The Achievement Gap and the Discipline Gap: Two Sides of the Same Coin?

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The gap in achievement across racial and ethnic groups has been a focus of education research for decades, but the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of Black, Latino, and American Indian students has received less attention. This article synthesizes research on racial and ethnic patterns in school sanctions and considers how disproportionate discipline might contribute to lagging achievement among students of color. It further examines the evidence for student, school, and community contributors to the racial and ethnic patterns in school sanctions, and it offers promising directions for gap-reducing discipline policies and practices.

discipline gap influences racial patterns in achievement. We then review the evidence on the factors that contribute to the discipline gap. Specifically, we examine the degree to which low-income status, low achievement, and rates of misconduct contribute to why Black, Latino, and American Indian students are overselected and oversanctioned in the discipline system. We argue that such student characteristics are not adequate to explain the large disparities, and we describe school and teacher contributors that need to be investigated in future research. Finally, we identify methodological challenges to the study of disproportionality and discuss promising strategies for gap-reducing interventions.

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