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CHICAGOLAND

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TRIBUNE SPECIAL REPORT

# School discipline harder on blacks

Analysis of federal data shows racial inequality in suspensions and expulsions nationwide; locally, the gap is widest in Lake and DuPage

By Howard Witt  
Tribune senior correspondent

AUSTIN, Texas — In the average New Jersey public school, African-American students are almost 60 times as likely as white students to be expelled for serious disciplinary infractions.

In Minnesota, black students are suspended six times as often as whites.

In Iowa, blacks make up just 5 percent of the statewide public

school enrollment but account for 22 percent of the students who get suspended.

Fifty years after federal troops escorted nine black students through the doors of an all-white high school in Little Rock, Ark., in a landmark school integration struggle, America's public schools remain as unequal as they have ever been when measured in terms of disciplinary sanctions such as suspensions and expulsions, according to little-known

**FULL COVERAGE**

- Supremacist groups seize on Jena 6 controversy. **PAGE 4**
- Compare the state-by-state racial disparity of disciplinary actions against students at [chicagotribune.com/discipline](http://chicagotribune.com/discipline)

ted data collected by the U.S. Department of Education for the 2004-2005 school year.

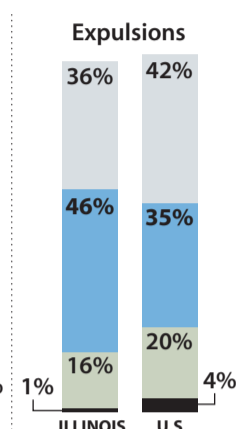
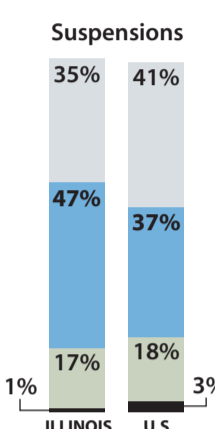
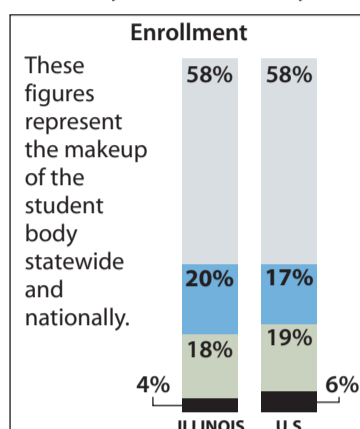
In every state but Idaho, a Tribune analysis of the data shows, black students are being suspended in numbers greater

PLEASE SEE **DISCIPLINE**, PAGE 16

**Suspensions and expulsions by race/ethnicity**

U.S. Department of Education statistics show that black students are disciplined at a much higher rate than students of other races. In Illinois, this disparity is slightly greater than the national average.

**KEY** White Black Hispanic Other



Note: Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. Source: Tribune analysis of Department of Education data for the 2004-05 school year

Chicago Tribune

## Iranian leader's speech sparks protests in NYC



New York Times photo by Damon Winter

Students fill the central quad at New York City's Columbia University on Monday as Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad accepted a controversial invitation for a campus address. Columbia President Lee Bollinger, who like Ahmadinejad was a focus of protests, excoriated the Iranian leader as a

"petty and cruel dictator" but said the invitation was a chance to "confront the mind of evil." Ahmadinejad fired back in his speech, calling Bollinger's words "insults," denouncing the White House, defending his doubts about the Holocaust and asserting Iran's right to a nuclear program. **STORY, PAGE 10**

## UAW walks over job security

Auto giant GM has enough vehicles to last 3 months

By Rick Popely and Stephen Franklin  
Tribune staff reporters

For a union that seemed to be pinned to the ropes, the United Auto Workers showed it can still punch back, shutting down General Motors Corp. on Monday after the two sides failed to agree on a four-year contract.

The strike, the first national walkout against GM since 1970, stunned Wall Street and industry analysts, who expected the union to agree to billions of dollars in concessions on wages, health care and other benefits in order to lower GM's labor costs.

But the UAW didn't get what it needed in return—significant promises of job security. And so 73,000 GM members streamed out of factories across the country Monday morning, shutting down production and setting up an epic showdown between a union and an industry whose mutual survival depends on getting a historic deal done.

GM desperately needs to offload tens of billions of dollars in health-care costs if it is to remain competitive with nimble foreign competitors like Toyota Mo-

**COMPLETE COVERAGE IN BUSINESS**

PLEASE SEE **STRIKE**, PAGE 17

IN METRO

### County eyes sales-tax hike

Most anything purchased in Cook County would cost more if the county decides to more than triple its portion of the sales tax to solve its lingering financial woes. If adopted, the hike would push the sales tax in Chicago to 11 percent. The idea might not win enough converts, but county leaders have been warning for months that some kind of tax increase is likely. Other proposals? Taxes on electricity, gas and phone service.

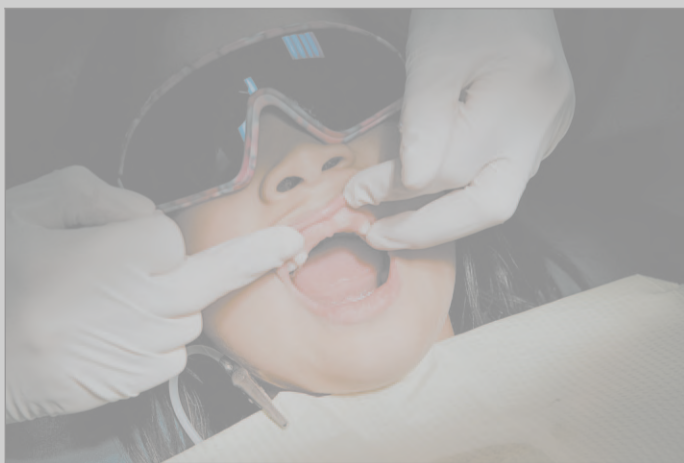
**Weather:** Storms in afternoon; high 80, low 58  
**Index, Page 2**

### Survey finds big holes in little kids' dental care

By Mary Ann Fergus  
Tribune staff reporter

Katelyn Patthana confidently slid into a chair to have her molars sealed, no big deal for a 7-year-old who had lived through a dental horror story. The Gilberts 2nd grader's tooth decay was so severe two years ago that dentists pulled six teeth, crowned two and filled five.

Katelyn is among a growing number of young children with cavities, creating concern among dentists and parents who hoped that brushing and avoiding candy was enough to silence the drills.



Tribune photo by Terry Harris

Katelyn Patthana, 7, opens wide at a checkup in Hoffman Estates. She has had teeth pulled, crowned and filled.

But with continual snacking and the use of non-fluoridated bottled water on the rise, experts say parents have to be even more vigilant.

"There's plenty of new cavities coming through," says Dr. Nicola Hill-Cordell, a pediatric dentist in Hoffman Estates. "At least once a week, you get a new kid who is

[younger] than 2 with a cavity."

Nationwide, nearly 28 percent of children ages 2 to 5 had at least one cavity, according to a federal survey covering 1999 to 2004. That represents a 4 percent climb from the previous survey, 1988 to 1994, and

PLEASE SEE **CAVITIES**, PAGE 2

TRIBUNE UPDATE

### Swindler convicted of taking church lots

Tribune investigation shed light on scheme, alerted others to thefts

By Ray Gibson and Robert Becker  
Tribune staff reporters

When authorities raided the Berwyn home of Phillip Radmer on the suspicion that he was selling vacant lots that really belonged to poor Chicago churches, they recovered box-loads of records, \$100,000 in cash, and a cartoon with two figures posing outside a house with a sign that read "For Sale By Non Owners."

Judge Stanley Sacks said the cartoon was a "five-word biography for Phil Radmer" as he

found the disbarred lawyer guilty of theft and forgery after a three-day bench trial in Cook County Circuit Court.

Radmer was the central figure in a scheme, uncovered last year by the Tribune, to steal more than 60 vacant lots using phony corporations and fictitious buyers. Radmer netted at least \$655,000 from the sale of just four properties owned by the First Presbyterian Church of Chicago.

Using public records, the Tribune traced dozens of land sales to phony corporations whose officers didn't exist. In most cases, the true owners were not aware their land had been sold until the Tribune informed them.

PLEASE SEE **CHURCH**, PAGE 17

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# 6,500 schools try different approach

## DISCIPLINE:

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

than would be expected from their proportion of the student population.

In 21 states—Illinois among them—that disproportionality is so pronounced that the percentage of black suspensions is more than double their percentage of the student body. And on average across the nation, black students are suspended and expelled at nearly three times the rate of white students.

No other ethnic group is disciplined at such a high rate, the federal data show. Hispanic students are suspended and expelled in almost direct proportion to their populations, while white and Asian students are disciplined far less.

### Backgrounds a factor?

Yet black students are no more likely to misbehave than other students from the same social and economic environments, research has found.

Some impoverished black children grow up in troubled neighborhoods and come from broken families, leaving them less equipped to conform to behavioral expectations in school. While such socioeconomic factors contribute to the disproportionate discipline rates, researchers say that poverty alone cannot explain the disparities.

"There simply isn't any support for the notion that, given the same set of circumstances, African-American kids act out to a greater degree than other kids," said Russell Skiba, a professor of educational psychology at Indiana University whose research focuses on race and discipline issues in public schools.

"In fact, the data indicate that African-American students are punished more severely for the same offense, so clearly something else is going on. We can call it structural inequity or we can call it institutional racism."

Academic researchers have been quietly collecting evidence of such race-based disciplinary disparities for more than 25 years. Yet the phenomenon remains largely obscured from public view by the popular emphasis on "zero tolerance" crackdowns, which are supposed to deliver equally harsh punishments based on a student's infraction, not skin color.

That's not what the data say is happening. Yet the federal Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, which is charged with investigating allegations of discriminatory discipline policies in the nation's public schools, has opened just one such probe in the past three years. Officials declined requests to explain why.

There's more at stake than just a few bad marks in a student's school record. Studies show that a history of school suspensions or expulsions is a strong predictor of future trouble with the law—and the first step on what civil rights leaders have described as a "school-to-prison pipeline" for black youths, who represent 16 percent of U.S. adolescents but 38 percent of those incarcerated in youth prisons.

Relatively few school districts scattered across the country—about 6 percent—have begun to acknowledge the issue of racial disparities in discipline and tried to do something about it.

In Austin, after administrators discovered that black youths accounted for 14 percent of the school district's population but 37 percent of the students sent to punitive alternative schools, they introduced a program in some schools based on encouraging positive student behaviors rather than punishing negative ones.

At one school, Pickle Elementary, which serves mostly Hispanic and black pupils, the results were dramatic—disciplinary referrals dropped to 20 last year from 520 in 2001-2002.

"I am not going to give up on a child and suspend him or send him to an alternative school," said Julie Pryor, who was the school's principal when the behavioral program was implemented and is now a district administrator. "Washing our hands of a child will never change his behavior, it just makes it worse. These are children. It's up to us to be creative to find ways to help them behave."

But academic experts say many more school administrators, when confronted with data showing disparate rates of discipline for minority students, react like officials in the small east Texas town of Paris and strenuously deny accusations of racial discrimination.

Paris is the sole school district in the nation currently



Photo for the Tribune by Andrew Loehman  
Texas teacher Sheila Carver works with children at Pickle Elementary School in Austin, where a program based on encouraging positive pupil behaviors rather than punishing negative ones has helped reduce disciplinary referrals to 20 last year from 520 in 2001-2002. The school serves mostly Hispanic and black children.

### School discipline and race

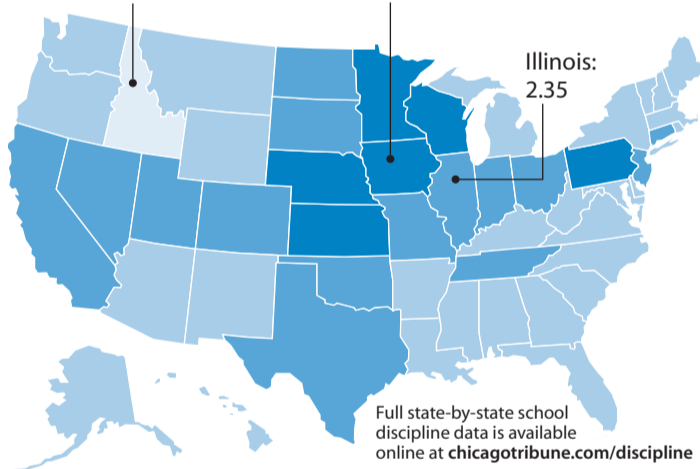
In every state except Idaho, black students were disciplined at a higher rate than their proportion of the student body. For example, in Illinois, where 20 percent of all students are black, they might be expected to make up 20 percent of all students receiving suspensions. Instead, they make up 47 percent of students receiving suspensions, or 2.35 times the percentage expected.

#### BLACK STUDENT SUSPENSIONS

Ratio of percentage of black student suspensions to percentage of black student enrollment

■ Less than 1 ■ 1-1.99 ■ 2-2.99 ■ 3 or more

Lowest ratio: Idaho: 0.96  
Highest ratio: Iowa: 4.39  
U.S. average: 2.21



Source: Tribune analysis of Department of Education data for the 2004-05 school year  
Chicago Tribune

***'If you teach kids the behaviors that are expected, you have a greater likelihood of success.'***

—George Sugai, education professor at the University of Connecticut who helped create a positive behavioral program being tried in 6,500 schools

under investigation by the Department of Education to determine whether higher discipline rates for black students there constitute institutionalized discrimination. The probe has been under way for more than a year.

"The school district has been a leader and very progressive when it comes to race relations," Dennis Eichelbaum, attorney for the Paris Independent School District, said in an interview earlier this year.

That perspective is not shared by the families of many of Paris' black students, who make up 40 percent of the school district's nearly 4,000 students.

"They say there's no racism here, but if you go inside a school and look in the room where they send the kids for detention, almost all the faces are black," said Brenda Cherry, a Paris civil rights activist who assembled some of the complaints that sparked the federal investigation. "Unless black people are just a bad race of people, something is wrong here."

Exactly why black students

across the nation are suspended and expelled more frequently than children of other races is a question that continues to perplex sociologists.

Socioeconomic factors are certainly at play, researchers believe.

"Studies of school suspension have consistently documented disproportionality by socioeconomic status. Students who receive free school lunch are at increased risk for school suspension," according to "The Color of Discipline," a 2000 study by Skiba and other researchers in Indiana and Nebraska.

Another study concluded that "students whose fathers did not have a full-time job were significantly more likely to be suspended than students whose fathers were employed full time."

But those studies and others have repeatedly found that racial factors are even more important.

"Poor home environment does carry over into the school environment," said Skiba, who is widely regarded as the nation's foremost authority on school discipline and race. "But middle-class and upper-class black students are also being disciplined more often than their white peers. Skin color in itself is a part of this function."

Some experts point to cultural miscommunications between black students and white teachers, who fill 83 percent of the nation's teaching ranks. In fact, the Tribune analysis found, some of the highest rates of racially disproportionate discipline are found in states with the lowest minority popula-

## DuPage 1st in Chicago-area student expulsion disparity

By Stephanie Banchemo  
Tribune staff reporter

In Chicago-area public schools, African-American students are five times as likely to be suspended and nearly eight times as likely to be expelled as white students, according to a Tribune analysis of state data.

The expulsion disparity was greatest in DuPage County, where blacks were expelled at a rate nine times as high as whites. African-Americans represent 6 percent of the public school population in DuPage yet accounted for 32 percent of all the students expelled in the last school year, the data show.

Lake County schools in the north suburbs had the largest suspension gap. Black students, who make up 10 percent

of the school enrollment, are six times as likely as whites to receive a suspension.

African-American students in Illinois have long been over-represented in school discipline statistics. The issue came to national prominence in 1999 when six black students were expelled from a Decatur high school after a fight. Their expulsion touched off a firestorm and brought Rev. Jesse Jackson and other civil rights leaders to the Downstate town.

The following year, the number of expulsions dropped statewide. But it has crept back up.

"These numbers are a wake-up call for those of us who went to sleep after the Decatur incident," said Mark Allen, who worked for Jackson and helped open the Decatur Rain-

bow/PUSH chapter. "When we were agitating and protesting, things got better. Now that we stopped monitoring, things went right back to the old way. It's a travesty."

Several area school districts, including Chicago, Oak Park and Carpentersville, have grappled with racial disparity in discipline in recent years.

In 2005, African-Americans in Oak Park and River Forest High School demanded an audit into the disparate suspensions and expulsions of black students. District officials eventually crafted new policies, including plans to train teachers in non-confrontational discipline methods.

Tribune staff reporter Darnell Little contributed to this report. sbanchemo@tribune.com

tions, where the disconnect between white teachers and black students is potentially the greatest.

"White teachers feel more threatened by boys of color," said Isela Gutierrez, a juvenile justice expert at the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, a watchdog and policy group. "They are viewed as disruptive. What might be their more assertive way of asking a question, for example, is viewed as popping off at the mouth."

Nor has the decline of court-ordered integration across the nation and the gradual resegregation of urban schools in recent decades made much difference in disciplinary rates.

Even in urban schools where most of the students are black, black youths are still disciplined out of proportion to their population, the data show. In Washington, D.C., for example, black students are 84 percent of the public school population but 97 percent of the students who are suspended.

#### Downside of zero tolerance

Other researchers believe that zero-tolerance policies, which encourage teachers and administrators to crack down on even minor, non-violent misbehavior, are exacerbating racial disparities.

Some states, such as Texas, are so zealous that they have criminalized many school infractions, saddling tens of thousands of students with misdemeanor criminal records for offenses such as swearing or defying class.

The school security climate,

in turn, can reinforce race-based expectations about which students are most likely to require discipline.

"Most suburban schools, where the students are more likely to be white, purchase security equipment that is meant to protect children—for example, hand scanners that make sure that the parent/guardian picking up the child is legitimate," said Ronnie Casella, an expert on the criminalization of student behavior at Central Connecticut State University. "In contrast, urban schools choose equipment such as metal detectors and surveillance cameras that are meant to catch youths committing crimes."

The new behavioral program being tried in Austin and some 6,500 schools nationwide, including some in Chicago area, seeks to turn zero tolerance on its head in a bid to slash the number of suspensions, expulsions and other punishments meted out by teachers.

Called "Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports," the intensive regimen requires a commitment from an entire school, including training of students in the behaviors that are expected of them and re-education of teachers and administrators in the use of positive motivational techniques.

The interactions of individual teachers with their students are scrutinized by a team of experts to pinpoint communication breakdowns, and specialized counseling teams are deployed to work with students who present the most serious discipline issues so that class-

room teachers are not left to deal with the problems on their own.

"Most schools use a get-tough, punish-the-kids kind of perspective, which results in the kinds of racial disciplinary disparities we see across the country," said George Sugai, a professor of education at the University of Connecticut who helped create the positive behavioral program.

"We come at it from the other perspective: If you teach kids the behaviors that are expected, you have a greater likelihood of success. It's really more about changing how adults interact with kids than it is about changing the kids."

Schools such as Pickle Elementary in Austin that are using the positive behavioral program often report sharp reductions in disciplinary referrals. But Skiba, who is studying the effectiveness of the program, cautions that it doesn't always eliminate racial disparities.

"They've been very successful at reducing rates of suspension and expulsion while making schools function more effectively," Skiba said of the schools using the program.

"But if you look at the data by race, what you find is that some discrepancies still exist. It's not enough to put this program in place and say, 'We are happy to reduce our rates of suspension,' because what we might have done is reduce our white suspensions and increase our African-American suspensions. There's just no silver bullet for this problem."

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