CHANGES IN EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE RATES AND DISCIPLINARY DISPROPORTIONALITY OVER TIME

Amity L. Noltemeyer
Caven S. Mcloughlin
Kent State University

Exclusionary discipline involves the use of suspensions, expulsions, and other disciplinary action resulting in removal from the typical educational environment; it is frequently used as a consequence for inappropriate student behavior. Because this form of discipline is associated with detrimental outcomes, it is of concern that in the United States of America the frequency of use of exclusionary discipline is consistently higher for the racial-minority group of African American students than for the majority racial group. This investigation utilized current district-level data from public schools in the state of Ohio to replicate previously documented findings of disciplinary disproportionality, to examine changes in overall use of exclusionary discipline over time, and to examine changes in disciplinary disproportionality over time. Results of repeated measures multivariate analyses confirm that African American students continue to be overrepresented as recipients of exclusionary discipline. Limitations of this investigation, implications related to public policy, and future directions for research are proposed.

Exclusionary discipline, expulsions and other disciplinary actions which require removal from the typical educational environment frequently have been used as consequences for inappropriate student behavior. In 2006, for example, approximately 3.3 million students (7% of the student population) were suspended and 100,000 students (0.2% of the student population) were expelled from school in the United States (Planty et al., 2009). Unfortunately, rather than promote appropriate behavior, these forms of discipline are associated with a variety of negative outcomes including academic failure (Gersch & Nolan, 1994; Safer, Heaton & Parker, 1981; MacMillan & Reschly, 1998; Rausch & Skiba, 2004), high school drop-out (Costenbader & Markson, 1998; DeRidder, 1990; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986), involvement with the juvenile justice system (Chobot & Garibaldi, 1982; Florida State Department of Education, 1995), grade retention (Safer, 1986), and illegal substance use (Swartz & Wirtz, 1990).

Given these detrimental outcomes, coupled with evidence that exclusionary discipline is ineffective at improving student outcomes (Fenning & Rose, 2007), the disproportional overrepresentation of African American students as recipients of exclusionary discipline is cause for concern. This issue was initially described by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF; 1975) in the first large-scale study to investigate national data on school discipline. Results of the investigation showed African American students as two-to-three times more likely to be suspended than White students across all grade-levels. African American students were significantly more likely to be suspended more than once, were exposed to harsher discipline strategies, and were less likely to receive milder alternatives when referred for a discipline infraction.

Studies over the ensuing decades consistently have supported these results across a wide variety of settings and populations. For example, in a study of one urban and one rural school district, Constenbader and Markson (1998) found that while African American students composed 23% of the student population they represented 45% of those receiving disciplinary actions. Garibaldi (1992) reported similar findings: African American males composed 43% of the students in an urban school district, while receiving 65% of the school district's suspensions and 80% of the school district's expulsions. Consistent with these results, Mendez and Knoff (2003) found that African American

males in a large Florida school district experienced approximately 2.5 times as many suspensions per 100 students as White males, and African American females in the same district experienced approximately 3.6 times as many suspensions per 100 students as White females. Other researchers have documented parallel findings (Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002; Skiba, Peterson & Williams, 1997; Thornton & Trent, 1988; Wu, Pink, Crain & Moles, 1982).

The overrepresentation of African American students in exclusionary discipline is not fully explained by an increased number or severity of problematic behaviors engaged in by African American students. Although some researchers have found differences in the actual level of behavioral functioning between African American and White students (Hosterman, DuPaul & Jitendra, 2008) other research suggests engagement in an equivalent number of problem behaviors (Bahr & Fuchs, 1991). Even when considering the same behavioral offenses, African American students tend to receive harsher consequences for less severe and more subjective offenses (e.g., *excessive noise*; Skiba et al., 2002). Researchers have also ruled out statistical artifacts as the primary explanation for disproportionality in discipline. Virtually all studies evidence some degree of disproportionality despite the measurement criteria utilized (Skiba et al., 2002). Finally, although poverty does contribute to disproportionality, a strong ethnicity effect remains even after controlling for poverty (Skiba et al., 2002).

Unfortunately, relatively little research has been done to examine longitudinal trends in either general use of exclusionary discipline or disciplinary disproportionality. As a result of several historical events that have occurred since the seminal CDF (1975) study, it can be anticipated that rates of both may reduce in response. For example, the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2001) has ushered in an era of accountability in which schools are expected to meet federally mandated achievement criteria. Fenning and Rose (2007) suggest that such expectations may have heightened pressure for administrators to remove children from classrooms who …*do not fit into the norms of the general student population* (p. 537). Cultural differences in what is determined as *normal* behavior may also be influential. Finally, some researchers have postulated that the increased adoption of zero-tolerance policies inadvertently may increase reliance on exclusionary discipline techniques (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). More specifically, zero tolerance policies may lead to increases in disciplinary disproportionality by failing to tolerate cultural differences and establishing a combative environment (Monroe, 2005).

It might also be expected that the increased focus on the potential negative impact of exclusionary discipline would prompt decreases in overall use of exclusionary discipline as well as disciplinary disproportionality over time. For example, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) legislation extended the provisions of its predecessors by providing State and Local Education Agencies the responsibility to define and enact policies to prevent disproportionality in special education identification and placement as well as the incidence, duration, and types of disciplinary actions used. Data collection may generate increased awareness and sensitivity to an issue that previously was absent. A plethora of recommendations for reducing exclusionary discipline use (Dupper, Theriot & Craun, 2009) and disciplinary disproportionality have been made (Monroe, 2005). Although this speculation warrants more research attention, it might be anticipated that exclusionary discipline and disproportionality rates would decrease as school administrators become more aware and increasingly adopt these strategies.

Although data examining trends in the use of exclusionary discipline over time is sparse, recent research suggests that although the number of such incidents is increasing, the proportion of the student population affected has remained relatively stable in recent years (Planty et al., 2009). There have been a few studies exploring changes in disciplinary disproportionality over time. Krezmein, Leone & Achilles (2006) found that the likelihood of African American students being suspended increased from 1995 to 2003, whereas the likelihood for White students remained relatively stable during the same period. In addition, Nichols (1999) found that disproportionality in discipline decreased over a three year period in a large urban school corporation, although African American students continued to be suspended at twice the rate of White students. However, the researchers disclose that the results should be interpreted with caution due to potentially flawed data collection techniques during the first two years of the study. As a result of this limitation, coupled with the general lack of longitudinal research on the topic and the contradictory results found by Krezmein et al. (2006) and Nichols (1999) further longitudinal research is warranted.

It is clear that a historical precedent of exclusionary discipline use and its disproportional application to African American students has been well established. However, preliminary research on changes in exclusionary disciplinary use and disciplinary disproportionality has been limited and at times contradictory (Krezmein et al., 2006; Nichols, 1999; Planty et al., 2009). Further research is needed to (a) establish the degree to which general use of exclusionary discipline and disciplinary disproportionality have changed in recent years, and (b) expand prior research to incorporate methods of discipline other than suspension (expulsion). To this end, the current study sought to answer the following research questions:

(1) Do significant differences exist in exclusionary discipline rates between White and African American students in Ohio during the period 2000-2001 through 2008-2009 when controlling for school district poverty? (i.e., *effect of ethnicity;* although disciplinary disproportionality has been documented since the 1970s, replication using current data and extension to diverse discipline types is warranted).
(2) Are there significant differences in general rates of exclusionary discipline in Ohio from the 2000-2001 school year through the 2008-2009 school year when controlling for school district poverty? (i.e., *effect of time;* given the potential negative outcomes of exclusionary discipline, it is important to consider the degree to which rates are changing over time in a bellwether state).
(3) Has the gap in exclusionary discipline between White and African American students changed significantly in Ohio from the 2000-2001 school year through the 2008-2009 school year when controlling for school district poverty? (i.e., *interaction between time and ethnicity;* although disproportionality in discipline is a well-established phenomenon, the degree to which disproportionality rates have changed in response to initiatives and legislation aimed at addressing the issue is unclear).

Ohio data comprise the data-set for this study because the state is a bellwether that reflects national educational and political trends (Noltemeyer, Brown & Mcloughlin, 2009; Rubin, 1997) and the percentages of White and African American individuals statewide approximate national averages based on census data (United States Census Bureau, 2008).

Method

Procedures

All data were obtained from the Ohio Department of Education website (www.ode.state.oh.us). To answer the research questions, the *Power Users Report* tool was used to create a spreadsheet of discipline incidents per 100 students for the academic years 2000-2001 through 2008-2009. Data were disaggregated by school year, school district, and race. Data were reported for three types of discipline incidents: Suspensions, expulsions, and *other* disciplinary actions.(see Table 1) The spreadsheet was exported to Microsoft Excel, where the columns and rows were sorted to eliminate (a) data on students from other ethnicities (e.g., Asian American), (b) data on schools that did not represent one of the seven school typologies of interest (see Figure 1 for a detailed description of each typology), and (c) districts with an *NC* in the data fields for White or African American ethnicity, indicating a total district population of fewer than 10 students for that ethnicity. Finally, the data were exported to SPSS for analysis.

Table 1.
Abbreviated Definitions for the Three Types of Discipline Incidents (adapted from Ohio Department of Education, 2006)

Type of Disciplinary Incident	*Abbreviated Definition*
Expulsion	The involuntary removal of a student from school by the superintendent.
Out of School Suspension	The denial of attendance at school for no more than 10 days
Other Disciplinary Actions	Includes in-school suspension, emergency removal by district personnel, in-school alternative discipline class, and removal by a hearing officer.

Data on the proportion of economically disadvantaged students from each school district were also acquired using the Power Users Report tool. These data were exported to Microsoft Excel and then integrated into the existing SPSS database. According to the Ohio Department of Education (Ohio Department of Education, 2006), a student must meet one or more of four criteria to be considered economically disadvantaged: (a) qualify for free or reduced priced lunch (the family must be at or below 130% of the federal poverty level to qualify for reduced price lunch and at or below 185% to

qualify for free lunch); (b) reside in a household where another member qualifies for free or reduced price lunch; (c) receive public assistance or live in a household where the guardians receive public assistance; or (d) meet the family income guidelines to qualify for Title I services for economically challenged families.

Typology 1. Rural/agricultural – high poverty, low median income These districts are rural agricultural districts and tend to be located in the Appalachian area of Ohio. As a group they have higher-than-average poverty, the lowest average median income level, and the lowest percent of population with college degree or higher compared to all of the groups. N=96, Approximate total ADM=160,000, Poverty count as a % of ADM for 2004=21.3%, Percentage of minority students in 2004=3.2%.
Typology 2. Rural/agricultural – small student population, low poverty, low to moderate median income These tend to be small, very rural districts outside of Appalachia. They have an adult population that is similar to districts in Group 1 in terms of education level, but their median income level is higher and their poverty rates are much lower. N=161, Approximate total ADM=220,000, Poverty count as a % of ADM for 2004=8.4%, Percentage of minority students in 2004=3.3%.
Typology 3. Rural/Small Town – moderate to high median income These districts tend to be small towns located in rural areas of the state outside of Appalachia. The districts tend to have median income levels similar to Group 6 suburban districts but with lower rates of both college attendance and managerial/professional occupations among adults. Their poverty percentage is also below average. N=81, Approximate total ADM=130,000, Poverty count as a % of ADM for 2004=5.4%, Percentage of minority students in 2004=2.8%.
Typology 4. Urban – low median income, high poverty This category includes urban (i.e. high population density) districts that encompass small or medium size towns and cities. They are characterized by low median incomes and very high poverty rates. N=102, Approximate total ADM=290,000, Poverty count as a % of ADM for 2004=23.2%, Percentage of minority students in 2004=16.6%.
Typology 5. Major Urban – very high poverty This group of districts includes all of the six largest core cities and other urban districts that encompass major cities. Population densities are very high. The districts all have very high poverty rates and typically have a very high percentage of minority students. N=15, Approximate total ADM=360,000, Poverty count as a % of ADM for 2004=44.3%, Percentage of minority students in 2004=62.2%.
Typology 6. Urban/Suburban – high median income These districts typically surround major urban centers. While their poverty levels range from low to above average, they are more generally characterized as communities with high median incomes and high percentages of college completers and professional/administrative workforce. N=107, Approximate total ADM=420,000, Poverty count as a % of ADM for 2004=8.2%, Percentage of minority students in 2004=9.3%.
Typology 7. Urban/Suburban – very high median income, very low poverty These districts also surround major urban centers. They are distinguished by very high income levels and almost no poverty. A very high percentage of the adult population has a college degree, and a similarly high percentage works in professional/administrative occupations. N=46, Approximate total ADM=240,000, Poverty count as a % of ADM for 2004=2.6%, Percentage of minority students in 2004=9.0%.

(from http://tinyurl.com/OH-typologies)

Figure 1.
Description of the school district typologies. . Frequency of Participating Schools by School Typology with Annual Daily Membership, Poverty-count and Proportion of Minority Students

Sample

The initial number of school districts for which both school typology and disciplinary data were accessed was 595.; however, 307 districts were eliminated from the sample due to insufficient exclusionary discipline data in one or more of the school years of interest (i.e., these schools had an NC

in the data field as described in the Procedures section). This resulted in a final sample of 288 school districts.

The final sample represented 48.4% of all school districts across the seven typologies identified within the state of Ohio. See Table 2 for an analysis of the degree to which the districts in the sample represent the districts across the state of Ohio using school typology as an indicator. It is evident that some differences between the sample and the state emerged. For example, urban schools were overrepresented in the sample and rural/small-town schools were underrepresented in the sample when compared to their representation in the state. This discrepancy was expected and unavoidable due to characteristics of the dependent variable and the proportion of racial minority students attending districts within the typologies. For example, rural/small-town school districts have an average minority enrollment of 2.8%; therefore, many of the districts might not have the minimum number of 10 African American students needed to report disciplinary data for that ethnicity. In contrast, urban schools have an average minority enrollment of 62.2%; therefore, it is certain that most urban districts will have sufficient African American participants to report disciplinary data.

Table 2.
Comparison of the Typology of Participating School Districts to the State of Ohio

Typology	N in Ohio	N in sample	Percentage of representation in Ohio*	Percentage of representation in sample**
1	96	27	15.8%	9.34%
2	161	25	26.5%	8.68%
3	81	17	13.2%	5.9%
4	102	84	16.8%	29.17%
5	15	14	2.5%	4.86%
6	107	79	17.6%	27.43%
7	46	42	7.6%	14.58%
TOTAL	*608*	*288*	*100%*	*100%*

* Indicates the percentage of districts from the entire Ohio school typology database that represent the typology of interest

**Indicates the percentage of districts from the sample that represent the typology of interest

Although an exact number of students attending the schools included in the sample was not readily available and not necessary because the dependent variable is reported in incidence *per 100 students* in attendance we *estimate* that the data reflect the average daily membership (ADM) of over one million students. This estimate was derived by identifying the percentage of Ohio schools represented in the sample for each typology and then identifying the same percentage of the total average daily membership for that typology (see Table 3 for overall estimate as well as estimates per typology).

Table 3.
Estimated Average Daily Membership for Sample Schools

Typology	Percentage of Ohio Schools Included in Sample	Average Daily Membership (ADM) for All Schools	Estimated ADM for Sample Schools (Column 1 multiplied by Column 2)
1	28.13	160,000	44,960
2	15.53	220,000	34,166
3	20.99	130,000	27,287
4	82.35	290,000	238,815
5	93.33	360,000	335,988
6	73.83	420,000	310,086
7	91.30	240,000	219,120
TOTAL			*1,210,422*

Analysis

Repeated measures multivariate analysis of covariance (repeated measures MANCOVA) was used to answer all research questions. This data analysis technique was selected because the study involved multiple measurements on multiple dependent variables. Specifically, the dependent variables were: (a) suspensions per 100 students, (b) expulsions per 100 students, and (c) other disciplinary actions per 100 students (each of which was measured annually for nine academic years). In addition, univariate ANCOVA was used to follow up all significant findings in order to discern the specific dependent variable(s) that contributed to the overall significant effect. Finally, descriptive statistics and trend analyses were used to supplement the results of repeated measures MANCOVA.

Results

Effect of Ethnicity

A repeated measures MANCOVA on the district-level data revealed significant differences in the use of exclusionary discipline between ethnic groups when controlling for school district poverty, F (3, 571) = 64.551, p=.000, ^{2} = .253. Using one-way ANCOVAS, these differences were deemed to be significant for suspensions, F (1, 573) = 187.893, p = .000, ^{2} = .247, expulsions, F (1, 573) = 53.315, p = .000, ^{2} = .085, and other disciplinary actions F (1,573) = 68.380, p = .000 ^{2} = .107. Specifically, the average rate of suspensions, expulsions, and other disciplinary actions for African American students ranged between 1.8 and 2.3 times the rate for their White peers. Overall, ethnicity explained 25.3% of the variability in disciplinary actions.

Effect of Time

When considering the overall use of exclusionary discipline, repeated measures MANCOVA revealed significant changes in rates over time, F (24, 13742) = 1.749, p = .013 ^{2} = .003. However, univariate ANCOVAS reveal these differences were significant only when considering suspensions, F (5.771, 3259.041) = 2.576, p = .019 ^{2} = .004. Tests of within subject contrasts suggest a quadratic effect, F (1, 573) = 9.167 p = .003 ^{2} = .016. This effect is displayed in Figure 2. Although non-significant, graphical depictions of the data for expulsions and other disciplinary actions over time are included in Figures 3 and 4.

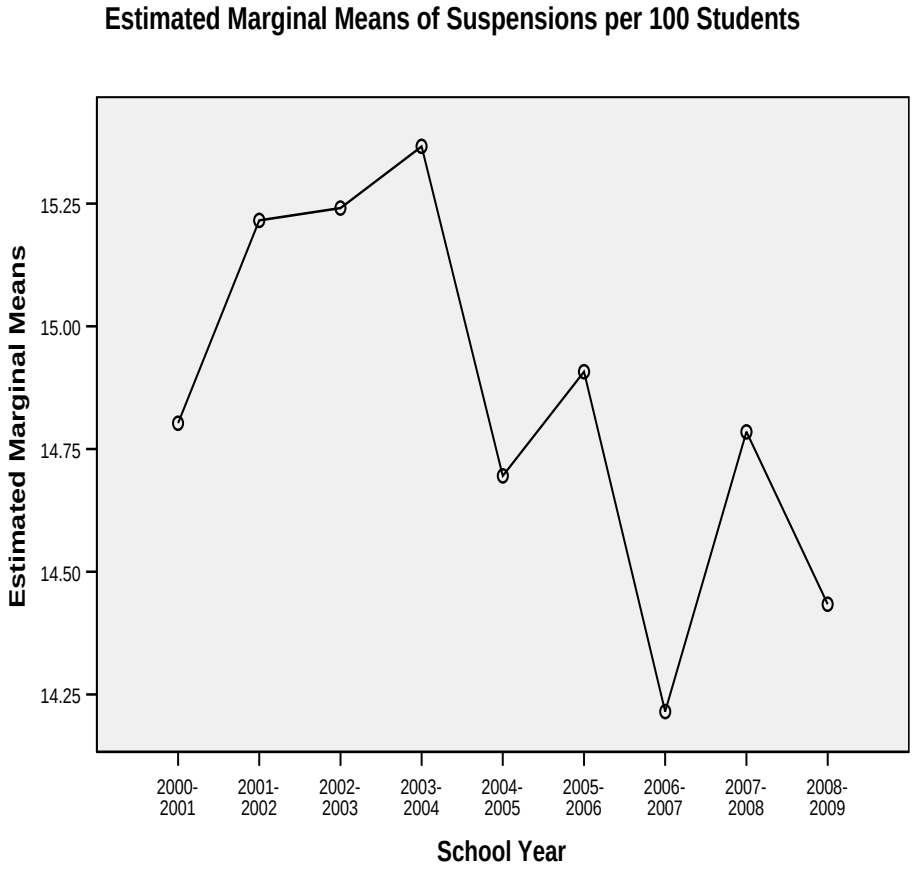

Figure 2.
Estimated marginal means of suspensions per 100 students in Ohio from 2000-2001 through 2008-2009

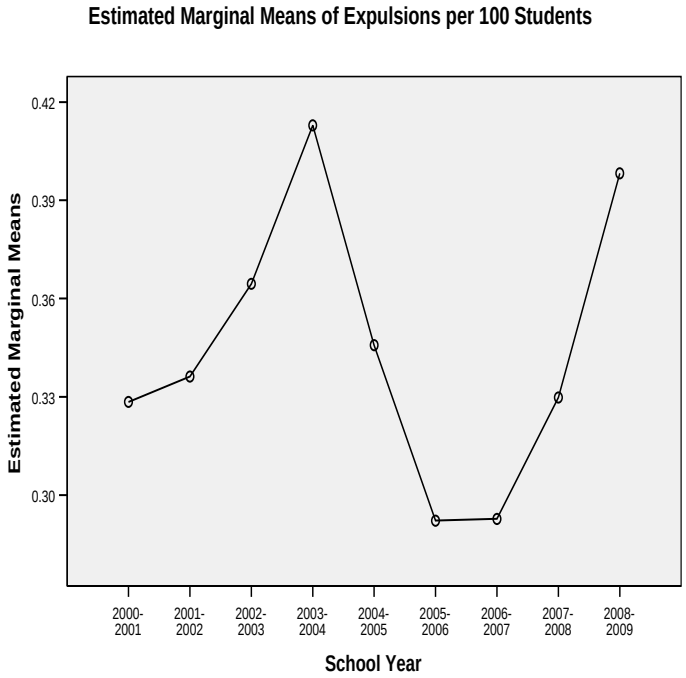

Figure 3.
Estimated marginal means of expulsions per 100 students in Ohio from 2000-2001 through 2008-2009

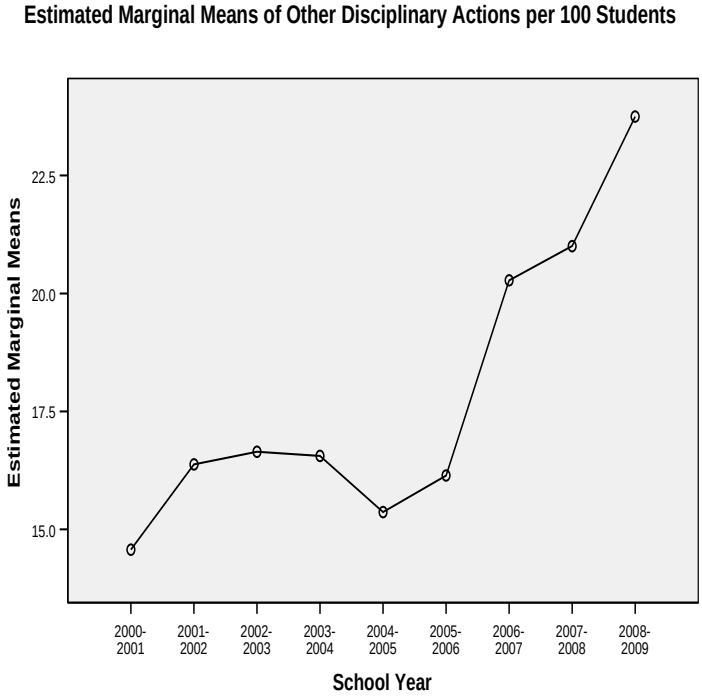

Figure 4.
Estimated marginal means of other disciplinary actions per 100 students in Ohio from 2000-2001 through 2008-2009

Interaction Between Time and Ethnicity

A repeated measures MANCOVA on the district-level data revealed that significant differences in disciplinary disproportionality also exist over time, F (24, 15134.000) = 5.893, p = .000 ^{2} = .004. Univariate ANCOVAS revealed this difference was only significant when considering suspensions, F (5.687, 3588.528) = 5.629, p = .000 ^{2} = .009. Tests of within subject contrasts suggest a significant linear effect, F (1, 631) = 16.213, p = .000 ^{2} = .025. This effect is displayed in Figure 5.

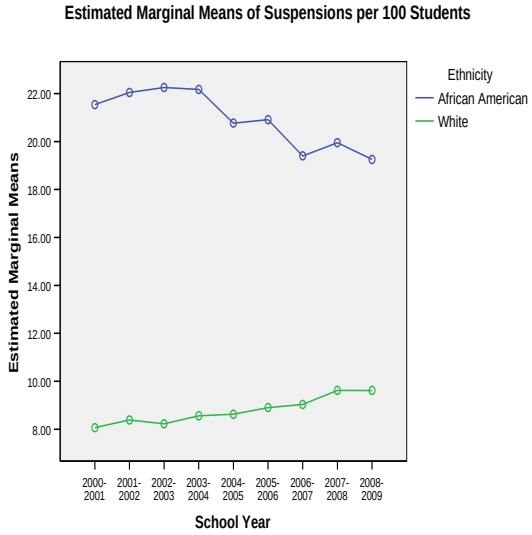

Figure 5.
Estimated marginal means of suspensions per 100 students in Ohio by ethnicity from 2000-2001 through 2008-2009

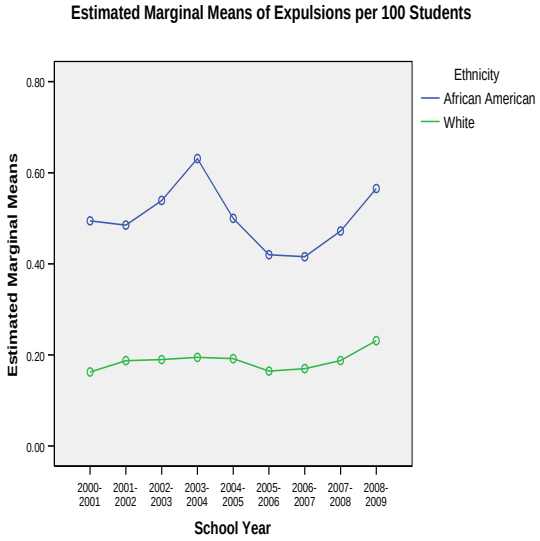

Figure 6.
Estimated marginal means of expulsions per 100 students in Ohio by ethnicity from 2000-2001 through 2008-2009

Using an analysis of slopes (slope for African American students is -.3737 and slope for White students is .1977), it appears that if *in theory* this pattern of suspensions continued at the same rate, the two groups of students would experience equal numbers of suspensions per 100 students part-way through the 2026-2027 school year at 12.98 suspensions per 100 students. Although non-significant, graphical

depictions of the data for expulsions and other disciplinary actions by ethnicity are included in Figures 6 and 7.

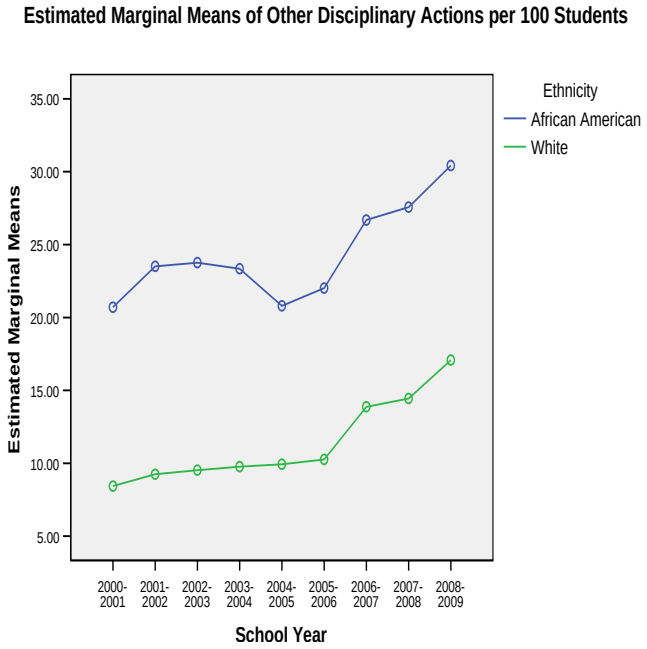

Figure 7.
Estimated marginal means of other disciplinary actions per 100 students in Ohio by ethnicity from 2000-2001 through 2008-2009

Discussion

Research documenting *trends* in the general use of exclusionary discipline is limited. Although findings consistently have documented the overrepresentation of African American students as recipients of exclusionary discipline (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 1997), further research using current data is warranted. There has been limited research exploring the changes in disciplinary disproportionality over time. The current investigation utilized data from public schools in Ohio to explore these three complex and interrelated issues.

Results indicate that African American students continue to be the recipients of significantly more suspensions, expulsions, and other disciplinary actions than White students. In fact, ethnicity accounts for over 25% of the variability in exclusionary discipline rates. This effect of ethnicity on exclusionary discipline rates was significant across all three discipline types considered (i.e., suspension, expulsions, and other disciplinary actions). These findings are consistent with prior research demonstrating disciplinary disproportionality; however, the effect was found to be notably stronger when considering suspensions and notably weaker when considering expulsions. One speculation for the more pronounced effect of suspensions than expulsions is that there may be less subjective judgment required in determining an expulsion than a suspension because expulsions are typically preceded by either single dangerous act or a series of non-dangerous acts. This explanation is consistent with previous findings that African American students often are disciplined more aggressively for engaging in trivial behaviors since suspensions may result from these acts while expulsions would be unlikely. It is likely that although the final decision rests with the school district superintendent, expulsions result less from unilateral decision-making and more from collaborative decision-making involving multiple individuals over time. This likely reduces the possibility of bias in decision-making.

This study suggests that significant differences exist in the use of exclusionary discipline from 2000-2001 through 2008-2009; however, these differences were significant only when considering suspensions. Examination of suspension data suggests a trend that is currently on the decline. Concurrently, although not statistically significant, we noted an upward trend with relation to other disciplinary actions. Although again only a speculation, it may be that due to an increased awareness of

the potential negative consequences of out of school suspensions schools are opting for more proactive (Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports) or alternative discipline programs. Given the documented negative effects of out-of-school suspensions these results suggest that the trend is promising; however, more research to determine why this effect was noted only for suspensions is warranted.

Finally, results indicate that significant differences in disciplinary disproportionality exist over time. Specifically, when each discipline type was separately considered, only suspensions emerged as significantly different over the period of interest. The general trend over time is a decrease in suspensions among African American students concurrent with a more subtle increase in suspensions among White students. Again, reasons for this trend can only be speculated and warrant further investigation. Recent legislation and policy (NCLB, 2001) increasingly have been requiring states and local education agencies to assess disciplinary practices and develop interventions to address disproportionality. It would be reasonable to assume that these efforts would result in decreased disproportionality because schools would be more aware when disproportionality exists due to the requirement to investigate it, and be more motivated to address it given sanctions for failing to do so. As a result, the findings should not be surprising. However, an unanticipated result was the rise in suspensions for White students; more research is warranted to explore whether these trends.

There are several limitations associated with the current investigation. The study relies on examination of existing data and the degree to which data were consistently recorded and reported by school districts is unknown. However, it is unlikely that any between-school variations in reporting had a significant effect on the findings because within school reporting for the two ethnic groups of interest was likely consistent. The effects of ethnicity may be confounded by other variables; although poverty was used as a covariate to minimize this likelihood, other variables such as academic achievement or family involvement may also partially explain the findings. The degree to which our findings generalize to other regions across the nation is unknown; although Ohio is considered a representative *bellwether* state, trends in disproportionality may be found to vary by state or by region. Finally, this study did not examine the types of behaviors reported to have led to the disciplinary consequences. It would be useful to explore which behavioral infractions explain disproportionality.

Despite these limitations, our results are important for several reasons. They demonstrate that efforts to decrease reliance on exclusionary discipline as well as disproportionality in discipline have met with some success. Although the researchers cannot conclusively determine due to the design of the study, it appears that increased awareness, monitoring, and intervention of disciplinary practices may have resulted in overall decreases in suspensions as well as decreases in disciplinary disproportionality in suspensions.

Notwithstanding the slightly narrowing gap in discipline between White and African American students in suspensions, it is important to note that ethnicity still accounts for over 25% of the variance in exclusionary discipline rates (even after controlling for district poverty level). This remains a startling difference. Additionally, no significant changes in disproportionality over time were noted for expulsions and other disciplinary actions. Several explanations may explain why this trend of disproportionality persists. Because the majority of teachers are White, there may be an increased likelihood that cultural differences would lead more African American children to be viewed as exhibiting such *atypical* behaviors. Since African American students have been documented to evidence lower average passing rates on standardized achievement tests (United States Department of Education, 2007) the increased pressure for accountability may result in increased acting-out behaviors due to frustration and/or a desire to escape the demands of the instructional environment. Past research has been inconsistent regarding the existence of differences in behaviors between ethnicities (Bahr & Fuchs, 1991; Hosterman et al., 2008; Skiba et al., 2002). Also, the increasing use of zero-tolerance policies may contribute to an unwelcoming instructional climate, which ultimately may lead to decreased student engagement (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). This factor may particularly be problematic for African American students who have traditionally been more disenfranchised and may feel less welcome in the academic environment. Finally, the contribution of institutional and/or individual bias in disciplinary referral has been suggested (Skiba et al., 2002).

It appears evident that strategies aimed at reducing the overall need for exclusionary discipline for *all* students appears warranted. One framework for schools to consider is Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS). SWPBS is a comprehensive approach designed to promote the appropriate behaviors of all students and enhance the capacity of systems to design positive environments for

students (OSEP Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, 2004). This approach has been demonstrated to result in decreases in out of school suspensions (Barrett, Bradshaw & Lewis-Palmer, 2008), office disciplinary referrals (Barrett et al., 2008), and lost instructional time due to disciplinary incidents and referrals (Scott & Barrett, 2004). To minimize disproportionality in discipline, schools should also consider training teachers in culturally appropriate classroom management strategies. Since inappropriate behaviors warranting disciplinary outcomes will continue, it is important to consider alternatives to exclusionary discipline that have more positive outcomes.

Several additional areas for future research deserve attention. It is important to identify factors that predict high- or low-use of discipline and disproportionality in implementing discipline. For example, regression or path analyses could be used to identify school demographic variables, (e.g., ethnicity of teachers, student to teacher ratios, percentage of highly qualified teachers), school process variables (e.g., positive behavior support implementation, home-school collaboration programs, intervention assistance teams), and student demographic variables (e.g., gender, disability status, socioeconomic status) that predict high or low rates of exclusionary discipline for different ethnic groups. This could lead to the development of a conceptual model detailing what factors have direct and indirect effects on exclusionary discipline and disciplinary disproportionality. Next, it may prove useful to examine schools that have demonstrated significant decreases in exclusionary discipline and disciplinary disproportionality over time to better understand the programs and processes that contribute to such decreases. Given the complexity of factors that likely contribute to the changes, qualitative methodologies may serve an appropriate starting point. Finally, it may prove useful to examine patterns in the types of behaviors reported to precede application of exclusionary discipline. This may reveal key types of infractions that explain a large proportion of the variability in exclusionary discipline use and disciplinary disproportionality and may also lead to a better understanding of how observed behaviors differ by ethnicity.

Exclusionary discipline is a commonly used technique for responding to student misbehavior. The overrepresentation of African American students in exclusionary discipline has been a longstanding issue. Given the increasing diversity of students entering our nation's schools, coupled with the potential negative effects of exclusionary discipline, the importance of addressing disproportionality can only intensify. This study presents one attempt at examining both the current status and recent trends in the overall use of exclusionary discipline as well as the disproportionate application of these techniques for African American students. These results can serve as an impetus for further commentary and research that ultimately will lead to the identification of the specific contributing factors to high reliance on exclusionary discipline and disciplinary disproportionality and consequently to interventions for creating more equitable and positive learning environments for all students.

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