Reducing Racial Disparities in School Discipline

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Making a difference for every child: Addressing disparities in education and beyond
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Understanding racial disparities in education: Distinguishing between symptoms and causes

- Racial disparities are byproducts or symptoms of larger systemic/structural inequities
- Achievement patterns reflect social inequality
  - Troubling assumptions: We tend to locate problems related to achievement and discipline in students
  - We tend to ignore unmet social needs –
  - Educators often exhibit resentment in response to demographic change
- Underlying causes: Systemic failures in the ways schools respond to student needs
- Normalization of failure

Child and Family Poverty in the U.S.

Typical educational disparities

- Achievement patterns
- Special Education placements
- Discipline referrals
- Graduation/dropout rates
- AP/Honors, Gifted enrollment
- School funding

Graduation Rates

School Suspension Rates

Figure 1: Racial Impact of the Rising Use of Suspension
Other disparities impact educational outcomes/performance

- Income/wealth
- Housing - foreclosures
- Criminal Justice – incarceration rates
- Politics – representation, voting rights
- Health – infant mortality, diabetes

Toxic stress impacts learning

Increasing evidence for the "toxic stress" hypothesis –

- Stressors associated with poverty increase wear and tear on cardiovascular and HPA axis— hypothesized to be “biomediator” of impact on brain development and function

Trends in median wealth by race

Children exposed to higher levels of poverty for longer periods of time have greater difficulty with
- Attention
- Working memory
- Inhibitory control
The overlap

Legend

% Poverty

PERCPOVERT

0.00 - 20.00

20.01 - 40.00

40.01 - 60.00

60.01 - 80.00

80.01 - 100.00

CSRP Participant Home Address

Homicides

Trauma exposure in military vs. urban Detroit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Combat</th>
<th>Fire/explosion</th>
<th>Rape/sexual assault</th>
<th>Shot or stabbed</th>
<th>Held captive</th>
<th>Mugged/badly beaten/ threatened w/ a weapon</th>
<th>Transportation accident</th>
<th>Other accident</th>
<th>Natural disaster</th>
<th>Sudden unexpected death</th>
<th>Caused injury/death</th>
<th>Witnessed death/human suffering</th>
<th>Learned of other’s illness/injury</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caretaker</td>
<td>46.5% (n = 1151)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fire/explosion</td>
<td>31.9% (n = 790)</td>
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<td>10.1% (n = 251)</td>
<td>8.3% (n = 205)</td>
<td>0.6% (n = 15)</td>
<td>38.2% (n = 946)</td>
<td>30.1% (n = 744)</td>
<td>18.4% (n = 456)</td>
<td>17.5% (n = 453)</td>
<td>70.0% (n = 1747)</td>
<td>12.4% (n = 307)</td>
<td>54.0% (n = 1317)</td>
<td>76.8% (n = 1849)</td>
<td>38.2% (n = 946)</td>
<td>30.1% (n = 744)</td>
<td>18.4% (n = 456)</td>
<td>17.5% (n = 453)</td>
<td>70.0% (n = 1747)</td>
<td>12.4% (n = 307)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rape/sexual assault</td>
<td>10.1% (n = 251)</td>
<td>19.1% (n = 256)</td>
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<td>Shot or stabbed</td>
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<td>Held captive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mugged/badly beaten/ threatened w/ a weapon</td>
<td>38.2% (n = 946)</td>
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<td>Transportation accident</td>
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<td>31.0% (n = 416)</td>
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<td>Other accident</td>
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<td>17.1% (n = 229)</td>
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<td>Natural disaster</td>
<td>17.5% (n = 453)</td>
<td>21.5% (n = 280)</td>
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<td>Sudden unexpected death</td>
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<td>79.5% (n = 1908)</td>
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<td>Witnessed death/human suffering</td>
<td>54.0% (n = 1317)</td>
<td>36.2% (n = 486)</td>
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<td>Learned of other’s illness/injury</td>
<td>76.8% (n = 1849)</td>
<td>75.8% (n = 969)</td>
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Key questions in countering educational disparities:

- Asking the right questions is essential to developing effective responses

  § How do we support the teachers of our most vulnerable students?
  § Do the schools that serve these children have the resources needed to meet their needs?
  § What are the barriers that deny access to learning opportunities?
  § How do we engage and support parents and caregivers?
  § How/when should interventions be targeted?

Examples: 9th grade academy, placing strong reading teachers in 3rd grade
II. The Failure of Reform: Learning from our mistakes

- Many school reforms have not been implemented with a clear focus on how they will solve the most pressing problems facing schools
  - Structural changes: Small learning communities
- Most school reforms fail to address the source of racial disparities
  - Overlook structural causes – poverty, inequality
  - Ignore opportunity gaps – racial segregation, unequal funding
  - Rely too much on pressure - failure becomes normalized – So Much Reform, Why So Little Change - Charles Payne

Reducing educational disparities requires a change in how schools operate

- Schools must be organized to meet student needs – academic and social
- Emphasis must be placed on maintaining quality in teaching, counseling and interventions
- Need for partnerships between schools and CBOs
  - Address non-academic needs – health and safety
  - Need to personalize the learning environment
- Size matters - schools where students are known
- Meet learning needs of students - EPGY

A holistic vision of school capacity building is needed to achieve equity in outcomes
PS 28 obtains highest gains in literacy and math in Brooklyn -2012