

## Press Release

### *Discipline Policies, Minorities, and High School Dropouts*

COLLEGE STATION--A report released by the Texas Educational Excellence Project (TEEP) finds evidence that school discipline policies affect minorities and Anglos differently. Across the state, school districts employ varying discipline policies—corporal punishment, suspension, expulsion, and zero tolerance policies are but a few. In 2000, these policies affected Latinos, African Americans, and Anglos differently across indicators of school dropout and performance on the TAAS test.

In an effort to understand how varying discipline policies affect minorities and Anglos, authors of the TEEP report use a technique that allows them to see how district policies, teacher quality, district financial resources, and environmental constraints impact dropout rates and TAAS performance of Latino, African American, and Anglo students. Results indicate that, “discipline policies have a more potent impact among minorities than among Anglos,” offers Rene Rocha, TEEP Research Associate.

These impacts, however, are not consistently positive. In fact, Latinos and African Americans are disadvantaged by high rates of suspension when evaluating TAAS performance. Also, a high suspension ratio among African Americans leads to higher dropout rates. Similar tests, however, do not indicate such impacts for Anglo students, suggesting inequitable application of school discipline policies to various student groups. This evidence also supports research that suspensions are often used to ‘push out’ students, in order to improve school performance in a number of areas, including performance on the TAAS test.

By contrast, districts with higher corporal punishment ratios for Latinos see improvements in the Latino dropout rate. It appears, then, that corporal punishment disciplinary policies are associated with lower rates of dropping out among Latinos, though not Anglos or African Americans. Expulsions, on the other hand, do not have any influence on dropout rates or TAAS performance for minority or Anglo students—nor do ‘zero tolerance’ disciplinary policies.

Along with this, Rocha contends “a discussion of disciplinary policies is incomplete without determining the motivation of school districts to actively engage in harsh or lenient disciplinary actions with all students.” With this in mind, the authors of the report find evidence that social and economic resources play a considerable role in the administration of corporal punishment across districts. For example, higher percentages of low-income students in a district are associated with the prevalence of corporal punishment as a disciplinary action. Also, lower revenue per pupil in a district is associated with the administration of corporal punishment. In sum, the rate at which corporal punishment is used is dependent on the resources available to the school district.

As districts evaluate and adopt disciplinary policies, it is important to consider the possible negative consequences associated with certain policies and students across different racial groups. Overall, the inequitable application of disciplinary policies can disadvantage minorities, as it concerns dropping out and performance on standardized tests.

The Texas Educational Excellence Project seeks to apply scholarly research to educational policy issues in order to make recommendations for greater quality and equity in Texas school systems. Statistical data for all districts used for the report can be found at <http://teep.tamu.edu/>.

The Carlos Cantu Hispanic Education and Opportunity Endowment provides funding for this study and other studies concerning Latino dropout research. This study is part of a large project studying factors affecting Latino dropout rates.

To see the entire report visit the TEEP web site at [teep.tamu.edu](http://teep.tamu.edu)  
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