



TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Barbara Jordan – Mickey Leland
School of Public Affairs
Center for Justice Research

Racial Disparity in Harris County School Suspensions

Jennifer Bourgeois

Melissa Kwende

centerforjusticeresearch.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report illustrates the analysis of school disciplinary actions in a local school district. In recent decades, K-12 school disciplinary practices have garnered national attention from researchers, policymakers, and educators. Racial disparity among school discipline raises serious questions about continued violations of the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education decision. The purpose of the report is to assist educators in determining if school disciplinary practices impact certain ethnic groups at a disproportionate rate. The current study examines the discipline records for five academic school years in nineteen independent school districts to identify the equitable assignment of in-school suspension (ISS), out-of-school suspension (OSS), disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEPs), juvenile justice alternative education programs (JJAEPs), and expulsions. Disparity ratio analysis found that for each school district, Black students were removed from the classroom at a disproportionate rate in comparison to White students. These findings suggest that greater attention to individual level factors is needed to understand the nature and extent of inequitable discipline-based decisions within each school district.

This report is different than others due to two important reasons. First, prior studies seeking to analyze school discipline have been at the federal and state level. The significance of this report is that it examines the administration of school discipline sanctions at the local level in the third largest county in the nation. Second, the findings provide an opportunity to ask a different set of questions while making progress towards a localized movement to address the impact of racial disparity in school districts.

Key findings in the report include the following:

1. During the 2016-2017 academic school year, Black students were over **three times** more likely to be removed from the classroom in comparison to white students.
 - Out of 918, 449 students in public schools during the 2016-2017 academic school year, 145,175 (16%) students were removed from the classroom. Although Blacks accounted for 19% of the total student population, they represented 36% of classroom removals.
2. Based on disparity ratios for the 2016-2017 academic school year, Black students were disproportionately more likely to be removed from the classroom for disciplinary reasons.
 - **For each school size (small, medium, and large)**, Black students were more likely to be removed from the classroom in comparison to their White classmates.
3. Black students were more likely to receive in-school suspension in each school district.

- **11 out of 19 school districts'** 2016-2017 disparity ratio for Blacks receiving in-school suspension was above the Texas ratio.
4. For the strictest categories of school disciplinary sanctions, Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEP), Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs (JJAEP), and expulsions, Blacks were impacted at a disparate rate.
 - The largest school district reflected the **highest 2016-2017 disparity ratio at 5.52.**
 5. **Lack of diversity in educators** in school districts.
 - The majority of K-12 students are minorities; however, the majority of teachers are White.
 6. Black students were impacted by school discipline sanctions at a disproportionate rate; however, further analysis of **individual campus level characteristics are needed** in order to fully answer the question why.
 - Aggregate school district level information is available on Texas Education Agency's website; however, there is minimum accessible individual campus level data.

The key findings above provide a brief glimpse into the reality of racial disparity, and the importance of additional research to explore supplementary questions. Further analysis within each school district, campus by campus, will determine the depth of racial disparity and its causes. Unfortunately, there are several limitations and will require school districts to be transparent with their data. An important next step is to obtain additional data points about both students and the individual schools to help identify which factors are contributing to school discipline disproportionality. Ultimately, this report can assist educators, administrators, and policy makers strive for an equitable education system, and serve as a model for the state and the nation.

INTRODUCTION

The school-to-prison pipeline debate has garnered great debate nationally. Steaming from the conversation about the school-to-prison pipeline is national and state level data showing that minorities who receive school disciplinary actions are impacted at a disproportionate rate (Losen & Whitaker, 2018; Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011). The need to address patterns of racial inequities in public schools has surfaced as a key focus for education system reform efforts. However, much of the research up to now has been descriptive in nature, and at the national and state level. The following report represents a localized movement toward education reform. The county studied has a population of 4.6 million residents and contains nineteen independent school districts (ISDs). Based on the 2016-2017 academic school year, Harris County ISD's racial and ethnic composition was approximately 6% Asian, 19% Black or African American, 55% Hispanic/Latino, 18% White, less than 2% two or more races, and American Indian or Alaska Native and Native/Hawaiian each account for less than 1%. The purpose of this report is to examine school disciplinary actions by ethnicity in Harris County public school districts.

African American students are suspended and expelled at a higher frequency than their peers who represent other racial groups. Students suspended or expelled are associated with the stigma of being labeled a "problem child." Studies show that students who are removed from school for disciplinary actions are more apt to end up at-risk, ultimately placed into an alternative disciplinary school, or worse. This is signified as the school-to-prison pipeline, and while it's a worst-case scenario, for many students, it becomes their reality (Wheeler, 2017). Zero tolerance policies were meant to expand school safety among all students (Skiba, Reynolds, Graham, Sheras, Conoley, & Garcia Vazquez, 2006). Yet in recent years, these policies have become excessively unbending and they have directly contributed to racial inconsistencies in school discipline. Additionally, these policies have directly impacted students of color in a negative manner. Zero tolerance policies are frequently authorized through unyielding practices and predestined penalties that significantly hamper any type of discretion in specific cases. The application of zero tolerance policies has augmented the commonness of suspension and expulsion to deal with behaviors that run the gamut from improper dress code violations and talking back to teachers to the worst case situations involving weapons possession and selling narcotics. These policies damage and disproportionately hurt students of color, students with disabilities, and low-income students (Curran, 2019; Hackett, 2018). Simply stated, zero tolerance policies resulting in school removals do not work. Removing a student from class, in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension is not the remedy for getting to the root of behavioral problems.

Under President Barak Obama's administration in 2014, the U.S. departments of Education and Justice released recommendations for educational leaders as guidance to assist schools in

creating school discipline good practices and strategies to ensure equality. If applied correctly, the purpose is to use alternative penalties for suspensions and expulsions, which do not remove students from classroom time, while simultaneously avoiding discriminating against specific racial and ethnic groups at a disproportionate rate.

The influence of school disciplinary actions has strong implications for students' entrance into the juvenile justice system (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011). Previous literature that document discriminatory practices in school disciplinary actions solely report the levels of disparity. What is less clear is the context in which inequities in school discipline practices happen. Therefore, this report aims to examine racial disparity among the total population for each school district in Harris County in order to work towards school discipline equity.

OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Overview of Disparity in the Educational System

The purpose of schools as a social institution is to provide an environment that supports acquiring knowledge and socialization. Essential to the learning process is a space in which everyone feels a sense of safety; however, there are different methods that can be used to maintain a level of security and protection for both teachers and students. Preserving order and school safety raise several questions and the intersection of various interdisciplinary research areas such as the educational system, juvenile justice system, and the mental well-being of children (Cornell & Mayer, 2010). The removal of disruptive students in order to maintain safety is the intended purpose of school disciplinary policies. However, past research shows that minority students are removed from the classroom at a disparate rate (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015; Rios & Vigil, 2017; Skiba, Horner, Chung Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014; Loveless, 2017). According to a report by the US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights in 2014, in comparison to white students, Black students were three times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension disciplinary action during the 2011-2012 academic school year. Those that are under the assumption that harsh school discipline policies are effective main argument is that minority students are removed from the classroom at a disproportionate rate simply due to misbehaving at a higher rate in comparison to their fellow classmates. However, this statement is inaccurate and not supported by empirical studies (Skiba, 2013; Peguero, & Shekarkhar, 2011).

The Impact of School Disciplinary Policies

Removal from the classroom setting is a disadvantage for students (Edwards, 2016). Students that are removed from the classroom are labeled as "at-risk," and as a "problem" student who is disrupting the learning process of their fellow classmates. When a student is removed from the classroom due to a school disciplinary action, they experience short and long term effects. Research has shown that students that are suspended or expelled have lower grades and test scores, a higher likelihood of being placed into special education classes, delay in

academic progress, higher dropout rates, and an increase in the odds of arrest (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Mattison & Aber, 2007; Kupchik, 2016; Peguero, Bondy, & Shekarkhar, 2017; Mowen & Brent, 2016). The short term impacts of school discipline resulting in the removal from the classroom can lead to a series of events that can follow students into their adulthood. Research shows that students who receive school discipline sanctions are more likely to dropout, which results in economic losses due to fewer opportunities for gainful employment (Marchbanks III, Blake, Booth, Carmichael, Seibert, & Fabelo, 2015). The outcomes of students that are removed from the classroom parallel those of the criminal justice system. The reentry process for students back into the classroom after their removal is met with several obstacles (Skiba et al., 2014; Kirk & Sampson, 2013).

Context of School Discipline Disparity (School-to-Prison Pipeline)

The majority of court-involved youth have experienced academic failure, school exclusion, and dropout. Many school-based policies and practices worsen the risks for court involvement among Black male youth. School-level leadership, a dedicated staff, a school wide behavior management system and evidence based academic instruction can help lessen the risks for youth delinquency and stymie the level of students of color being disciplined at harsher rates (Christle, Jolivette, Nelson, 2005). Prior studies have determined that schools' unrestricted decisions to suspend, expel, and criminalize student misconduct contributes to student push out and dropout rates (Fowler, 2011).

EXPLANATION OF KEY TERMS

The following are definitions of the main key terms for school discipline sanctions in Texas that will be used throughout this report (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

In-School Suspension (ISS) is a form of suspension where students are removed from their regular classroom for a set amount of time and placed an alternative location within the same school. This type of suspension allows students to complete homework assignments and not have a break in their educational setting; they are just removed from other students until their suspension is completed. Normally, a student that receives in-school suspension spends their whole school day in the designated ISS location.

Out-of-School Suspension (OSS) is a temporary, complete barring from a school campus and any school functions and activities. Per TEA guidelines, a typical out-of-school suspension cannot exceed 3 days.

Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) is defined as an educational and self-discipline alternative instructional program. DAEP removes students from their routine classes for disciplinary related reasons. DAEP's are usually located on-campus or off-campus yet separate from other non-DAEP students.

Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP)'s goal is to decrease delinquency rates and increase student accountability and rehabilitate students through an across-the-board, coordinated community-based juvenile probation system.

Expulsions are permanent school wide removals of students. Expulsions remove or ban a student from a school system due to persistent violations of the institution's policies.

School District Sizes referenced in this report are based on TEA standards, large school districts are identified by a population of fifty thousand or more students, medium school district have ten thousand to fifty thousand, and small districts have less than ten thousand students.

Large School Districts

Houston ISD, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, Katy ISD, Aldine ISD, Pasadena ISD, and Klein ISD.

Medium School Districts

Alief ISD, Humble ISD, Spring ISD, Spring Branch ISD, Goose Creek ISD, Galena Park ISD, Tomball ISD, and Deer Park ISD.

Small School Districts

Channelview ISD, Sheldon ISD, LaPorte ISD, Crosby ISD, and Huffman ISD.

METHODOLOGY

Consistent with the suggestions in Nishioka (2017), we used data that we knew to be accessible, accurate and reliable. The data analyzed for this study came from two sources, The Texas Education Agency (TEA) and individual school districts within the county. The management of funding and overseeing for the state's public education system is the responsibility of TEA. This study focused on the 2016-2017 academic school year. The dependent variable in this study is the type of school disciplinary sanction measured by the number of actions per category. There are five school disciplinary sanctions that school districts report to TEA, in-school suspensions, out-school-suspensions, disciplinary alternative programs, and expulsions were analyzed. For the purposes of this study, DAEP, JAEP, and expulsions were grouped together in one category, and all five sanctions were grouped together and referred to as total classroom removals. DAEP, JJAEP, and expulsion actions marked as N/A in TEA's data indicated counts or percentages that were not available or masked. For the purpose of this study, N/A was counted as 0 actions. The independent variable in the study was ethnicity. Ethnicity was separated into seven different categories: American Indian or Alaskan, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian, Two or more races, and White.

Analysis Methods

This report focused on descriptions of relationships between two variables, for example, ethnicity and the type of school disciplinary action. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all students, by ethnicity kindergarten through 12th grade and by type of discipline

administered. Refer to the Texas Compilation of School Discipline Law and Regulations (2018) regarding specific criteria regarding out-of-school suspensions for students that are in the grade level three or below.

Three different types of analysis methods were used in the study: absolute numbers and percentages, rates, and relative rate ratios. Due to rates failing to show whether or not disparity exists in each disciplinary action category across different groups, relative rate ratios were calculated. By calculating relative rate ratios, this study was able to answer questions regarding how the classroom removal rate among Black students compare with the classroom removal rate among White students, as well as provide additional context such as whether the rate is higher or lower (Nishioka, 2017; Boneshefski & Runge, 2014; Bollmer, Bethel, Garrison-Mogren, & Brauen, 2007). Below explains calculations for rates and relative rate ratios.

Rate (risk index) = Number of students in a specified disciplinary sanction category
(for example, Black students removed from the classroom due to ISS)

X 100

Total number of student in the group
(for example, total number of Black students)

Relative Rate Ratio = Rate of students in a specified disciplinary sanctions category
(for example, rate of Black students removed from the classroom due to ISS)
Rate of students in comparison group in the same disciplinary sanction category
(for example, rate of White students removed from the classroom due to ISS)

In this study, rates were calculated for in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions. DAEP, JJAEP, and expulsion categories were first combined together and then the relative rate was calculated. In this report, the formula used to calculate relative rate ratios shows the between group disparity with Blacks and Hispanics being compared to Whites. For the remainder of the report, relative rate ratio is referred to as the disparity ratio. Due to using aggregate data, the disparity ratios reflect the number of students disciplined, but does not distinguish between the number of occurrences per a student. Simply stated, the data does not distinguish between students that may have had more than once disciplinary occurrence. It should also be noted that in some instances the data indicated N/A for certain disciplinary sanctions, and in those instances the information was coded as 0. Due to some districts having N/A or 0 occurrences, disparity ratios were not able to be calculated.

County Independent School Districts

The study's sample contained nineteen independent county school districts, which consisted of Houston ISD, Cypress-Fairbanks (CyFair) ISD, Katy ISD, Aldine ISD, Pasadena ISD, Klein ISD, Alief ISD, Humble ISD, Spring ISD, Spring Branch ISD, Goose Creek ISD, Galena Park ISD, Tomball ISD, Deer Park ISD, Channel View ISD, Sheldon ISD, LaPorte, ISD Crosby ISD, and Huffman ISD. Katy

ISD is a large school district that sits in three different counties; however, the majority of the school district is located in Harris County, and therefore is included in this report for analysis. The nineteen districts enroll approximately 818,251 students, representing 15.71% of K–12 students in the state of Texas.

FINDINGS

Figure 1 illustrates the ethnicity of students in Texas and the 19 school districts in Harris County for the most current 2016-2017 academic school year. In the state of Texas, during the 2016-2017 academic school year, Hispanic students were the majority of the total student population at 52%. White students accounted for 28%, Blacks 13%, and other (Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Two or More Races) accounted for approximately less than 7%.

Figure 1. Texas and Harris County Independent School Districts Student Demographics for the 2016-2017 Academic School Year

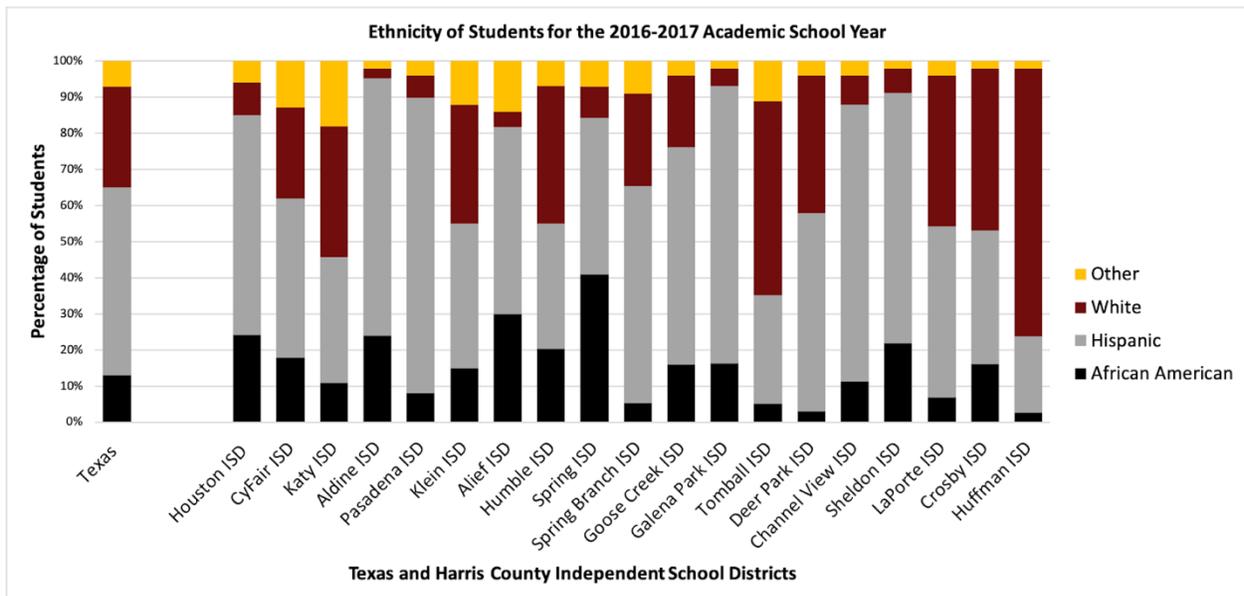
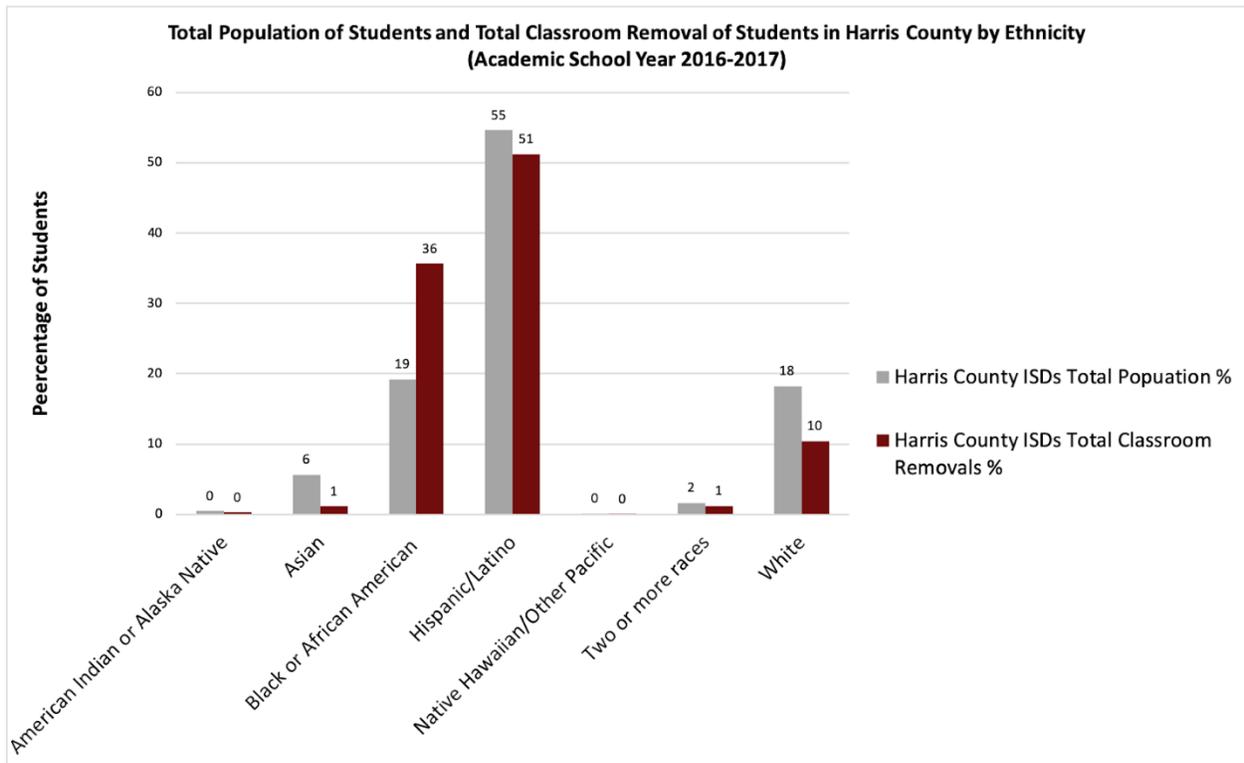


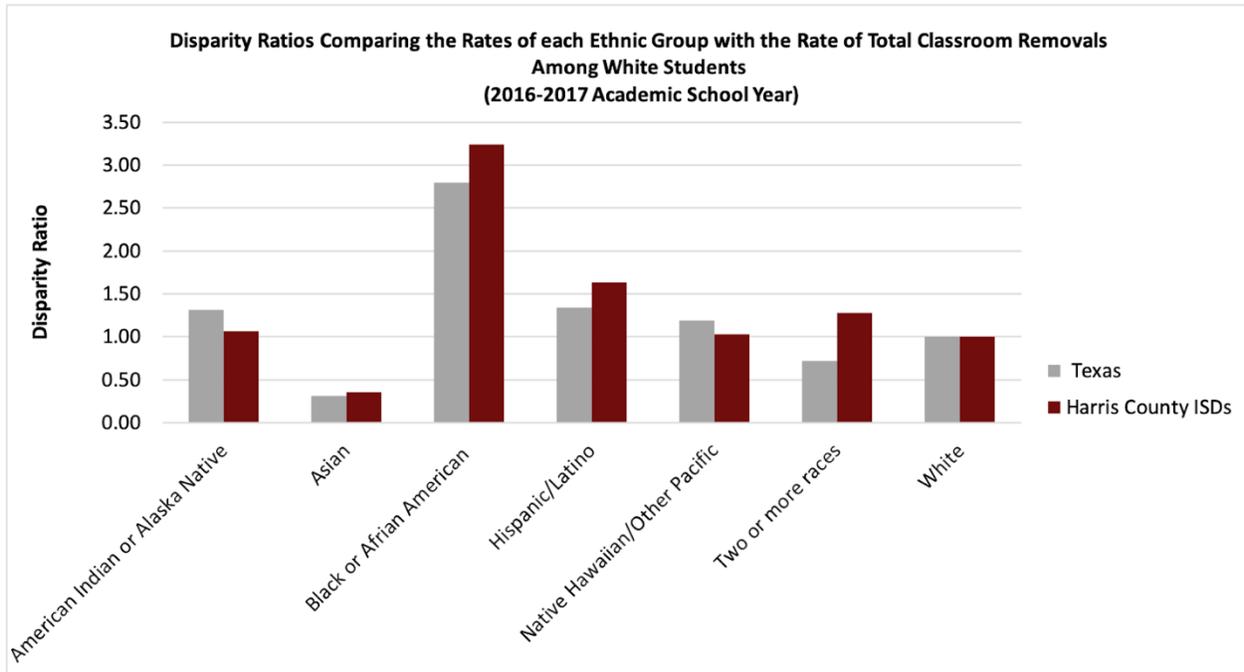
Figure 2 shows for the 2016-2017 academic school year the percentage of the total population of all 19 Harris County Independent School Districts in comparison to the percentage of total classroom removal of students in Harris County by ethnicity. In Harris County, Black students represent 19% of the total student population in Harris County; however, they account for 36% of total classroom removals.

Figure 2. Percentage of Total Classroom Removals for Harris County Independent School Districts for the 2016-2017 Academic School Year



In order to examine in more detail classroom removals within Harris County, Figure 3 illustrates the disparity ratio for classroom removals for the 2016-2017 academic school year. Black students were almost three times more likely than White students to be removed from the classroom, which is more than the Texas ratio; the Texas disparity ratio is 2.74 and the Harris County ratio is 3.23.

Figure 3. Disparity Ratios Comparing Rates of each Ethnic Group with the Rate of Total Removals Rate of White Students in Texas Overall compared to Harris County Independent School Districts



Total Removals

This section of the report displays disparity ratios for the 2016–2017 academic school year for total classroom removals in Harris County. As mentioned in the methodology section, for the purposes of this report, total classroom removals were determined by grouping together ISS, OSS, DAEP, JJAEP, and expulsions into one category. Figure 4 displays the disparity ratio of total removals by ethnicity from Harris County’s six largest school districts. The bars represent the disparity ratio of percentage of total classroom removals to percentage of student body. For each of the nineteen school districts, Blacks were more likely to be removed from the classroom at a disproportionate rate. As shown in Figure 4, out of the large school districts, Black students in Houston, Katy, and Klein ISDs surpassed the Texas disparity ratio of 2.74. In Houston ISD, Black students were almost five times more likely to be removed from the classroom in comparison to White student with a disparity ratio of 5.56.

Figure 4. Disparity Ratios Comparing the Rates of Black and Hispanic Students with the Rate of Total Classroom Removals Among White Students for Large Harris County Independent School Districts

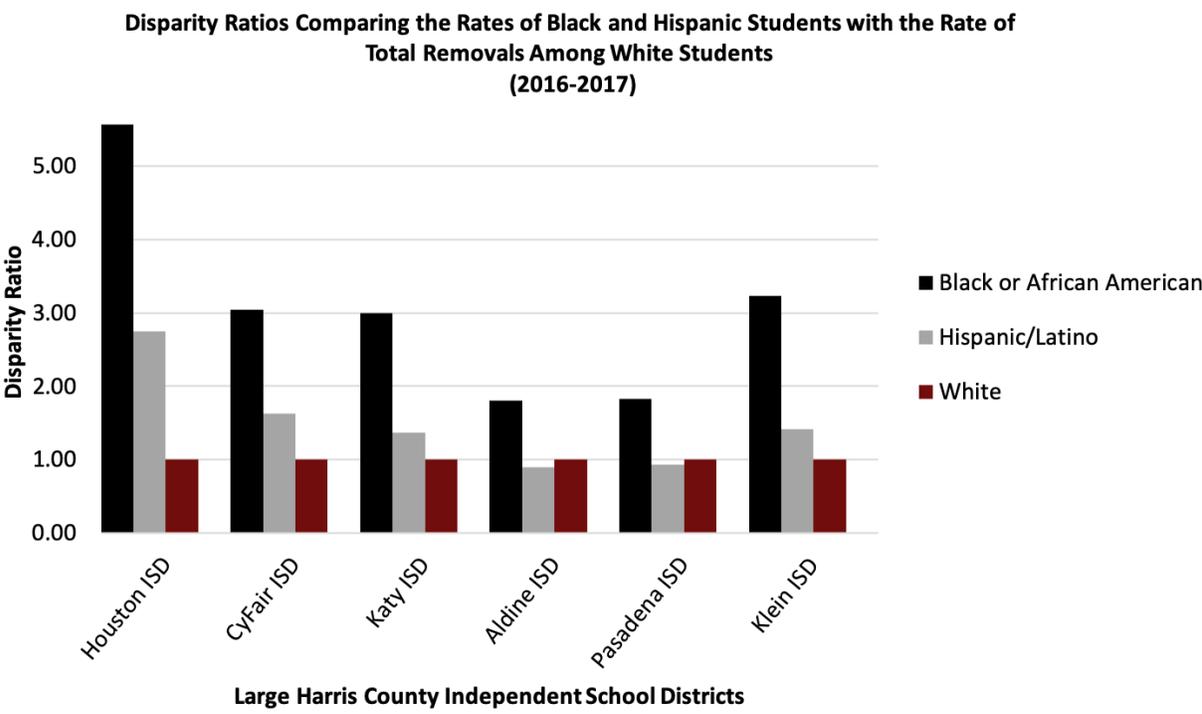


Figure 5 represents eight medium sized school districts. Within the five medium districts, Black students in Humble, Spring, Spring Branch, and Deer Park ISDs surpassed the Texas disparity ratio. Humble and Spring Branch had the highest levels of disparity ratios for Black students at 4.20 and 4.51; the disparity ratio for the state of Texas is 2.74.

Figure 5. Disparity Ratios Comparing the Rates of Black and Hispanic Students with the Rate of Total Classroom Removals Among White Students for Medium Harris County Independent School Districts

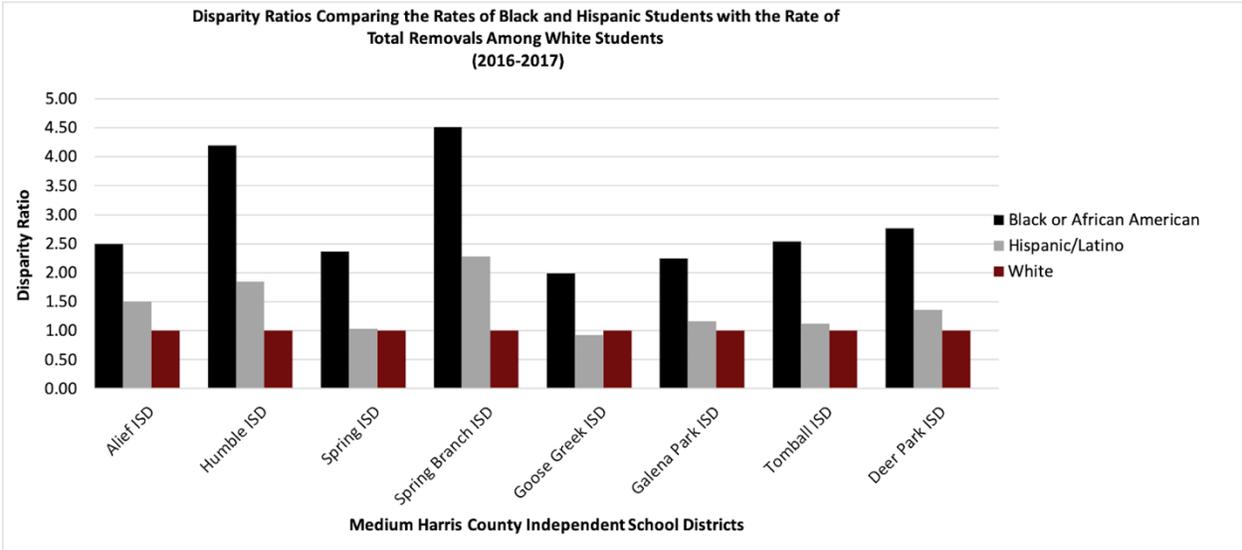
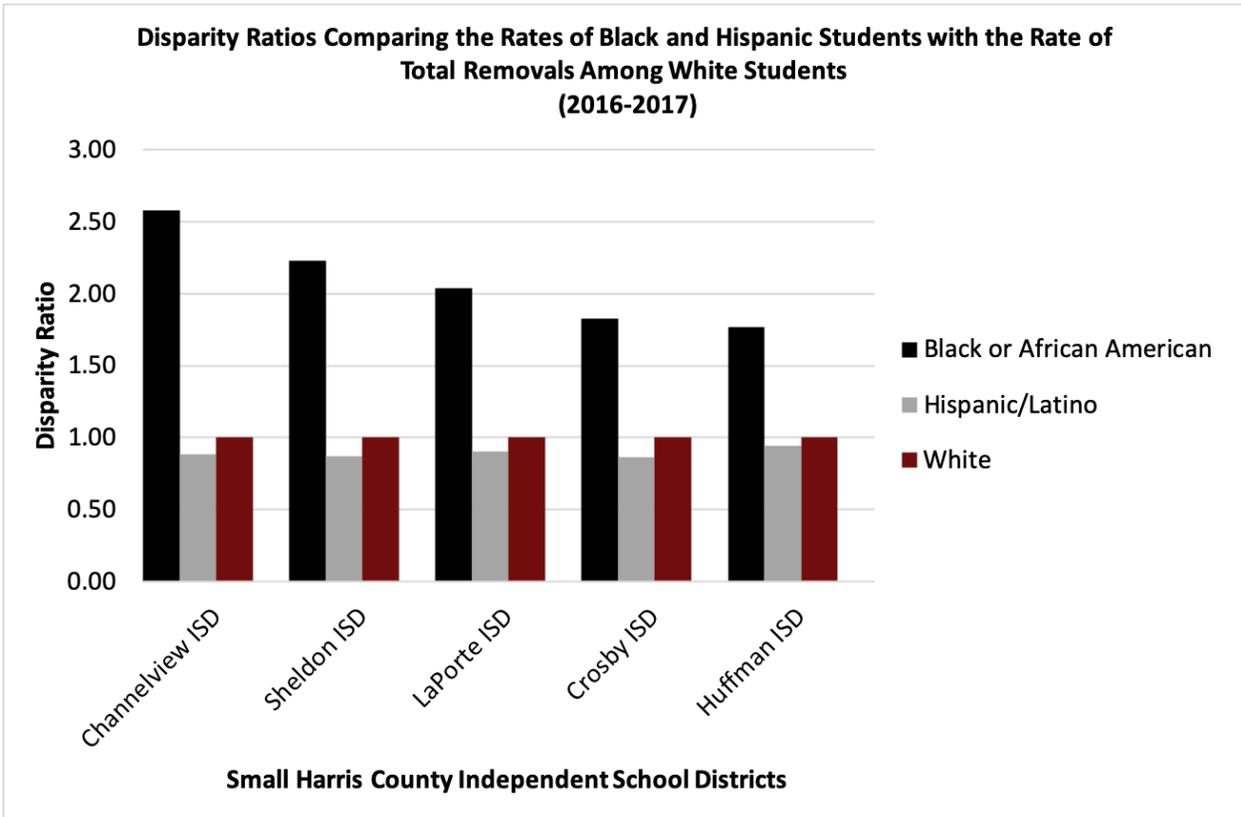


Figure 6 shows the five smallest school districts in Harris County. Black students’ disparity ratios in all five small school districts were below the Texas 2016-2017 disparity ratio; however, Black students were still removed from the classroom at higher rates in comparison to White students.

Figure 6. Disparity Ratios Comparing the Rates of Black and Hispanic Students with the Rate of Total Classroom Removals Among White Students for Small Harris County Independent School Districts



In-School Suspensions

This section of the report displays disparity ratios for the 2016-2017 academic school year for in-school suspensions (ISS) in Harris County. Similar to the prior section, schools were categorized into three categories based on the school student body population size. Figure 7 shows a breakdown of large Harris County School districts. Blacks were impacted at a disproportionate rate in comparison to White students in each large school district. Additionally, Black students in 3 of the 6 large districts disparity ratios were above the Texas disparity ratio for Black students at 2.22; Houston ISD had at highest disparity ratio at 5.00.

Figure 7. Disparity Ratios Comparing the Rates of Black and Hispanic Students with the Rate of In-School Suspensions Among White Students for Large Harris County Independent School Districts

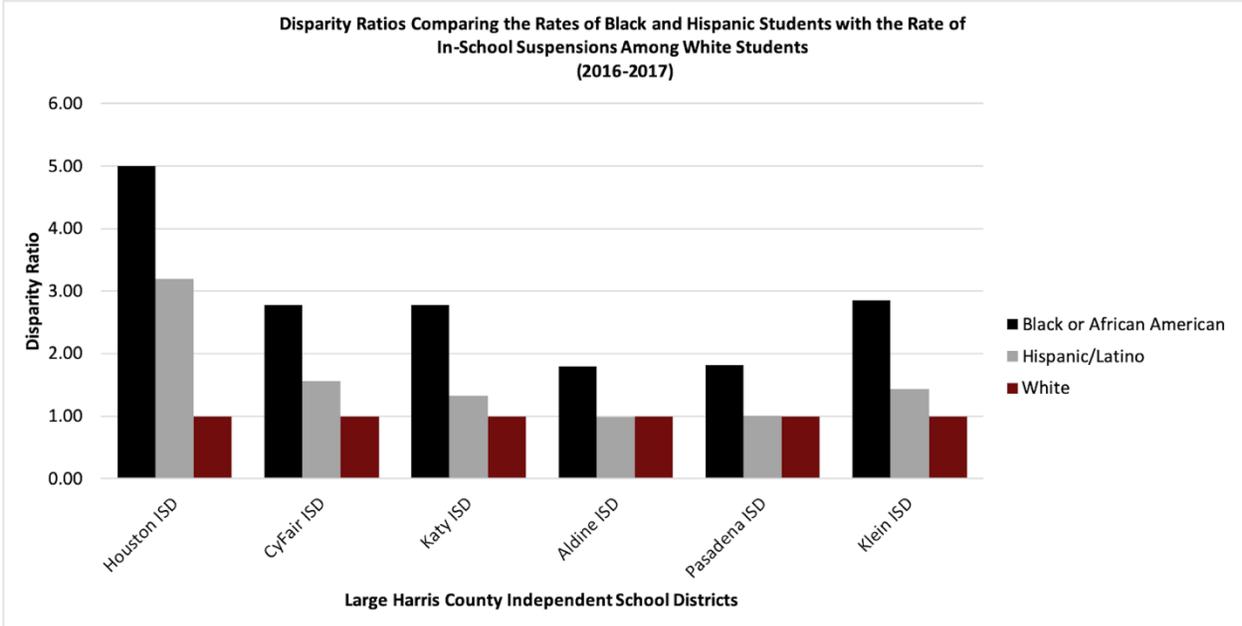
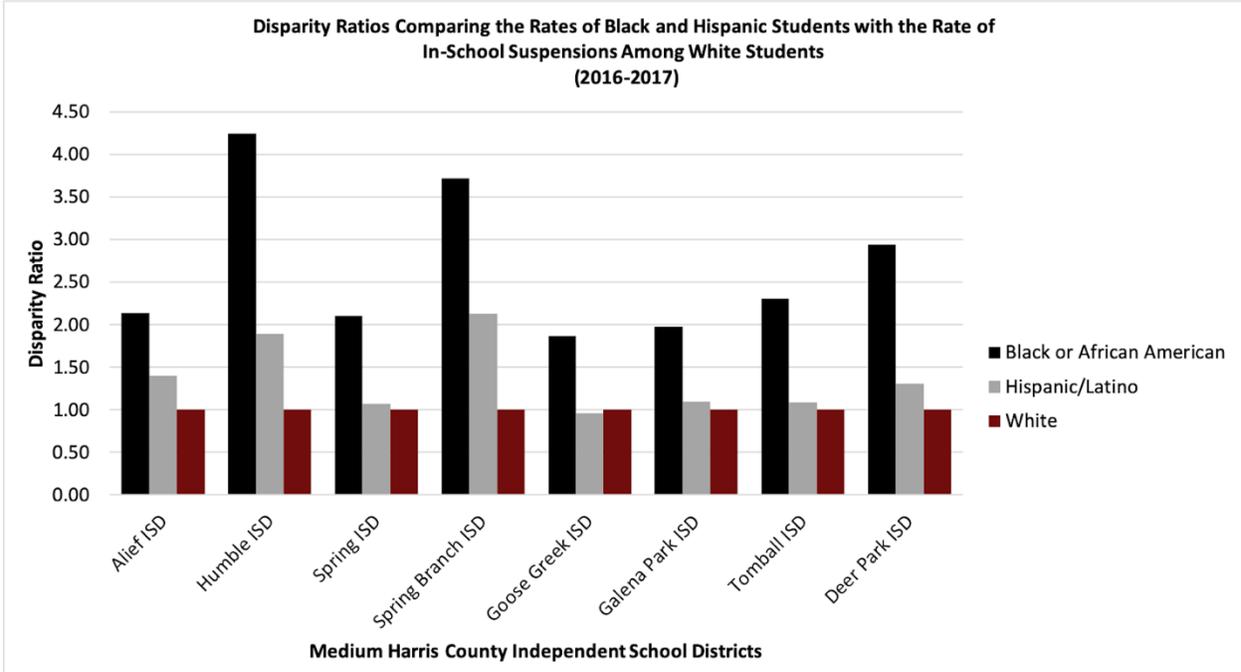


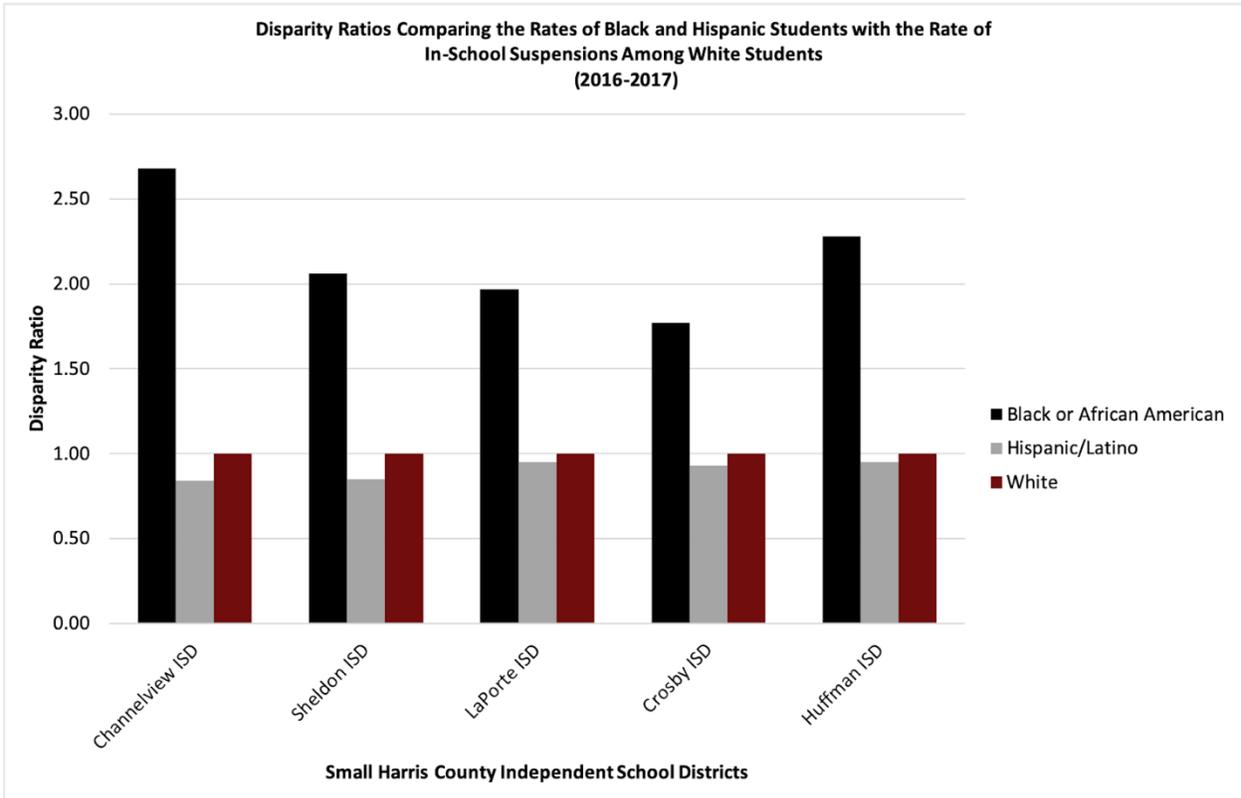
Figure 8 illustrates in-school suspensions of medium sized schools in Harris County. Consistent with large school districts, Black students were impacted at a disparate rate for ISS sanctions also. The disparity ratio for Black students in Humble, Spring Branch, Tomball, and Deer Park ISDs were all above the Texas ratio of 2.22. In Humble ISD, Black students had the highest disparity ratio and were over four times more times likely, in comparison to White students, to receive ISS disciplinary action.

Figure 8. Disparity Ratios Comparing the Rates of Black and Hispanic Students with the Rate of In-School Suspensions Among White Students for Medium Harris County Independent School Districts



There are five school districts in Harris County that have a student body population of less than 10,000. Channelview ISD was the only small district whose disparity ratio for Black students was above the Texas ratio. Figure 9 shows the ratio of In-School Suspensions to study body by ethnicity. Black students’ ISS disparity ratio was lower than the Texas ratio of 2.22 in each of the small districts; however, Black students were still more likely to receive in-school suspension in comparison to White and Hispanic Students.

Figure 9. Disparity Ratios Comparing the Rates of Black and Hispanic Students with the Rate of In-School Suspensions Among White Students for Small Harris County Independent School Districts



Out-of-School Suspensions

Although out-of-school suspensions cannot exceed three days, this is a significant amount of time for a student to be removed from the classroom, which can hinder their learning experience. The following section of this report shows disparity ratio for the 2016-2017 academic school year for out-of-school suspensions (OSS) in Harris County. Figure 10 illustrates the disparity ratio of OSS for large school districts, and Black students in all 6 districts received OSS sanctions at a disparate rate. Out of the six large school districts, Houston ISD was the only one above the Texas disparity ratio of 4.49. Black students in Houston ISD were more than six times more likely to receive out-of-school suspension. Katy ISD disparity ratio was 3.92 and Klein ISD was 4.24.

Figure 10. Disparity Ratios Comparing the Rates of Black and Hispanic Students with the Rate of Out-of-School Suspensions Among White Students for Large Harris County Independent School Districts

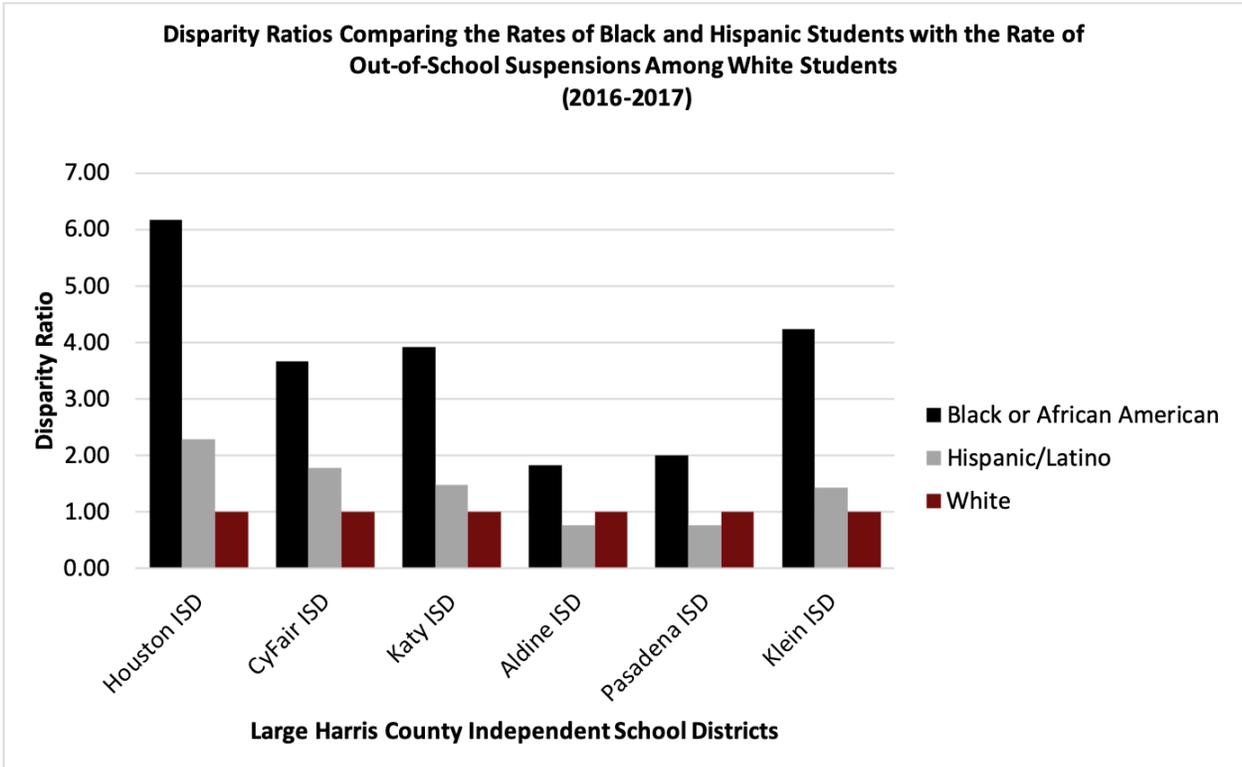


Figure 11 shows the disparity ratios for eight of the medium sized school districts in Harris County. For each medium school district, Blacks were more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions in comparison to White students. Humble and Spring Branch ISDs had alarming OSS disparity ratio for Blacks at rates of 5.38 and 6.28, respectively.

Figure 11. Disparity Ratios Comparing the Rates of Black and Hispanic Students with the Rate of Out-of-School Suspensions Among White Students for Medium Harris County Independent School Districts

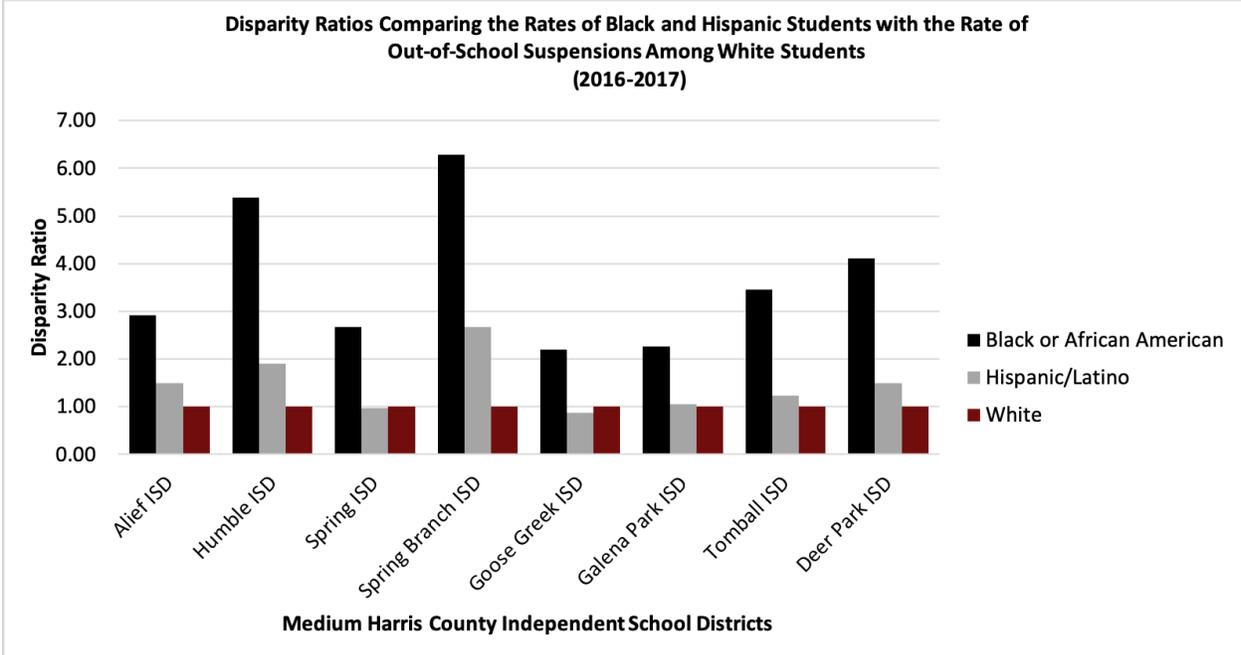
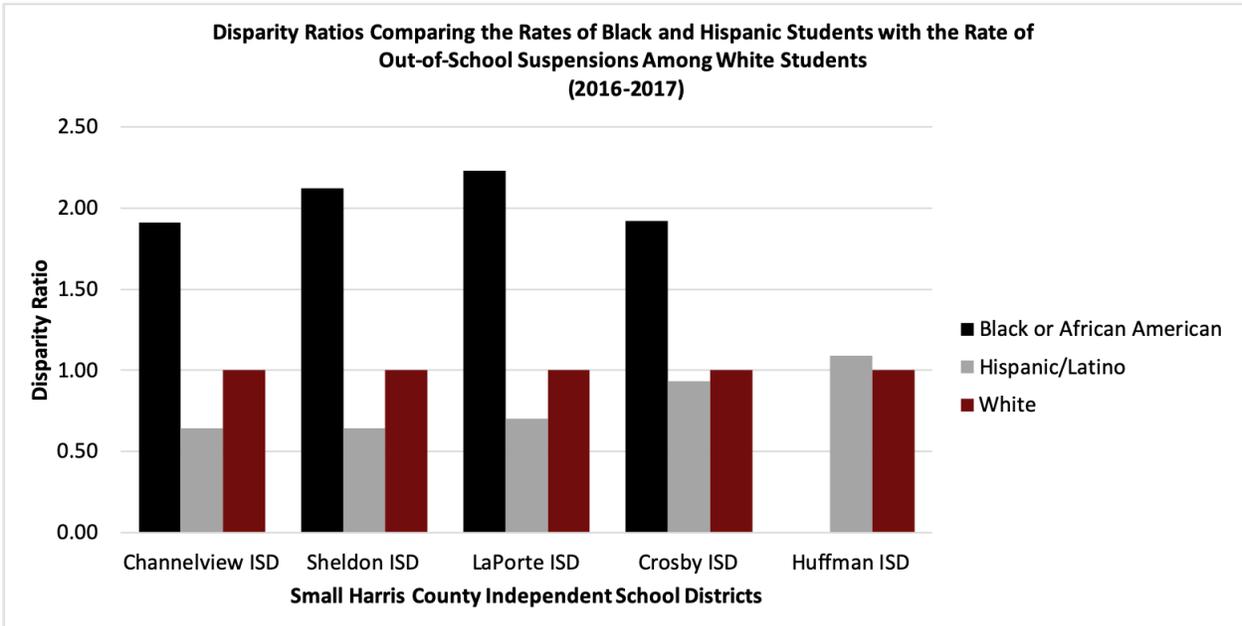


Figure 12 illustrates OSS disciplinary sanctions for school districts in Harris County with a population of less than 10,000 students. For small school districts, the disparity ratio for Black students for each of the schools was under the Texas ratio of 4.49; however, in four of the five districts, Blacks were still more likely than their White counterparts to receive out-of-school suspensions. Huffman ISD has a very small population of Black students and did not indicate disparity in OSS sanctions.

Figure 12. Disparity Ratios Comparing the Rates of Black and Hispanic Students with the Rate of Out-of-School Suspensions Among White Students for Small Harris County Independent School Districts



DAEP/JJAEP/Expulsions

After observing ISS and OSS removals, a pattern was also observed for Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEPs), Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs (JJAEPs), and expulsions. This section of the report displays disparity ratio for the 2016-2017 academic school year for DAEPs, JJAEPs, and expulsions in Harris County. Similar to the prior sections, schools were categorized into three categories based on the school student body population size. Blacks were disproportionately impacted by expulsions and placement into DAEP and JJAEP programs. Figure 13 depicts the disparity ratio for large school districts, and Houston and Klein ISDs had the highest disparity ratios; in the largest school district, Houston ISD, Blacks were over five and half more times more likely to receive DAEP, JJAEP, or expulsion sanction. CyFair and Klein ISDs disparity ratios for Black students were both above the Texas ratio of 2.54 at 3.08 and 3.01, respectively.

Figure 13. Disparity Ratios Comparing the Rates of Black and Hispanic Students with the Rate of DAEP/JJAEP/Expulsions Among White Students for Large Harris County Independent School Districts

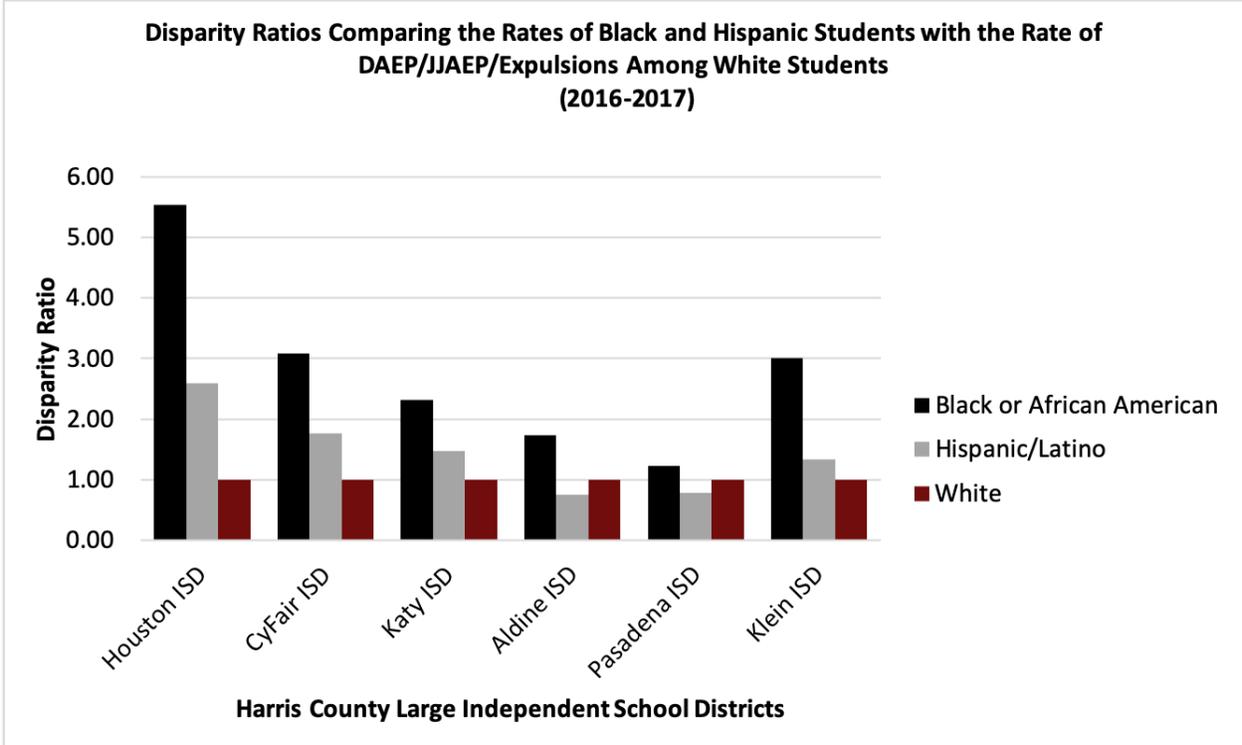
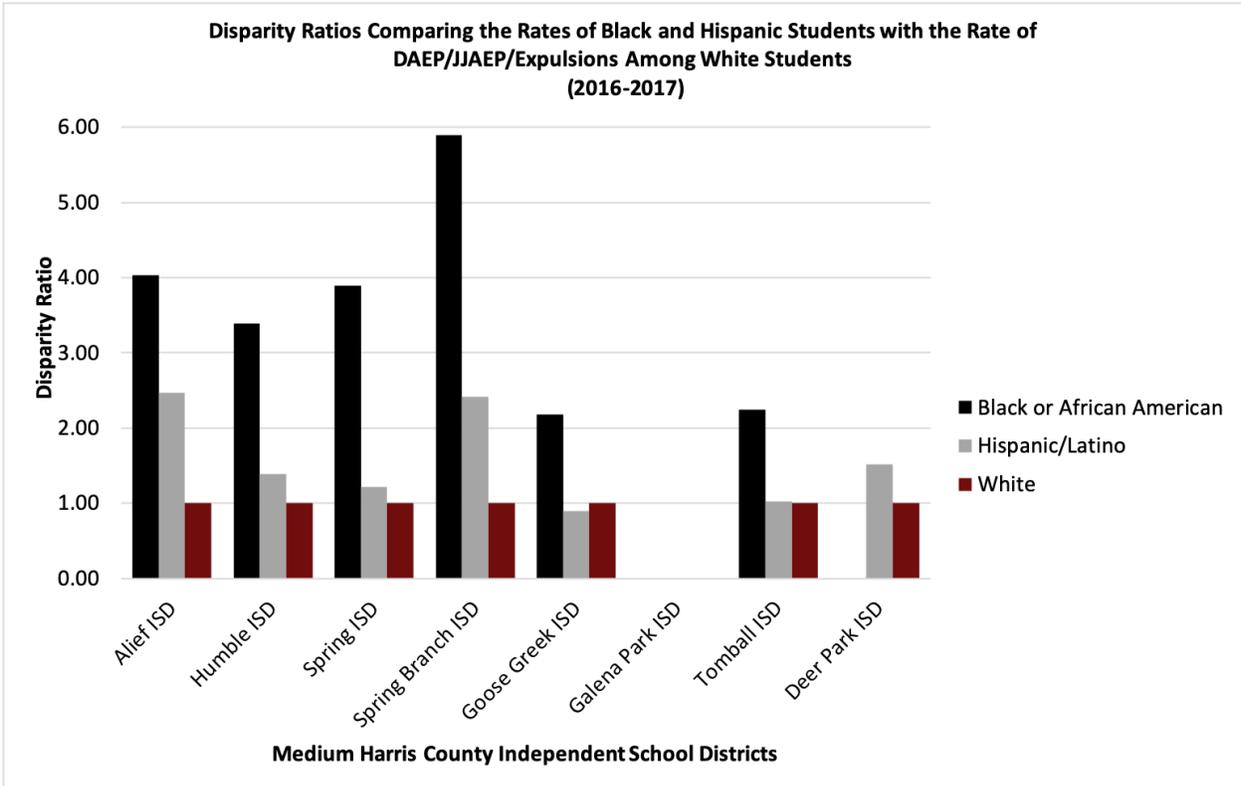


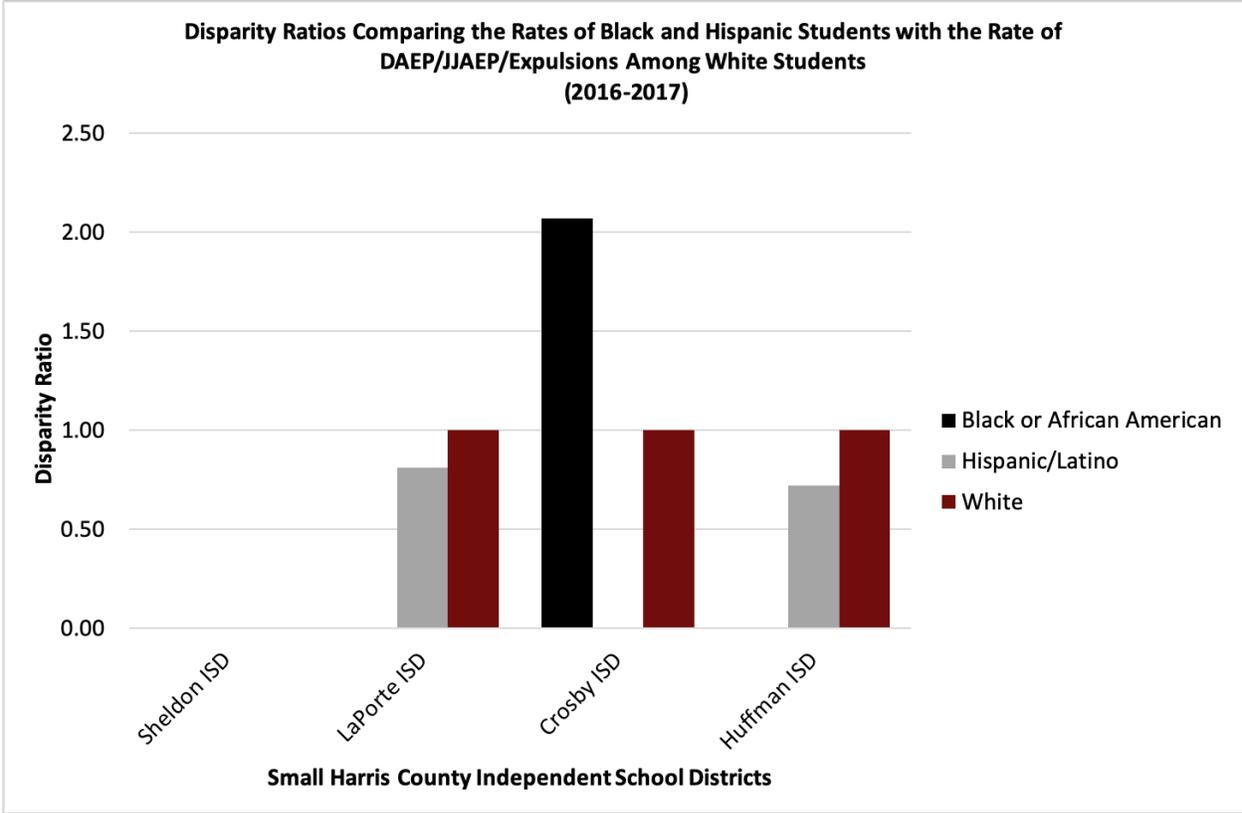
Figure 14 shows the disparity ratios for the 2016-2017 academic school year of DAEP/JJAEP/Expulsions to the student body by ethnicity. For the medium school districts group, Galena Park and Spring Branch ISDs had the highest disparity ratio for Black students at 4.03 and 5.89 respectively in comparison to White students. Four of the eight medium school districts’ disparity ratio for Black students receiving DAEP, JJAEP, or expulsions as disciplinary sanctions were above the Texas disparity ratio of 2.54 for Black students.

Figure 14. Disparity Ratios Comparing the Rates of Black and Hispanic Students with the Rate of DAEP/JJAEP/Expulsions Among White Students for Medium Harris County Independent School Districts



As shown in Figure 15, one out of five small districts indicated the place of Black students' placement into alternative programs or received expulsion at a disparate rate in comparison to White students. Channelview and Huffman ISDs did not reveal disparity for Black students.

Figure 15. Disparity Ratios Comparing the Rates of Black and Hispanic Students with the Rate of DAEP/JJAEP/Expulsions Among White Students for Small Harris County Independent School Districts



Racial Disparity in Harris County Independent School Districts

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:

Disaggregate Data Analysis

In order to acquire a better understanding of which variables have a relationship with these inequitable disciplinary trends and provide effective recommendations countywide, disaggregate data analysis is necessary. Consistent with the model created by Osher, Fisher, Amos, Katz, Dwyer, Duffey, & Colombi (2015), this report is an example of the first step in the model, which is examining available data, in order to determine if the administration of school discipline disparities exists in Harris County. Our findings showed that racial disparity is persistent throughout each district in Harris County, with Blacks being impacted at a disproportionate rate. While using data that was accessible for our key findings, we realized additional information was needed for future studies.

Data provided on TEA’s website reports number of disciplinary actions per student group. For the purposes of this study, this report used the number of students in each school discipline category per student group. However, the data does not distinguish between which students may have been suspended multiple times. Since TEA is responsible for compiling school disciplinary information from each school, our recommendation is that TEA requires each school within each district to provide disaggregate discipline information based on ethnicity, gender, and grade level.

Example: North Carolina

The State of North Carolina school discipline data includes information regarding multiple suspensions per student.

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2016-17/consolidated-report.pdf>

Recommendation 2:

Focus on Implementing, Adapting, and Evaluating Evidence-Based Interventions to Decrease Classroom Removals

Within the state of Texas, there have been some schools that have taken a proactive approach to address racial disparity. In order to determine what works and what does not work, it is essential to review current policies and evaluate programs. The evaluation of programs will provide insight into what measures have been taken to ensure equitable school discipline practices, and whether or not the implementation of certain programs have been effective. In situations in which evidence-based interventions do not exist, an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach involving educators, community partners, and researchers should work together to develop and implement new interventions with clearly defined measurable outcomes (Rathvon, 2008).

Recommendation 3:

Cultural Awareness Training

In addition to evidence-based interventions, the management of classrooms should take into consideration that each student learns differently. The acquiring of knowledge needs to consist of classrooms that encourage a safe place to learn while recognizing the diversity of students and their learning capabilities (Rathvon, 2008). For example, organize short training sessions on topics about diversity and cultural competence. The trainings should be in depth and require a hands on approach. The purpose of the trainings are for individuals to obtain knowledge about their own biases, discuss them, and provide tools and methods to reduce racial and ethnic disparities.

Recommendation 4:***Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports***

As an alternative to suspension or school removal, one plan that has gained traction is the use of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports is the application of using evidence-based prevention strategies along with a layered scale of measures and outcomes that supports the academic, emotional, social, and behavioral needs of a student in order for said students to succeed (Garbacz, McIntosh, Eagle, Dowd-Eagle, Hirano, & Ruppert, 2016). The effects tend to work among children who are exposed to PBIS in kindergarten. There is evidence based support that there is a reduction in behavior problems and improvements in positive behavior and successful emotion regulation after training in PBIS. The PBIS framework is a hopeful approach for reducing problems and promoting correction among elementary school children. (Bradshaw & Waasdorpe, 2012).

Example**Recommendation 5:*****Professional Development and Support for Teachers***

Teachers are the gatekeepers for students, and broad discretion as to which students they recommend need removal from the classroom. Therefore, school districts need to ask themselves if they are supporting their teachers as much as possible? Are they giving them essential tools to ensure they are able to manage their classrooms without the last result of removing a student from the classroom? Providing professional development for teachers can assist in improving their academic instruction model and lessen the suspension rate through positive behavioral interventions. There is growing acknowledgment that young children's social ability is important since it is positively connected with their school readiness and educational success. However, professional development opportunities for teachers to augment their role in promoting these students is limited (Han, 2014). Programs such as REACH, an intervention designed program used to grow the capacity of early childhood teachers to support children's social and emotional development, have shown great promise (Connors-Burrow, Patrick, Kyzer, & McKelvey, 2017). Research shows that effective classroom management and building trust between teachers and adolescents resulted in improved outcomes (Skiba, 2008). This suggests that providing better funding and training for teachers could help lessen suspension rates. Negative behaviors that violate school policies are based in juvenile development; therefore, teachers may need specialized training in this particular area. Programs such as The My Teaching Partner-Secondary (MTP-S), which focus on teacher-student interactions in a sustained manner using a rigorous approach, can reduce the disparate use of exclusionary discipline with African American students. Findings per districts that used MTP-S show policymakers a direction to identify different types of professional development programs that have promise for decreasing the racial discipline gap (Gregory, Allen, Mikami, Hafen, & Pianta, 2013).

Recommendation 6:***Community-School Partnerships***

Community-School partnerships allow schools to provide a wide-ranging support structure to help students succeed, instead of interrupting their learning process with suspensions. Working in tandem to combine resources to support children in an all-inclusive learning environment can help guarantee positive academic and non-academic success. Schools are the foundation of many communities, linking students with much-needed means and encouragement. Schools that follow these enterprises, such as the YMCA, have been fruitful in increasing family engagement and cultivating student learning, increasing better attendance, better behavior and development as well (Duke, Children's Law Clinic, 2015). These partnerships create a sort of "connected science" in which real world problems are used as contextual scaffolds for bridging students' community-based knowledge and school evidence-based knowledge as a way to provide opportunities for meaningful and intellectual challenges for students (Bouillion & Gomez, 2001). Partnerships between school staff, faculty, families, and communities are vital for establishing success for all students (Grace, Martha, Judith, Ann, & Shana, 2015).

Recommendation 7:***Restorative Justice***

About forty years ago, criminal justice academics and activists in North America and Europe began studying justice across different cultures and studying the viewpoints of perpetrators. "Eye for an eye" justice may be an established part of Western society, yet it's not true to be that way in all cultures. Many communities put compromise above revenge. Inspired by this awareness, restorative justice was born. Behavioral science alludes to the many advantages of this methodology. Suspension rates for students of color are far higher than for White students, even in schools that apply alternatives to suspension such as restorative justice practices. Even with people's hearts being in the right place, there is still a disconnect (Lustick, 2017). Yes, punishment is necessary at times, and reckless or negative actions should have consequences; however, the disciplinary action should fit the act. In criminal justice, experts generally recognize that people convicted of crimes have a probability of going back to jail or prison, which is referred to as recidivism and the revolving criminal justice door. Restorative justice on the other hand emphasizes working within the community, giving empathy and perspective talking. This in turn can account for some of the deficiencies of outdated punitive actions (Yuhas, 2018). Restorative justice practices may produce benefits for students, but they may result in only minimal lessening of the inequalities in suspension rates between Black and White students. What this shows is that greater attention is needed to address the unbalanced school contexts in which disparities come from (Gregory, Huang, Anyon, Greer, Downing, 2018).

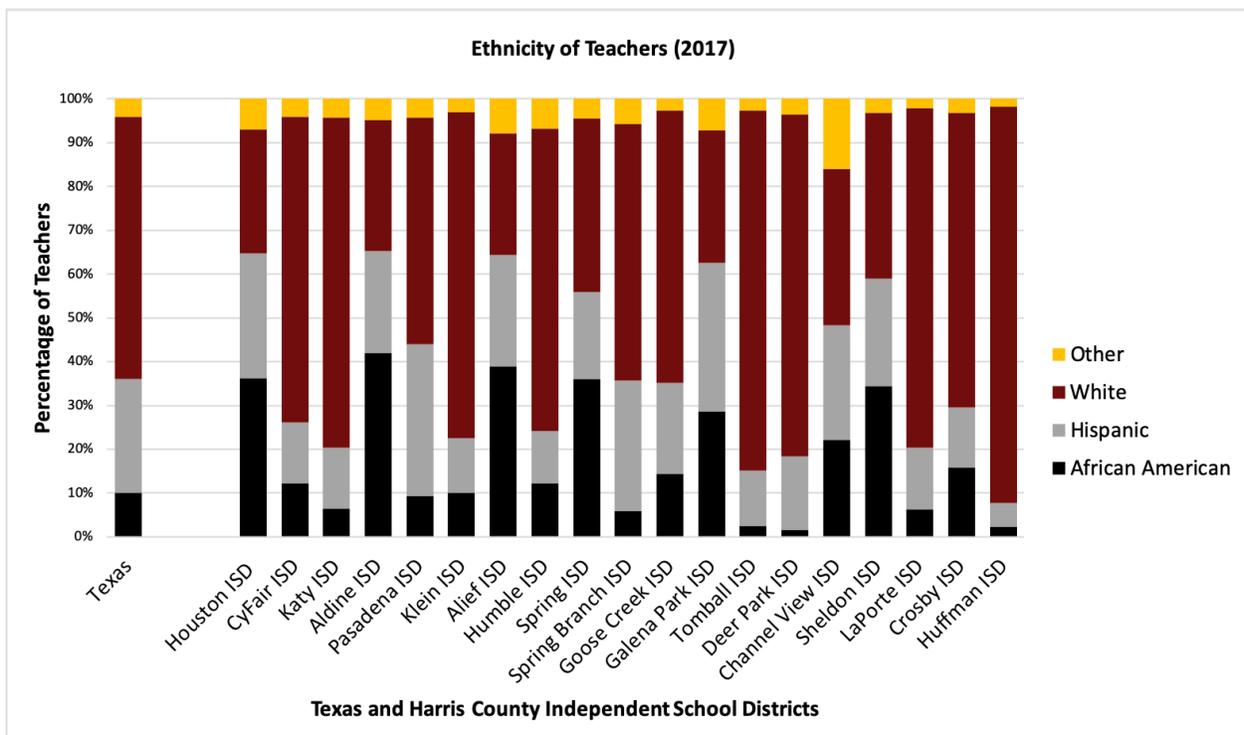
Conclusion

This report is the first step in moving towards an education system in Harris County that is equitable regarding school disciplinary practices. Racial disparity is apparent in each district in Harris County, and the next step is for TEA and each school district to be transparent and forthcoming with data. Additional individualistic data will allow for a more comprehensive analysis in order to get to the root cause of racial disparity in school discipline practices. A past

study revealed that individual district level information can add more context to school discipline disparate treatment, and determine the strongest predictors of school discipline based on race and ethnicity (Duffy, 2018).

In the report that follows this one, we have hopes to acquire additional campus level data with individual campus level information regarding students, teachers, and the administration to further examine the extent of disparity in each district. In our next report, we will examine the ethnicity of teachers in comparison to the ethnicity in the student population at each district (refer to Figure 16).

Figure 16. Texas and Harris County Independent School Districts Ethnicity of Teachers (2017)



The Center for Justice Research will continue research in order to ask several unanswered questions about school discipline sanctions in Houston area schools to work towards fairness in the public school districts. Determining the causes for excessive use of harsh school discipline sanctions can assist with decreasing the funneling of students into the school-to-prison pipeline. Black students across Harris County are removed from the classroom at higher rates than their fellow classmates, which is the trend statewide and nationally. Several national policy makers have expressed the need for education reform; however, each school district at the local level has a responsibility to examine what is happening inside their districts campus by campus. Although our analysis is ongoing, we feel comfortable saying that Harris County schools need an action plan to address racial disparity.

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