High Suspension Schools and Dropout Rates for Black and White Students

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Abstract

This study examined the association between school suspension rates and dropout rates in a statewide sample of 289 Virginia public high schools. The contribution of suspension rates on dropout rates was examined for both Black and White students, after controlling for school demographics (school racial composition, percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals, urbanicity), and school resources (per pupil expenditure). Because student attitudes also might influence suspension rates, the prevalence of aggressive attitudes and rejection of school rules among students were used as additional predictors. Hierarchical regression analyses using schools as the unit of analysis found that, after entering both school demographics and student attitude measures, schools with high suspension rates tended to have high dropout rates. There were comparable findings for both White and Black students, although school suspension rates were more strongly associated with White dropout rates than Black dropout rates. These findings contribute new evidence that suspension policies may have an adverse effect on student completion of high school.