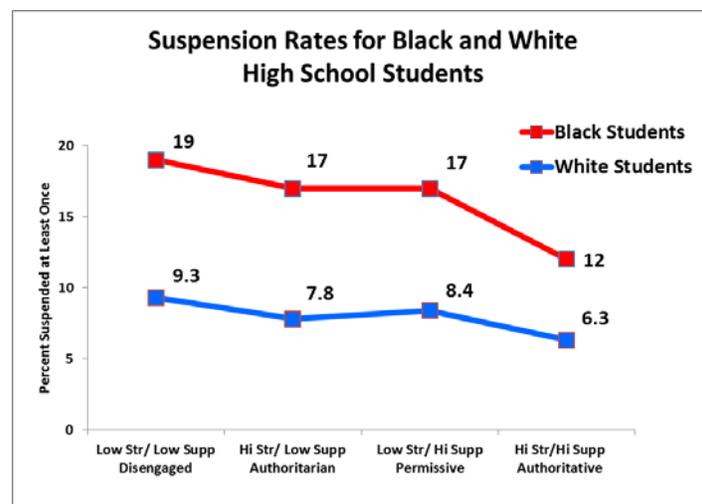


Authoritative High Schools Have Lower Suspension Rates for Black and White Students

Our research found that high schools with an authoritative climate report have lower out-of-school suspension rates than other schools. As described in Issue 1, an authoritative school is one in which students report that their teachers are strict but fair in their discipline (high structure) *and* concerned and respectful toward them (high support). In contrast, there are schools with high structure but low support (authoritarian), high support but low structure (permissive), or low structure and low support (disengaged). School climate was measured with surveys of 48,027 students in grades 9-12 in 323 Virginia public schools. Suspension rates were obtained from Virginia Department of Education records. As shown in the chart, the percentage of students suspended at least one time during the school year was 12% for Black students and 6.3% for White students in authoritative schools, versus 19% and 9.3% respectively in disengaged schools. The comparisons of school types controlled for differences in size, poverty level, and minority composition of the student enrollment as well as differences in student race, gender, GPA, and parent education.



Practical Suggestions. Educators do not have to choose between being strict versus being supportive with their students; the best strategy is to strive for both. A positive school climate may be protective against student misbehavior leading to suspension, although it also may be that schools that rely heavily on suspension generate a perception among students that school discipline is not fair and that school staff are not supportive. In either case, there is substantial evidence that school suspension is not an effective disciplinary practice and has negative consequences such as increased risk of school failure and dropout. There are large racial disparities in school suspension nationwide. In Virginia high schools, Black students are suspended approximately three times as often as White students. Critics have claimed that school suspension is a practice that contributes to the so-called “school to prison pipeline” <<http://neatoday.org/2015/01/05/school-prison-pipeline-time-shut/>>. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights has challenged schools to review disciplinary practices with a goal of eliminating racial disparities, and has issued new recommendations and policy guidance on school discipline <<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/index.html>>.

Study Overview. The Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey (including scales from the Authoritative School Climate Survey) was administered as a component of the Virginia School Safety Audit program carried out by the Virginia Center for School Safety of the Department of Criminal Justice Services, in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Education. The survey was designed to yield practical information on school climate and safety conditions that can be used to improve conditions for learning. The survey was developed by researchers (P.I. Dewey Cornell) at the Virginia Youth Violence Project of the Curry School of Education, University of Virginia. This project was supported by Grant #2012-JF-FX-0062 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice. This is a correlational study that can support, but not prove, causal relationships. More detailed analyses are available from the Virginia Youth Violence Project: <<http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu>>.