treatment of students, also teach students how the government views them as citizens," Haider-Markel said. "So students who do not perceive fair treatment might take away the message that the government will not be fair or treat everyone equally."

Such a message might lay the foundation for making a young person less likely to participate in civil society through voting, attending public meetings or other means, he said.

Other researchers have found that increasing diversity in police departments enhances perceptions of fairness and legitimacy in how civilians evaluate [police officers](#), but this is only part of the solution in enhancing policy and community relations, Haider-Markel said.

The researchers said the study supports a recommendation that schools with few or no minority teachers could benefit from hiring teachers that more closely match the demographic of their enrollment. Also, because white student perceptions of legitimacy did not decline in schools with more minority teachers, government bureaucracies in general could presume that increasing representation of its work force would not come

at the cost of increasing [negative perceptions](#) by Caucasians, Haider-Markel said.

Provided by University of Kansas

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