The Relationship of School Structure and Support to Suspension Rates for Black and White High School Students

Anne Gregory
Rutgers University
Dewey Cornell
Xitao Fan
University of Virginia

This study examined the relationship between structure and support in the high school climate and suspension rates in a statewide sample of 199 schools. School climate surveys completed by 5,035 ninth grade students measured characteristics of authoritative schools, defined as highly supportive, yet highly structured with academic and behavioral expectations. Multivariate analyses showed that schools low on characteristics of an authoritative school had the highest schoolwide suspension rates for Black and White students after statistically controlling for school demographics. Furthermore, schools low on both structure and support had the largest racial discipline gaps. These findings highlight the characteristics of risky settings that may not meet the developmental needs of adolescents and may contribute to disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for Black students.