

Tracing Discipline Disparities: Racial Inequities in Virginia Schools

Findings from 2016–2020 Public Data

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, Virginia has been reported as a state with notable disparities in school disciplinary actions, particularly affecting Black students. This study utilizes publicly available data from the Virginia Department of Education's Safe Schools Information Resource to examine variation in the use of exclusionary discipline across divisions from 2016 to 2020. By calculating a Discipline Disparity Index, the analysis compares suspension rates of Black and White students and considers how these patterns relate to student demographics, per-pupil expenditure, and poverty levels. In addition to quantitative analysis, the study situates these disparities within existing research on exclusionary discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline, emphasizing the long-term harms associated with exclusionary discipline. The aim is to provide a better understanding of how inequities in school discipline emerge and what structural factors may contribute to them, highlighting the role of schools as potential gateways to or barriers against social mobility.

INTRODUCTION

Though presented as an effective method to maintain order in schools, the use of exclusionary discipline practices (suspensions, expulsions, etc.) has only continued to increase in the United States. Chu & Ready (2018) reported that more than 3 million students nationwide miss instructional time as a result of exclusionary disciplinary actions¹, with suspensions being the most commonly used form of punitive punishment.² This rise reflects how discipline has become integral in the American education system. However, African American students are consistently disciplined at higher rates than any other race/ethnic group, and are almost three times as likely to be suspended as their white peers.³ Rather than its intention to deter misconduct, research has correlated exclusionary discipline with lower academic performance and repeated disciplinary incidents insofar as encountering the legal system.⁴ Thereby positioning Black youth to be prone to a cycle of criminalization when they enter what should be a safe learning environment, a phenomenon known as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” These disparities vary depending on area or region, with a state such as Virginia distinguished by its high rates of student referrals to law enforcement, averaging about 16 per 1,000 students, compared to the national average of six per 1,000 students.⁵ Marked by its racial, socioeconomic, and land mass diversity, Virginia is the epitome of a melting pot. This study uses Virginia as a case study to examine disparities in school discipline across counties, taking into account

¹ Chu, Elizabeth M., and Douglas D. Ready. “Exclusion and Urban Public Schools: Short- and Long-Term Consequences of School Suspensions.” *American Journal of Education* 124, no. 4 (August 2018): 479–509. <https://doi.org/10.1086/698454>

² Paul Hemez, John J. Brent, and Thomas J. Mowen, “Exploring the School-to-Prison Pipeline: How School Suspensions Influence Incarceration during Young Adulthood,” *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 18, no. 3 (July 2020): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204019880945>

³ Chu and Ready, *Exclusion and Urban Public Schools*, 481.

⁴ Adriana E. Cuéllar and Sara Markowitz, “School Suspension and the School-to-Prison Pipeline,” *International Review of Law and Economics* 43 (September 2015): 98–99, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.irl.2015.06.001>

⁵ Courthouse News Service, “Tradition That Fed Virginia’s School-to-Prison Pipeline Finds Rebirth with New GOP Majority,” *Courthouse News*, January 25, 2022, <http://courthousenews.com/tradition-that-fed-virginias-school-to-prison-pipeline-finds-rebirth-with-new-gop-majority/>

secondary factors such as school racial demographics, socioeconomic status, and per-pupil expenditure, in order to gather a more comprehensive view of how structural conditions contribute to racial gaps in school discipline.

CONTEXT & LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of exclusionary discipline in American schools is reflected in the policy shifts of the mid-20th century. In the 1960s and 1970s, federal leaders made efforts to highlight “public accountability” in government spending, which included transparency in school expenditures. However, the Supreme Court was taking steps to undermine nationwide educational equity. The *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* decision of 1973 ruled that education was not a fundamental right, effectively removing federal accountability for funding disparities in schools. This decision widened the gap between wealthy and poor districts. Due to the simultaneous rise of the “tough-on-crime” agenda in the 1970s, districts were placed under additional federal pressure to increase punitive responses, simulating a carceral setting in learning environments, and spurring youth into the justice system.⁶

When schools’ zero-tolerance policies gained momentum in the 1990s, initially to prevent drug and weapon use, they then expanded to more minor behavioral infractions. Exclusionary discipline was evolving to be the standard, limiting administrators’ agency in deciding when or how to discipline.⁷ Following the Columbine shooting in 1999, these policies

⁶ Gerard Robinson, “Addressing the School-to-Prison Pipeline Through Three Nontraditional Pathways,” *Virginia Law Review* 109, no. 1 April 2023): 49, 52, https://virginialawreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Robinson_FINAL.pdf

⁷ Daniel J. Losen and Paul Martinez, “Lost Opportunities: How Disparate School Discipline Continues to Drive Differences in the Opportunity to Learn,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 102, no. 2 (October 2020): 5, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8277150/>

further escalated in which there was a substantial increase in the presence of School Resource officers (SROs), establishing law enforcement as a foundation of daily school operation.⁸

The aftermath of the rise in disciplinary policies is captured by the concept of the “school-to-prison pipeline,” which depicts how exclusionary discipline funnels students into the justice system. Research has shown how suspensions fail to act as a deterrent: Cuellar and Markowitz in 2015 found that youth who were suspended were more likely to increase in their “misconduct” and are more likely to encounter the criminal justice system.⁹ Exclusionary practices also come at the cost of students’ academic growth and achievement. Annually, more than three million students lose valuable instructional time due to exclusionary discipline practices. Though these academic harms disproportionately impact Black students, who are nearly three times as likely to be suspended as their White peers. Notably, around one-fifth of the achievement gap between Black and White students has been attributed specifically to the disproportionate suspension rate of Black students.¹⁰ Research has thus revealed how the institutionalization of exclusionary discipline marginalizes students and perpetuates racial inequities that go on to shape societal standings.

Virginia makes these racial dynamics within school discipline especially evident. The state has been identified for holding some of the highest rates of school referrals to law enforcement, at almost three times the national average.¹¹ Between 2016 and 2019, Black

⁸ Kylie Rafferty, “Exclusionary Discipline and the School-to-Prison Pipeline: An Analysis of Virginia Schools” (student research paper, University of Mary Washington, 2021), 19, https://scholar.umw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1606&context=student_research

⁹ Daniel J. Losen and Paul Martinez, “Lost Opportunities: How Disparate School Discipline Continues to Drive Differences in the Opportunity to Learn,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 102, no. 2 (October 2020): 6, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8277150/>

¹⁰ Chu and Ready, *Exclusion and Urban Public Schools*, 479–81, 483–84.

¹¹ Courthouse News Service, “Tradition That Fed Virginia’s School-to-Prison Pipeline.”

students made up solely 22 percent of Virginia’s school population, but accounted for more than 62 percent of school-based disorderly conduct criminal complaints. In contrast, White students make up 50% of the student population, but only averaged 29% of complaints.¹² While these findings adequately capture Virginia’s disciplinary disparities, existing research has yet to thoroughly examine how these disparities vary across divisions within the state and how they intersect with structural circumstances, such as funding, socioeconomic status of residents, or the racial demographics within counties. Addressing this gap explores how conditions within schools perpetuate racial hierarchies, as Virginia’s diversity makes it a valuable platform to examine education’s role in sustaining inequity at the national level.

DATA AND METHODS

Data Sources

The central dataset for this study is the Virginia Department of Education’s (VDOE) Safe Schools Information Resource (2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20), which provides division-level records of disciplinary response organized by student race and type, such as STS (short-term suspension) and LTS (long-term suspension).¹³ This raw data serves as the framework for the analysis, which involves calculating patterns of disciplinary outcomes and then identifying disparities across Virginia school divisions.

To analyze disciplinary disparities, two additional datasets were included. Financial data was obtained from the VDOE Superintendent’s Annual Report: Table 15, Sources of Financial Support for Expenditures, Total Expenditures for Operations, and Total Per Pupil Expenditures for Operations for the years 2016–17 through 2019–20.¹⁴ Additionally, poverty data for Virginia residents were sourced from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities HDPulse Data Portal, specifically the measure "Poverty (Persons Below Poverty)" for Virginia by County, Black or African American (Including Hispanic/Latino), Both Sexes, All Ages,

¹² Robinson, *Addressing the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, 59.

¹³ Virginia Department of Education, Safe Schools Information Resource, 2016–2017 through 2019–2020, Richmond, VA: Virginia Department of Education, <https://p1pe.doe.virginia.gov/pti/selection.do>

¹⁴ Virginia Department of Education, Superintendent’s Annual Report: Table 15, Sources of Financial Support for Expenditures, Total Expenditures for Operations, and Total Per Pupil Expenditures for Operations, 2016–2017 through 2019–2020, Richmond, VA: Virginia Department of Education, <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/data-policy-funding/data-reports/statistics-reports/superintendent-s-annual-report>

2019–2023, which was the most relevant time period available.¹⁵ Thus, the selection of these datasets allows for a comparative analysis of disciplinary outcomes and demographic, as well as financial characteristics across Virginia counties.

Key Variables

The dependent variable in this study is the Discipline Disparity Index. This index is calculated by dividing the out-of-school suspension rate for Black students by the suspension rate for White students, expressed as a rate per 1,000 enrolled students. A value of 1 reflects equality between Black and White students, values greater than 1 suggest disproportionate disciplinary action against Black students, and values less than 1 indicate disproportionate disciplinary action against White students. This index can then be used for comparison of disparities across divisions with varying student body sizes.

The two demographic variables introduced to contextualize these racial disparities were the percentage of Black and White students enrolled in each school division. These measures capture the racial composition of school populations to examine whether racial demographics are associated with differences in disciplinary disparities.

Furthermore, economic circumstances were addressed through two variables. First, per-pupil expenditure refers to the total spending allocated per enrolled student in a division, encompassing the financial resources dedicated to student support. Additionally, the percentage of Black residents living below the poverty line in each county is relative to the corresponding school division. This variable captures the greater economic conditions of the community surrounding the division to observe how it may impact the disciplinary practices of the school district.

Ultimately, these variables were selected to examine more closely the structural factors that contribute to disciplinary disparities.

Analytical Methods

The data analysis was conducted in a series of steps. The median of the discipline disparity index (Black/White) was calculated to determine the range of comparison across divisions. Following the calculation, a division was then either classified as above, at, or below the median discipline disparity index.

The following step included generating descriptive statistics for the reach grouping. To ensure greater accuracy, both means and medians were reported for the percentages of Black students enrolled, White students enrolled, per-pupil expenditure, and the percentage of Black

¹⁵ National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, HDPulse Data Portal: Poverty (Persons Below Poverty) by County, Black or African American (Including Hispanic/Latino), Both Sexes, All Ages, Virginia, 2019–2023, Bethesda, MD: National Institutes of Health, https://hdpulse.nimhd.nih.gov/data-portal/social/table?age=001&age_options=ageall_1&demo=00008&demo_options=poverty_3&race=00&race_options=race_7&sex=0&sex_options=sexboth_1&socialtopic=080&socialtopic_options=social_6&statefips=51&statefips_options=area_states

residents living below the poverty line. This component was crucial for conducting an initial comparison of demographic and economic characteristics between divisions with relatively higher or lower levels of disciplinary disparity.

Thereafter, visual analyses were included to further examine relationships between the discipline disparity index and various structural variables. Scatterplots were then produced with the disparity index on the x-axis and each independent variable on the y-axis, incorporating regression lines to analyze trends.

In the final stage, tables and figures were used to summarize and compare the findings. The tables reflected group averages and medians across divisions above and below the median, while the scatterplots synthesized patterns of association between disciplinary disparities and structural factors. Ultimately, these analytical steps provided comprehensive numerical and graphical perspectives on how demographic and economic conditions correlate with disciplinary disparities across Virginia school divisions.

LIMITATIONS

Year Inconsistencies

In this study, not all school divisions are consistently represented across the 2016-2020 timeframe. This is because the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) maintains student anonymity by suppressing exact counts when the number of student offenders in a category is fewer than 10, substituting the actual number with the symbol “<.” To ensure greater accuracy, no estimates were made for these suppressed values; rather, any school-division year combination in which suppression occurred in the disciplinary response and racial demographic that was being analyzed (short-term suspension (STS), long-term suspension (LTS); Black, not of Hispanic Origin, White, not of Hispanic Origin) was excluded from the dataset. Thus, some divisions are represented across the full four-year span, while others appear only in select years. To avoid bias, all disciplinary data were standardized as per-year averages, ensuring that divisions with more years of data were not weighted more and vice versa.

Level of Analysis

The study is limited to division-level data, meaning that the analysis does not account for potential variation across individual schools within the same county.

Scope

Though the disciplinary dataset ranges from the school years 2016-17 to 2019-20, data from 2020-21 (the most recent) is available. However, they were not included due to shifts in disciplinary practices fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic, which altered school attendance patterns. The earliest year of public reporting available was the 2016-17 school year, marking the starting point for the study. In contrast, the poverty dataset spans the years 2019-2023, as it was the most relevant time period for this analysis available at the Virginia county level. Despite a

slight mismatch in reporting years, the ranges were carefully selected to provide the most accurate view of disciplinary disparities for the most recent years for which data are available.

FINDINGS

Section 1: Overview of Discipline Disparities in Virginia

The median index of discipline disparity (Black/White) was used to group Virginia public school divisions as either above, at, or below the median. This classification can be utilized to compare institutional characteristics based on disciplinary disparity and understand variation across school divisions.

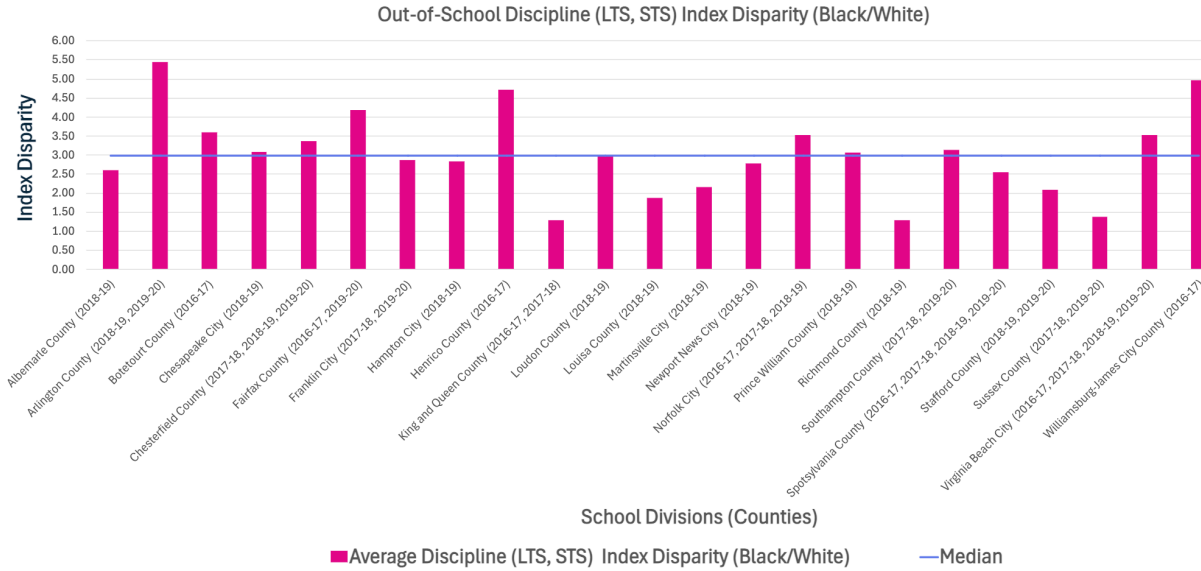
Table 1. Virginia School Divisions Above, At, and Below the Median Discipline Disparity Index (Black/White)

Below Median Disparity	Median Disparity	Above Median Disparity
King and Queen County (2016-17, 2017-18)	Loudon County (2018-19)	Prince William County (2018-19)
Richmond County (2018-19)		Chesapeake City (2018-19)
Sussex County (2017-18, 2019-20)		Southampton County (2017-18, 2019-20)
Louisa County (2018-19)		Chesterfield County (2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20)
Stafford County (2018-19, 2019-20)		Virginia Beach City (2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20)
Martinsville City (2018-19)		Norfolk City (2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19)
Spotsylvania County (2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20)		Botetourt County (2016-17)
Albemarle County (2018-19)		Fairfax County (2016-17, 2019-20)
Newport News City (2018-19)		Henrico County (2016-17)
Hampton City (2018-19)		Williamsburg-James City County (2016-17)
Franklin City (2017-18, 2019-20)		Arlington County (2018-19, 2019-20)

Source: Virginia Department of Education, *Safe Schools Information Resource, 2016–2020*.

As shown in Table 1, divisions exhibit a wide range in their placement relative to the median disparity. Loudoun County represents the median county. This classification will serve as the framework for comparing other structural variables across divisions.

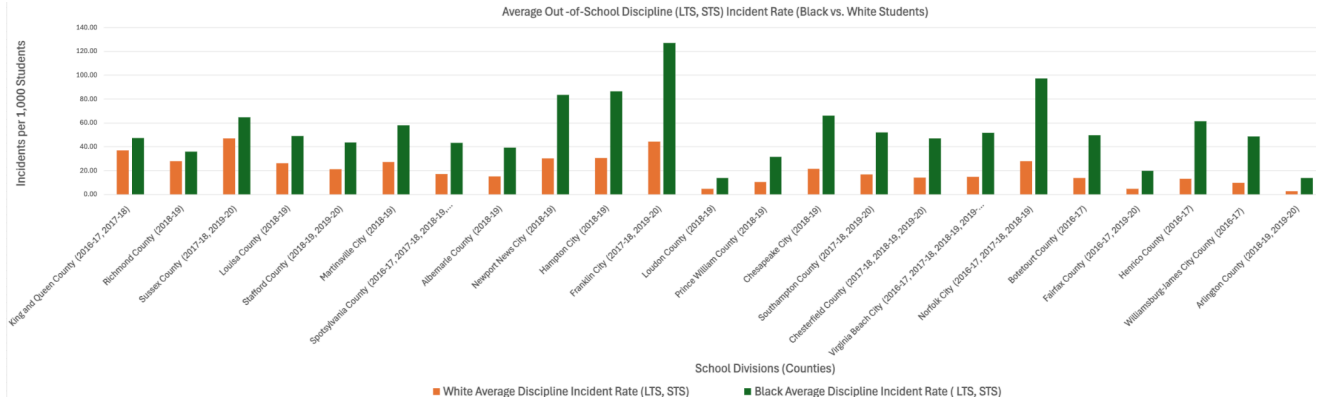
Figure 1. Out-of-School discipline (Long-Term (LTS) and Short-Term (STS)) Disparity Index (Black/White) across Virginia divisions, with the median indicated.



Source: Virginia Department of Education, Safe Schools Information Resource, 2016–2020.

Figure 1 provides a visualization of the disciplinary disparity index values across divisions, with a median value of 2.99. Although some divisions fall near the median, others display significantly more disproportionality. For instance, divisions such as Arlington County, Henrico County, and Williamsburg-James City reach indexes above 5, demonstrating that Black students are given out-of-school disciplinary action at a rate more than five times that of their white peers. It is crucial to note that many divisions below the median still demonstrate disproportionality toward Black students, with values generally greater than one.

Figure 2. Average Out-of-School Discipline (Long-Term (LTS) and Short-Term (STS)) Incident Rates per 1,000 Students, Black vs. White Students, Selected Virginia Divisions



Source: Virginia Department of Education, Safe Schools Information Resource, 2016–2020.

In Figure 2, the raw disciplinary rates for Black and White students are presented. Across all observed Virginia school divisions, it is confirmed that Black students experience significantly higher rates of out-of-school discipline.

Given that the distribution of school divisions in relation to the disciplinary disparity index has been established, the analysis begins to examine other structural factors that may provide context or an explanation for these high levels of disproportionality.

Section 2: Demographic Correlates of Disparity

This section examines specifically whether the racial composition of school divisions provides an explanation for the variation in discipline disparities. The calculations include comparing the percentage of Black and White students enrolled in divisions above and below the median disciplinary disparity index.

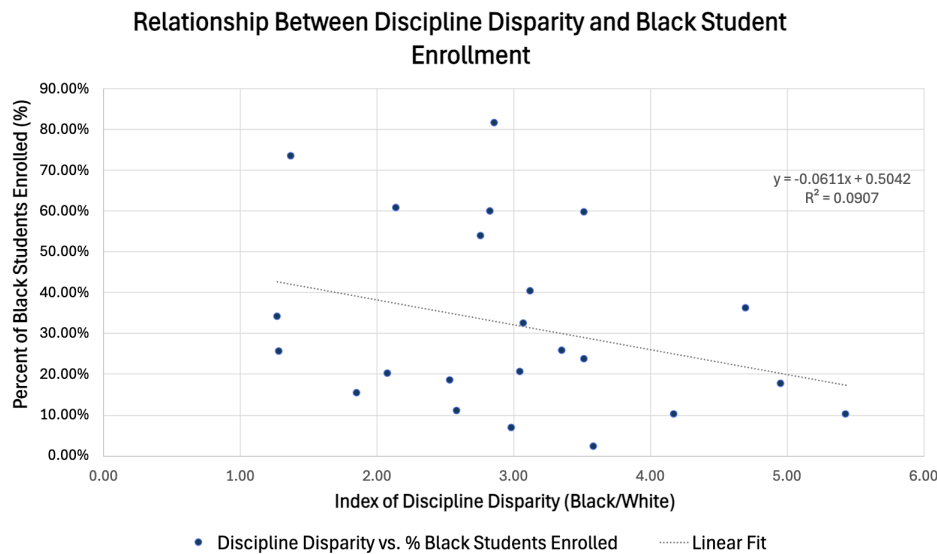
Table 2. Student Enrollment by Race in Above- vs. Below-Median Disparity Divisions

Variables	Above Median (Avg.)	Below Median (Avg.)	Above Median (Median)	Below Median (Median)
% Black Students Enrolled	25.71%	39.41%	24.58%	29.71%
% White Students Enrolled	49.44%	39.67%	47.84%	38.35%

Source: Virginia Department of Education, Safe Schools Information Resource, 2016–2020.

Table 2 compares student enrollment by race across divisions above and below the median disparity index. Divisions with higher discipline disparities enroll a smaller percentage of Black students, 25.71% on average and 24.58% at the median, compared to divisions below the median, which enroll 39.41% on average and 29.71% at the median. In contrast, White students make up a larger share of enrollment in above-median divisions, 49.44% on average and 47.84% at the median, compared to 39.67% on average and 38.35% at the median in below-median divisions. These demographic differences suggest that racial disproportionality in discipline is more prevalent in divisions where Black students are the minority.

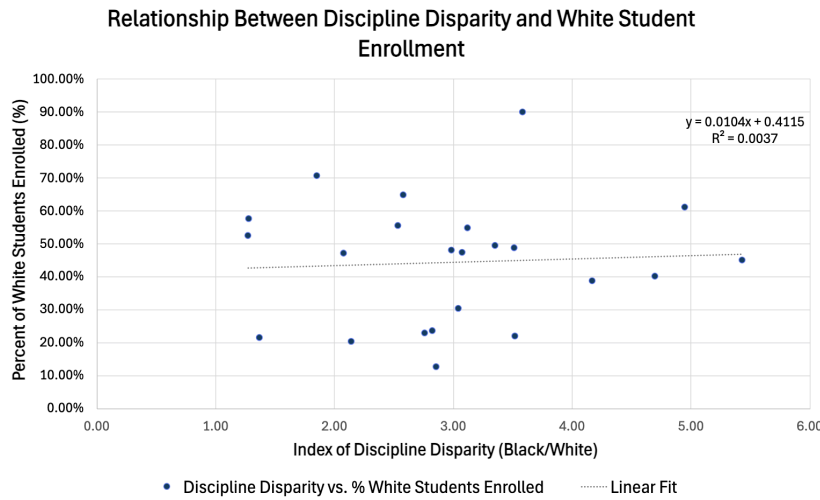
Figure 3. Relationship Between Discipline Disparity and Black Student Enrollment



Source: Virginia Department of Education, *Safe Schools Information Resource*, 2016–2020.

Figure 3 confirms the correlation between Black student representation and disproportionate disciplinary action, revealing a negative relationship, although not a strong one ($R^2 \approx 0.09$). These results demonstrate how school environments with a smaller percentage of Black students display higher levels of disproportionality.

Figure 4. Relationship Between Discipline Disparity and White Student Enrollment



Source: Virginia Department of Education, *Safe Schools Information Resource*, 2016–2020.

Figure 4 does not display a substantial relationship ($R^2 \approx 0.004$) between White student enrollment and discipline disparity. This points to White student representation as not significantly associated with disproportionality in disciplinary outcomes.

These findings suggest that disproportionality in school discipline for these divisions is shaped in part by racial demographics, specifically that of Black student representation.

Section 3: Per-Pupil Expenditure and Disparity

This section examines whether differences in school funding (per-pupil expenditure) are associated with variation in discipline disparities. Per-pupil expenditure was compared across divisions above and below the median disparity index.

Table 3. Per Pupil Expenditure in Above- vs. Below-Median Disparity Divisions

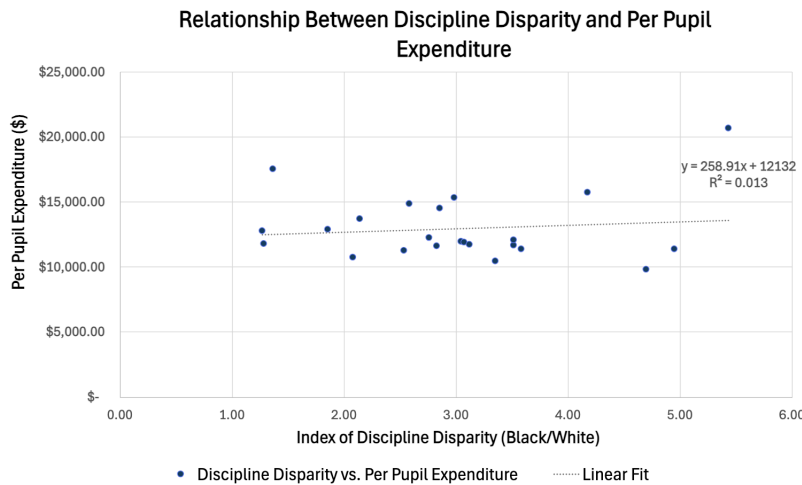
Variables	Above Median (Avg.)	Below Median (Avg.)	Above Median (Median)	Below Median (Median)
Per Pupil Expenditure (\$)	\$12,639.78	\$12,938.69	\$11,641.83	\$12,463.75

Source: Virginia Department of Education, “*Superintendent’s Annual Report: Table 15, Sources of Financial Support for Expenditures, Total Expenditures for Operations and Total Per Pupil Expenditures for Operations*,” 2016–17 through 2019–20; and Virginia Department of Education, *Safe Schools Information Resource*, 2016–2020.

Funding levels in Table 3 appear to lack variety across divisions with above- and below-median discipline disparities. On average, below-median divisions spend slightly more

per pupil (\$12,938.69) than above-median divisions (\$12,639.78), though the difference is marginal. This applies to median values as well, with below-median divisions spending \$12,463.75 compared to \$11,641.83 in above-median divisions. These minimal differences suggest that funding levels do not account for the variation in discipline disproportionality across the observed Virginia school divisions.

Figure 5. Relationship Between Discipline Disparity and Per-Pupil Expenditure



Source: Virginia Department of Education, “Superintendent’s Annual Report: Table 15, Sources of Financial Support for Expenditures, Total Expenditures for Operations and Total Per Pupil Expenditures for Operations,” 2016–17 through 2019–20; and Virginia Department of Education, Safe Schools Information Resource, 2016–2020.

Figure 5 confirms the lack of a meaningful relationship between per-pupil expenditure and discipline disparities. The regression line is nearly flat, with an R^2 of 0.01, indicating that differences in general per-pupil expenditure explain almost no variation in discipline disproportionality.

Section 4: Poverty Rates and Disparity

This section compares whether poverty levels among Black residents are associated with discipline disparities across Virginia counties. To test this correlation, average and median poverty rates were observed in relation to school divisions above and below the median disciplinary disparity index.

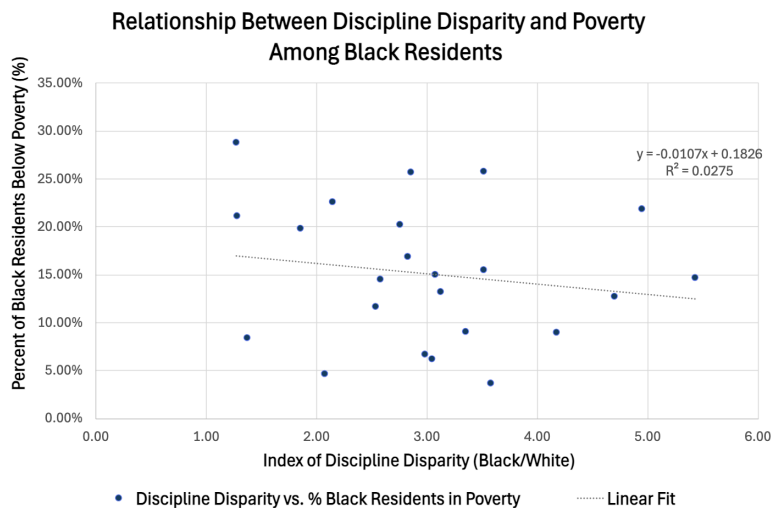
Table 4. Poverty Rates of Black Residents in Above- vs. Below-Median Disparity Divisions

Variables	Above Median (Avg.)	Below Median (Avg.)	Above Median (Median)	Below Median (Median)
% of Black Residents Below Poverty	13.96%	16.62%	13.85%	18.25%

Source: National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, HDPulse Data Portal, 2019–2023; and Virginia Department of Education, Safe Schools Information Resource, 2016–2020.

Poverty rates among Black residents in Table 4 are slightly higher in school divisions with below-median discipline disparities than in those with above-median disparities. On average, below-median divisions report a 16.62 percent Black poverty rate compared to 13.96 percent in above-median divisions. Median values follow a similar pattern, with 18.25 percent in below-median divisions and 13.85 percent in above-median divisions. These findings suggest that poverty among Black residents is not a strong driver of disciplinary disproportionality within the observed divisions.

Figure 6. Relationship Between Discipline Disparity and Poverty Among Black Residents



Source: National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, HDPulse Data Portal, 2019–2023; and Virginia Department of Education, Safe Schools Information Resource, 2016–2020.

Figure 6 illustrates that, within this dataset, there is only a weak correlation between the socioeconomic standing of Black residents and discipline disproportionality, with an R^2 value of around 0.03. Together, these results suggest that higher poverty among Black residents does not consistently correspond with greater disciplinary disproportionality in the selected Virginia divisions.

Section 5: Synthesis of Findings

This section focuses on consolidating the results across demographic and economic variables to assess which factors are associated with discipline disparities.

Table 5. Summary of Demographic, Expenditure, and Poverty Measures in Above- vs. Below-Median Disparity Divisions

Variables	Above Median (Avg.)	Below Median (Avg.)	Above Median (Median)	Below Median (Median)
% Black Students Enrolled	25.71%	39.41%	24.58%	29.71%
% White Students Enrolled	49.44%	39.67%	47.84%	38.35%
Per Pupil Expenditure (\$)	\$12,639.78	\$12,938.69	\$11,641.83	\$12,463.75
% of Black Residents Below Poverty	13.96%	16.62%	13.85%	18.25%

Source: Virginia Department of Education, Safe Schools Information Resource, 2016–2020; Virginia Department of Education, Superintendent’s Annual Report, Table 15, 2016–17 through 2019–20; National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, HDPulse Data Portal, 2019–2023.

Table 5 presents a synthesis of the division-level characteristics analyzed in previous sections. The most consistent difference appears to be demographic across groups, where divisions above the median index disparity enroll substantially smaller percentages of Black students and larger percentages of White students. In comparison, per-pupil expenditure and poverty rates show little to no difference between groups.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that discipline disparities as they relate to Black and White students exist in every Virginia school division observed, with all indices greater than one. Divisions below the calculated median of 2.99 continue to suspend Black students at higher rates than their White peers (as shown in *Figure 1*), illustrating how inequities are widespread, not isolated. Since “below-median” divisions still discipline Black students at higher rates, structural factors such as funding levels or poverty rates did not appear significantly different above and below the median (as shown in *Tables 3* and *4*). However, racial composition emerged as the strongest pattern: divisions with smaller Black student populations portrayed greater discipline disparities (as shown in *Figure 3*).

These results reflect prior scholarship where punitive discipline in schools has often been reported to greatly impact the achievement of Black youth. This understanding aligns with the school-to-prison pipeline, where the exclusion from the classroom, particularly that of Black students, increases their susceptibility to coming into contact with the justice system, contributing to the already high Black incarceration rates.¹⁶ While incarceration was not measured in this study, the heightened disparity indexes where Black students are a minority point to their vulnerability when in school environments with implicit bias and a lack of representation.

Specific to Virginia, the study’s findings suggest that disciplinary inequities are not entirely resource-driven. Even well-funded divisions with similar poverty levels revealed significant disparities, emphasizing the importance of school culture and administrative decisions in shaping disciplinary outcomes. Because Virginia is racially, socioeconomically, and

¹⁶ Chu and Ready, *Exclusion and Urban Public Schools*, 479–81, 483–84

geographically diverse, the state exemplifies how these inequities may surface nationwide.

Addressing the racial disparities in discipline in Virginia, therefore, provides a basis for reducing exclusionary discipline nationwide. School policy reforms should prioritize centering restorative justice and training staff to recognize how biases influence their administrative decisions. Further research should also delve deeper into school-level data to identify specific practices that sustain these disparities more thoroughly.

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