

# ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES, PRACTICES AND PARADIGMS IN THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

**Enhancing school discipline and increasing academic achievement and graduation rates among those most impacted or characterized by the findings**

**BASED ON A COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH CONDUCTED AMONG 92 OF 152 LOCAL MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

- The term “zero tolerance” was coined in the 1980s for strict drug-seizure policies adopted as part of the federal “War on Drugs.”
- Beginning in 1989, school districts in California, New York, and Kentucky were the first to attach the term “zero tolerance” to policies mandating expulsion for drugs, fighting, and gang-related activity, according to the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy.
- Zero tolerance became a national policy for schools when President Bill Clinton signed the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, which was passed in response to several school shootings across the country. The federal law required states to expel students who bring firearms to school for at least one calendar year.
- According to the Youth Law Center, the national movement toward school accountability and mandatory testing, such as President Bush’s sweeping No Child Left Behind Law, which penalizes schools that do not raise student test scores, has led to the abuse of zero-tolerance policies.
- State law makers and school boards since have expanded the punishment for weapons to include automatic expulsion or suspension for drugs and alcohol, fighting, swearing, disrupting class, disobedience, truancy, and more than a dozen other forms of misbehavior.
- According to the Youth Law Center, “groups who perform poorly on standardized test, such as students with disabilities, minorities and low income kids, are targeted for expulsion...”



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## Introduction

The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) is a mandatory data collection, authorized under the statutes and regulations implementing Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Department of Education (DOE) Organization Act (20 U.S.C. 3413). The regulations implementing these provisions can be found at 34 CFR 100.6(b); 34 CFR 106.71; and 34 CFR 104.61. DOE recently released Part 2 of its 2009-2010 CRDC. According to the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR), Minority students across America face harsher discipline, have less access to rigorous high school curricula, and are more often taught by lower-paid and less experienced teachers.

According to the U.S. Department of Education's website, Education Secretary Arne Duncan said the "CRDC findings are a wake-up call to educators at every level and issued a broad challenge to work together to address educational inequities. He further said that, "The power of the data is not only in the numbers themselves, but in the impact it can have when married with the courage and the will to change. The undeniable truth is that the everyday educational experience for many students of color violates the principle of equity at the heart of the American promise. It is our collective duty to change that."

***Chief among the issues identified in the 2009-2010 CRDC report is: "African-American students, particularly males, are far more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their peers. "Black students made up 18% of the students in the 2009-2010 CRDC sample, yet represented 35% of the students suspended at least one time, and 39% of the students expelled."***

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Southern Region, inspired by the OCR/CRDC report, sought to determine the profile of zero tolerance discipline policies and practices within the state of Mississippi. During the fall of 2011, CDF/Southern Region commissioned the PERICO Institute for Youth Development and Entrepreneurship (the PERICO Institute) to conduct research to help determine the profile of disciplinary or "zero tolerance" policies, practices and paradigms in the state of Mississippi. The goal of this research is to better understand the nature and number of disciplinary incidents that students are involved in and the nature and number of disciplinary dispositions that the schools are administering as a matter of "zero tolerance" or progressive discipline. The desired outcome of the research is to have a body of valid and reliable data to rely on as a basis for communicating with state Department of Education officials and local school superintendents to express the state of affairs as it relates to administering discipline, and the potential these practices have in perpetuating youth into the pipeline

for school drop-out, incarceration and life-long poverty through high utilization of suspensions and corporal punishments as the discipline of choice.

Defined, a zero-tolerance policy is a policy that results in mandatory expulsion of any student who commits one or more specified offenses (e.g., offenses involving guns or other weapons, violence or similar infractions, or combinations of these factors). A policy is considered “zero tolerance” even if there are some exceptions to the mandatory rule, such as allowing the chief administering officer of an LEA to modify the expulsion on a case-by-case basis (Reference: OCR)

### **Methods and Quality of Data**

Using the Freedom of Information Act as a means to gain access to the data, The PERICO Institute asked 152 school districts and 7 specialty schools for data relating to their discipline policies, practices and paradigms. Specifically, researchers requested for information that schools have previously reported to the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) in response to the No Child Left Behind Act. This includes data from the Mississippi Student Information System (MSIS) or the Student Administration Management (SAM) System. One hundred and seventeen (117) school districts responded to our request of which 92 submitted data. Most data was sent voluntarily and much other data was sent for an administrative fee. The 92 schools districts that sent data can be identified by examining Table 1. Twenty-eight (28) school districts or their lawyers responded with letters to include the district's invoice for extraordinary fees, reasons why they could not send the data requested. Those districts that charged an excessive fee were contacted twice – by phone - to negotiate the price for reproducing or compiling the data. Districts that agreed to share their data for a reasonable fee were compensated for their labor, time and effort. Thirty-two (32) school districts did not provide a response at all to the public records request.

The initial public records request asked for 10 years of data to be used in assessing the school disciplinary practices. Many school districts were not equipped to provide 10 years of data; as an alternative, schools that couldn't provide 10 years of data were asked to provide what they were able to or at least three years of data dating from 2008-2011. The analysis of the data required an understanding of two dominant management information systems: Mississippi Student Information System (MSIS) and Student Account Management (SAM).

MSIS was first implemented statewide at the beginning of 2001/2002 school year. SAM is a complementary system that some school districts have as a more detailed

database. Some data was provided in “raw” administrative form format; or, in a form where the data was not disaggregated.

The data collection process was managed by a seasoned Data Manager who developed an Excel spreadsheet commensurate with the categories found on most MSIS or SAM mechanized data sheets provided by the school districts. A team of data collectors were assigned to a number of school districts and data was taken from the mechanized reports and placed on the spreadsheets. The Principal Investigator monitored the transference of data from the mechanized reports to the excel spreadsheets. A master data collector was assigned to input the data from the spreadsheets into the computerized spreadsheet. Data calculations were done on a weekly basis and data runs occurred after the calculations to ascertain a quantitative profile of the data that had been received up to that point in time. After 2 months of collecting, inputting and calculating the data, draft presentations, publications and reports were completed in order to share the preliminary findings and observations. This report is based on Data received by March 31, 2012. More data has come in and will be reflected in a future report should future examination be requested or required. The final products resulting from the research include a Power Point Presentation, Sample Brochures in Publisher, A navigational Excel Spread sheet showing all of the incident and disposition data by race, gender and school we collected, and a final report in Word. The first page in the spread sheet represents all of the data we collect and the page tabs thereafter reflect the data from the 92 counties that provided data for the study. The Principal Investigator and the Data Manager monitored the input of data on a daily basis to ensure reliability and validity of the data collection, system input, run of the data, reporting and writing the report processes.

The cohort used in this analysis was comprised of all student records captured for the 2001-2011 timeframe. On average for the past decade, over 500,000 youth are annually registered in Mississippi Public schools. While the majority of youth in the state are White, the majority of students in the Mississippi public school system are 50.5% black and whites comprise 46.3% of the public school population. Researchers examined 613,192 incidents and 609,430 dispositions. This examination profiled a “big picture” view of the disciplinary incidents and dispositions by race and gender and describes – quantitatively - how discipline has been administered in Mississippi over the past decade. A sample group of 30 Mississippi Public School Districts was identified using a combination of CDF relationships with various counties in the state, proximity of the school districts to the CDF Southeast Region central office, and random selection (See Table 9). The sample identified the most critical incidents and dispositions for the 30 school districts, then compared them to the normative rate established for all 92 school districts during the 2001-2011 period.

Incident categories were defined loosely and left a lot of room for interpretation and discernment at the local school district level. The concept of Home Rule facilitated the wide range of interpretation and discernment. Listed below are some common definitions founding this report and as defined by school districts in various Parent/Student Handbooks. To begin with, Incidents are student actions or infractions which violate school policy. For example:

- Noncriminal behavior is any act which violates school policy but does not violate the law.
- Prohibited behavior is a specific act that violates school policy but does not violate the law.
- Disorderly conduct is an intentional act that provokes a breach of the peace.

A list of other incident categories can be examined by looking at table 10, page 29. Only those incidents that cross over into a criminal misdemeanor or felony are easily defined. The three categories mentioned above show the most ambiguity in the application of "Fair and balanced" discipline at the school district level.

## Findings

### Incident Findings

Researchers accounted for 575,715 students involved in 613,192 incidents. Some districts did not break down the incidents by race or gender. The ratio of students to incidents is 1.07. The ratio indicates that there are repeat violators! For every 100 students, seven (7) of them are likely to be characterized as repeat violators. Blacks were cited for seventy-two percent (72%) of the incidents in 92 school districts while comprising only 50.5% of the state's public school student population overall.

Contrastingly, Whites were cited for 26% of the incident while comprising 46% of the state's public school student population. Table 1 below provides a 10-year snapshot of the incidence findings by race, number, and percent. Native Americans, Asians and Hispanics were each cited for roughly 1% of all incidents. School Districts that did not send data disaggregated by race (or gender) were grouped as "unspecified."

Table 1: Incidents by Race, 2001 - 2011

Ethnic Group	Number	Percentage
Native American	1,275	<1%
Asian	1,326	<1%
Black/African American	412,458	72%
Hispanic	5,977	1%
White	138,404	26%
Unspecified	6,264	1%
Total All Ethnic Groups	575,715	100%

Where data was provided, researchers could assert that by gender, males were involved in incidents at a rate of 2:1 when compared to females. Males were cited for 67% of the incidents, and females were cited for 33% of the incidents. There were 380,736 incidents attributed to males and 194,979 incidents attributed to females. Overall, there were 26 different categories of incidents identified in the study.

A parallel study of school discipline as it relates to the involvement of the School Safety Officer/Law Enforcement revealed that the primary communications to the parents and the students about the various categories of incidents that a student may be subject to is the Student/Parent School Handbook. In an informal poll of participants in a community workshop on school discipline, only 25% of parents remembered four months after school started they had examined the student/parent school handbook; the other 75% could not recall whether they had reviewed the handbook.

Using the Hawkins/Catalano approach to identifying major problem behaviors and underlying risk factors, researchers identified the top three to five incidents as the major problem behaviors experienced by the school system overall (Table 2).<sup>6</sup>

Out of 26 different categories of incidents, prohibited behavior ranked as the number one problem behavior in which students in the state engaged followed by noncriminal behavior, and disorderly conduct. Fights ranked fourth. A significant number of incidents were not identified. These were categorized as “unspecified.” Incidents that were equal to or less than 1% were categorized as “other.”

**Table 2: Top Four Incidents, 2001 - 2011**

<b>Incident</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Noncriminal Behavior	245,276	40%
Prohibited Behavior	61,319	10%
Disorderly Conduct	42,923	7%
Fights	36,791	6%
Unspecified	171,694	28%
Other	55,189	9%
Totals	613,192	100%

The “other” category included excessive tardiness, assaults, trespassing, vandalism, weapons, uniform violations, alcohol, tobacco, sexual crimes, theft, drugs, robbery, gang, mayhem, etc. and made up 9% of all incidents. Table 10 provides a breakdown of those “other” incidents.

As shown in Table 3, when compared to state normative rates, the sample group data shows that, in some instances, there were deviations (highs and lows) in the type and frequency of incidents, and perhaps for the same behavior was exhibited by youth regardless of the year of the incident. The reporting systems in some instances “forced administrators to categorize student’s conduct using only the categories available to them. Without appropriate training this area of interpretation could be more subjective than objective. In instances where a sample school district did provide general incident data, but did not provide categorical data, ND or no data was indicated. Instances where the infraction (incident) exceeded that of the state comparison group by 10% points are highlighted in bold.

As shown in Table 3, the percent of Noncriminal Behavior for the state group (92 school districts), highlighted in green is 40%, while Benton and nine other school districts (East Tallahatchie, Forrest, Hazelhurst, Jackson, Lamar, Moss Point, North Panola, West Bolivar, and Yazoo City PSDs) exceeded the state wide “Noncriminal Behavior” normative rate. Five school districts exceeded the 10% norm for “Prohibited Behavior”

<sup>6</sup> David Hawkins and Richard Catalano “Problem Behaviors and Risk Factors, University of Washington

(Coahoma, Grenada, Indianola, Neshoba and Yazoo County PSDs). Eight school districts exceeded the 7% norm for “Disorderly Conduct” (Aberdeen, Biloxi, Canton, Claiborne, George, Grenada, Leland, and Neshoba PSDs). Eight school districts exceeded the 6% norm for “Fighting:” (Aberdeen, Canton, Claiborne, George, Moss Point, Neshoba, North Panola, West Bolivar and Yazoo city PSDs).

While not exceeding the 10 points more than the state’s criteria, Jackson Public School’s data did lead the state with major offenses that involved illegal activities, followed by George (8%), Lamar (8%) and Claiborne (7%) county School districts. These four school districts demonstrated a need for greater prevention and intervention programs to reduce underlying risk factors leading to such incidents and behaviors.

<b>Table 3: Analysis of Incident Data Among a Sample of 30 School Districts In Comparison to the 92 School Districts Reporting</b>					
<b>School District Name and Number of Incidents Examined</b>	<b>Noncriminal Behavior</b>	<b>Prohibited Behavior</b>	<b>Disorderly Conduct</b>	<b>Fights</b>	<b>Major Offenses/Arrested Off Campus<sup>7</sup></b>
<b>Ratio of 92 Districts that Responded</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>2%</b>
Aberdeen PSD N=6399	44%	NR	37%	17%	<2%
Benton PSD N=5324	64%	6%	15%	10%	<1%
Biloxi PSD N= 15,358	37%	18%	47%	<2%	<1%
Coahoma PSD N=2105	48%	36%	NR	15%	2%
Canton PSD N= 1357	19%	NR	47%	19%	<1%
Claiborne PSD N=597	2%	NR	49%	42%	7%
Clarksdale PSD <sup>8</sup> N=683	28%	NR	13%	10%	NR
East Tallahatchie PSD N=10,894	71%	9%	11%	8%	<1%
Forrest PSD N=22,821	72%	11%	9%	5%	<1%
George PSD N=4,287	3%	11%	20%	39%	8%

<sup>7</sup> This category includes illegal activities such as drugs, weapons, assault (to include sexual assault), theft, robbery arrests on or off campus.

<sup>8</sup> Clarksdale PSD had an inordinate number of alcohol related incidents. There were 334 incidents of alcohol use or involvement for the period examined.



<b>Table 3: Analysis of Incident Data Among a Sample of 30 School Districts In Comparison to the 92 School Districts Reporting</b>					
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<b>Ratio of 92 Districts that Responded</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>2%</b>
Grenada County PSD N=12,453 <sup>9</sup>	NR	<b>37%</b>	<b>26%</b>	2%	<1%
Harrison PSD N=21,227	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
*Hazlehurst PSD N=14,752	<b>85%</b>	NR	3%	11%	1%
Hollandale PSD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
*Indianola PSD N=1342	42%	<b>34%</b>	15%	8%	2%
*Jackson PSD N= 27,772	<b>82%</b>	0%	NR	3%	10%
Lamar PSD N=3,034	<b>79%</b>	NR	0%	9%	8%
LeFlore PSD N=3,962	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
Leland PSD <sup>10</sup> N=2,281	6%	0%	<b>50%</b>	15%	1%
Lincoln Co. PSD N=1910	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
Madison County PSD N=2974	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
*Moss Point PSD N=2789	<b>60%</b>	0%	3%	<b>35%</b>	2%
Neshoba County PSD N=9,583	16%	<b>23%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>16%</b>	1%
Newton Municipal PSD N=1512	73%	0%	<1%	4%	1%
North Panola PSD N=5662	<b>50%</b>	4%	16%	<b>18%</b>	4%
Ocean Springs PSD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
Pearl PSD	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
*Simpson PSD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD

<sup>9</sup> Grenada PSD experienced an inordinate number of Tardy/School Attendance incidents (2,781) which represented 22% of total incidents over the period of examination. Uniform policy discrepancies accounted for 11% of total incidents.

<sup>10</sup> Leland Public School District incidents resulted in 28% being listed as unclassified. Total incidents were greater than the sum of categorized incidents.

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<b>Ratio of 92 Districts that Responded</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>2%</b>
West Bolivar PSD N=553	<b>75%</b>	1%	0%	<b>24%</b>	0%
*Yazoo City PSD N=16,503	<b>64%</b>	<1%	11%	<b>17%</b>	2%
Yazoo County PSD <sup>11</sup> N=79	34%	<b>23%</b>	3%	4%	6%

As an interim summary, 8 school districts exceeded the state comparison rate by 10 or more percentile points in two or more incident categories. Those public school districts are:

- Aberdeen
- Canton
- Claiborne
- George
- Grenada
- North Panola
- West Bolivar
- Yazoo City

These districts are the districts where interventions such as parent involvement, peer mediation, group and community conflict resolution, and youth court should first be tried in an effort to bring their incident count more in line with the state normative rate. The incidents represent problem behaviors for which the underlying risk factors need addressing. Prevention strategies are critical for the necessary behavioral change to occur in the youth. Prevention will reduce the nature and number of dispositions administered in the future, and will counter the school house to jailhouse trends.

<sup>11</sup> Yazoo County experienced an inordinate number of unclassified incidents where the total incidents reported were not equal to the sum of the specific categories of data provided.

## Dispositions

In response to the 613,192 incidents cited over the ten year period, 609,430 dispositions were administered to 579,185 clearly identified students. Many districts sent in data that did not specifically link dispositions to race or gender. The result is 14% of the reported dispositions could not be associated with race or gender.

As shown in Table 4, The disposition data shows that **suspensions** are the discipline of choice for the majority of school districts – where the dominant incidents are noncriminal and prohibited behavior and disorderly conduct (See table 3). Sixty-nine percent (69%) of all dispositions are suspensions or some sort.<sup>12</sup> Further, corporal punishment is still a viable disposition in the state. Ten percent of all dispositions involve paddling, spanking, or other forms of physical punishment imposed on students.

Type of Disposition	Count	Percentage
Out of School Suspensions	249,243	41%
In-School Suspension	170,918	28%
Corporal Punishment	58,309	10%
Warnings/Administrative Discipline	34,846	6%
Alternate School	13,098	2%
Jail (3,380)+Youth Court (869)+Police Calls(88) = Juvenile Justice System	4,337	0.7%
Expel/Expulsion	2,046	0.3%
Unspecified – not reported or not disciplined	76,663	14%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>609,430</b>	<b>100%</b>

Warnings, administrative discipline, and parent or student conferences were under utilized to correct or modify student behavior. Alternative Schools were also under

<sup>12</sup> Out-of-school suspension is an instance in which a child is temporarily removed from his/her regular school for disciplinary purposes to another setting (e.g., home, behavior center). This includes both removals in which no IEP services are provided because the removal is 10 days or less as well as removals in which the child continues to receive services according to his/her IEP. For students without disabilities and students with disabilities served solely under Section 504: Out-of-school suspension means excluding a student from school for disciplinary reasons for one school day or longer. This does not include students who served their suspension in the school. (OCR)

utilized to correct or modify problem behaviors. There is a sixty-three point difference in the utilization of suspension as a disciplinary tool and the utilization of Alternative school to modify behavior in the positive sense.<sup>13</sup>

Expulsions were less than 1% and often used for incidents that were clearly under the zero tolerance paradigms.<sup>14</sup> The irony, however, based on the data, is that schools demonstrated a “zero tolerance” response to incidents that do not clearly fit the definition of zero tolerance incidents, yet resulted in harsh responses such as suspensions and corporal punishments (e.g. noncriminal behavior and prohibited behavior).

Table 5 below provides a cross matrix of the findings from the 30 school district sample group and the overall state comparison data provided by the 92 districts that provided data for analysis. When compared to state normative rates, the sample group’s data shows that there deviations (highs and lows) in the type and frequency of dispositions. Forced choice is also applied to disposition categories and school districts are often forced with picking “the category” that best fits or within the context of “home rule.” Without appropriate training this area, interpretation of the “best” consequence” could be more subjective than objective.

In instances where a sample school district did not provide categorical data, ND (no data) was indicated. Dispositions rates in the sample group that exceeded the state comparison group by 10 percentage points are highlighted in bold print.

District	Out of School Suspensions	In School Suspensions	Corporal Punishment	Warnings Administrative Discipline	Alternate School
<b>Ratio of the 92 School Districts Reporting</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>2%</b>
Aberdeen PSD	<b>68%</b>	14%	13%	3%	3%
Benton PSD	45%	<1%	<b>50%</b>	<1	4%

<sup>13</sup> An alternative school is a public elementary or secondary school that addresses the needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school and provides nontraditional education which falls outside of the categories of regular education, special education, vocational education, gifted or talented or magnet school programs. This definition includes schools that are adjunct to a regular school, e.g., are located on the same campus as a regular school but have a separate principal or administrator. (OCR)

<sup>14</sup> Removal of a student from the school setting for an extended length of time because of zero-tolerance policies. A zero tolerance policy is a policy that results in mandatory expulsion of any student who commits one or more specified offenses (for example, offenses involving guns, or other weapons, or violence, or similar factors, or combinations of these factors). A policy is considered “zero tolerance” even if there are some exceptions to the mandatory aspect of the expulsion, such as allowing the chief administering officer of an LEA to modify the expulsion on a case-by-case basis.(OCR)

<b>Table 5: Analysis of Dispositions Among a Sample of 32 School Districts In Comparison to the 92 Districts Reporting</b>					
<b>District</b>	<b>Out of School Suspensions</b>	<b>In School Suspensions</b>	<b>Corporal Punishment</b>	<b>Warnings Administrative Discipline</b>	<b>Alternate School</b>
<b>Ratio of the 92 School Districts Reporting</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>2%</b>
Biloxi PSD	17%	<b>48%</b>	5%	<b>32%</b>	<2%
Coahoma PSD N=2105	41%	33%	4%	11%	<1%
Canton PSD	<b>59%</b>	1%	5%	<b>32%</b>	3%
Claiborne PSD	<b>86%</b>	4%	1%	0%	7%
Clarksdale PSD N=683	<b>77%</b>	16%	5%	2%	NR
East Tallahatchie PSD N=10,799	28%	36%	<b>30%</b>	6%	1%
Forrest PSD N=23,476	31%	31%	<b>41%</b>	4%	<1%
George PSD N=4,287	<b>74%</b>	1%	2%	12%	12%
Grenada County PSD N=12,495	10%	31%	4%	<b>44%</b>	9%
Harrison PSD N= 17,901 <sup>15</sup>	49%	14%	19%	8%	5%
*Hazelhurst PSD N=14,752	<b>61%</b>	19%	17%	<1%	<1%
Hollandale PSD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
*Indianola PSD N=1342	30%	14%	15%	<b>35%</b>	<1%
*Jackson PSD <sup>16</sup> N=27,776	<b>89%</b>	6%	NR	NR	1%
Lamar PSD N=2878	<b>81%</b>	<1%	4%	NR	7%
LeFlore PSD <sup>17</sup> N=3625	<b>74%</b>	0%	0%	0%	5%
Leland PSD N=2,281	19%	31%	0%	<b>50%</b>	0%

<sup>15</sup> Harrison Public School District expelled 7% of the students involved in the schools disciplinary system (incidents and dispositions) for the period examined. Less than 1% of the dispositions resulted in jail time during the same period of time.

<sup>16</sup> Note: While 10% of the incidents were major offenses involving illegal activities, expulsion and incarceration accounted for 4% of the dispositions.

<sup>17</sup> LeFlore Public School District dispositions also included instances of Police calls (2%), youth court (1%), and Expulsions (1%).

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<b>Ratio of the 92 School Districts Reporting</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>2%</b>
Lincoln Co. PSD N=1892	31%	25%	44%	0%	0%
Madison County PSD	63%	18%	3%	10%	0%
*Moss Point PSD	50%	49%	0%	1%	0%
Neshoba County PSD N=9583	37%	15%	8%	40%	0%
Newton Municipal PSD N=1512	20%	53%	23%	1%	<1%
North Panola PSD N=4256	84%	13%	0%	0%	3%
Ocean Springs PSD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
Pearl PSD <sup>18</sup> N=108	6%	0%	0%	0%	75%
Simpson PSD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
West Bolivar PSD N=553	99%	0%	<1%	0%	0%
*Yazoo City PSD N=16,503	50%	27%	18%	<1%	3%
Yazoo County PSD <sup>19</sup>	0%	0%	0%	0%	96%

Blacks students were cited for seventy-two percent (72%) of all incidents (See Table 1) and seventy-one percent (71%) of all dispositions. White students comprised twenty-five percent (25%) of all dispositions, and Hispanics three percent (3%). Note that Hispanics make up 2.1% of the student population, 1% of the incident citations, but received 3% of the dispositions. As in the case of incidents, males were involved 2:1 over females in dispositions.

Twelve school districts exceeded the state normative rate (41%) for **Out of School Suspensions** by more than 10 percentile points (Aberdeen, Canton, Claiborne, Clarksdale, George, Hazelhurst, Jackson, Lamar, LeFlore, Madison, North Panola and

<sup>18</sup> Pearl PSD experienced a 18% expulsion rate which exceeds the normative state rate of

<sup>19</sup> Three of the 79 dispositions were expulsion and for this small population, this number represented 4% of the dispositions administered by this district.

West Bolivar). The **top five school districts** using suspensions as a disciplinary action in Mississippi include:

- West Bolivar – 99%
- Jackson – 89%
- Claiborne – 86%
- North Panola – 85%
- Lamar – 81%

Biloxi, Moss Point and Newton Municipal PSDs exceeded the state normative rate for **In-School Suspension** by more than 10 percentile points. Five school districts exceeded the state normative rate for **Corporal Punishment** (6%): Benton, East Tallahatchie, Forrest, Lincoln, and Newton Municipal PSDs; Benton has the highest **Corporal Punishment** rate at 50%.

School districts that exceeded the state normative rate of 6% for **Administrative Warnings, Conferences, and Administrative Discipline** provided an insight into the power of conflict resolution and peer mediation. These districts may provide insight to the entire state on the value of talking, consulting and negotiating as a means of effective discipline. Those counties include: Biloxi, Canton, Grenada, Indianola, Leland and Neshoba; Leland is the leader in this area of discipline

In categories other Administrative Warnings, Conferences, and Administrative Discipline, Newton Municipal PSD is the only school district that exceeded the state normative rates in 2 or more categories (In-School Suspension and Corporal Punishment).

Expulsions was not overly utilized as a disciplinary tool. However, in some school districts expulsion rates were high comparatively. For example, Pearl PSD experienced an 18% expulsion rate for the period of time examined. As while expulsions were not high, this research suggests a positive correlation with high rates of individual suspensions to school dropout - and in effect self-expulsion.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the majority population of Mississippi is white. More black children (53%) are in public schools than white children (45%) or any other ethnic group. Disproportionately, black students were cited for more incidents (71%) and received suspensions and other dispositions at an accelerated rate (72%) when compared to whites (3:1).

Noncriminal Behavior (40%), Prohibited Behavior (10%), Disorderly conduct (7%), and Fighting (6%) were the majority of the incidents committed. Yet, the data suggests that there is a wide variance in the way that incidents are interpreted and categorized. Standardization, training and development in disciplinary policies, procedures, guidelines, and definitions in this area may be the remedy. Major offenses, though minor when compared to other incidents can be significant and disruptive in school settings.

Moreover, schools need help in categorizing the incidents more concretely for better discipline accountability. Unspecified incidents, although non-descript, accounted for 28% of all incidents. This is an extremely high percentile of “unknown” incidents.

Administrative Warnings, Conferences, and Administrative Discipline are not used widely enough nor effectively enough to modify behavior and contribute to an environment conducive for learning. Alternative schools (2%) are used less as a means of progressive discipline. Out of School Suspensions (41%) and In-School Suspensions (28%) drive the school district discipline system; thus the schoolhouse to jailhouse pipeline is primed with 69% of dispositions that may drive students to low attendance rate and low academic achievement which may lead to school drop-out and mass incarceration.

For Alternative schools to be effective, more emphasis on behavior modification is needed to prevent the schools from being like and functioning like pseudo-prisons. Peer mediation, conflict resolution, and youth courts may effectively stem the tide of mass suspensions.

Consistent with the CRDC findings, the state of Mississippi public school system disproportionately cites black students for noncriminal and prohibited behavior, and disorderly conduct and sets them on a pathway toward a build-up of suspensions over the course of 12 school years – which could promote a dislike for school and eventual dropping out of school. According to the Mississippi code, an audit of a schools disciplinary program should take place every other year and ideally every year. To determine how frequent audits have taken place, additional research is needed.



School districts demonstrated various levels of proficiency in interpreting and reporting the Mississippi Students Information System (MSIS) and (Student Administration Management) SAM data, and the policies by which they should be practiced. Home Rule allows each district to manage in a way that is localized. This contributes to inconsistent application of discipline across the state. There is a lack of standard codification for translating incidents and recording them into appropriate categories. This lack of proficiency at the district level is apparent as evidenced by the variance of the data received. Harsh punishments are being assigned to noncriminal and prohibitive behavior at a high rate. Proportionately, black students are involved in more incidents and receive more "suspension oriented" dispositions than any other ethnic group.

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## APPENDIX TABLES

Aberdeen Public School District (Data)	Adams County School District (Data)	Alcorn County School District (Data)	Amite County School District (Data)
Amory Public School District (Data)	Baldwyn Public School District (Data)	Benton County Public School District (Data)	Biloxi Public School District (Raw Aggregated Data)
Booneville Public School District (Data)	Canton Public School District (Data)	Carroll County School District (Data)	Chickasaw County School District (Data)
Choctaw County School District (Data)	Claiborne County School District (Data)	Clarksdale Public School District (Data)	Cleveland Public School District (Data)
Coahoma County School District (Data)	Coffeetown Public School District (Data)	East Tallahatchie Public School District (Data)	Forrest County Public School District (Data)
George County Public School District (Data)	Grenada County Public School District (Data)	Harrison County Public School District (Data)	Hazelhurst Public School District (Data)
Hollandale Public School District (Data)	Indianola Public School District (Raw Administrative Data)	Jackson Public School District (Data)	Lamar County School District (Data)
Laurel Public School district (Data)	Lawrence County Public School District (Data)	Leflore County Public School District (Data)	Leland Public School District (Data)
Lincoln County Public School District (Data)	Long Beach Public School District (Data)	Lumberton Public School District (Data)	McComb Public School District (Data)
Monroe County School District (Data)	Montgomery County School District (Data)	Moss Point Public School District (Data)	Mound Bayou Public School District (Data)
Natchez-Adams Public School District (Data)	Neshoba County Public School District (Data)	Nettleton Public School District (Data)	Newton County Public School (Data)
Newton Municipal Public School District (Data)	North Panola County Public School District (Data)	North Pike County Public School District (Data)	North Tippah County Public School District (Data)
Ocean Springs Public School	OkTibbeha Public School District	Oxford Public School District	Pascagoula Public School District

<sup>21</sup> Districts that sent letters indicated that they needed a payment to pay for labor and expense of retrieving data or their Attorney sent a letter explaining why, in their view, they could not send the data.

<b>Table 6: Response by School District<sup>21</sup></b>			
District (Data)	(Data)	(Data)	(Data)
Pass Christian Public School District (Data)	Pearl County School District (Data)	Pearl River Public School District (Data)	Perry County School District (Data)
Petal Public School District (Data)	Picayune Public School District (Data)	Pontotoc School District (Data)	Poplarville Public School District (Data)
Prentiss County School District (Data)	Richton Public School District (Data)	Shaw Public School District (Tabled Data)	Simpson County Public School District (Tabled Data)
South Pike Public School District (Data)	Starkville Public School District (Data)	Stone County Public School District (Data)	Tishomingo County Public School District (Data)
Tunica County Public School District (Data)	Tupelo County Public School District (Data)	Union County Public School District (Data)	Walthall County Public School District (Data)
Wayne County Public School District (Data)	Water Valley Public School District (Data)	West Bolivar Public School District (Data)	West Point Public School District (Data)
Winona School District (Data)	Yazoo City Public School District (Data)	Yazoo County Public School District (Data)	Madison Public School District (Data)
Senatobia Public School District (MSIS/SAM Data)	South Tippah County Public School District (MSIS Data)	Tate County Public School District (Tabled Data)	West Tallahatchie Public School District (Tabled Data)
Clinton Public School District (MSIS Aggregated Data)	West Bolivar County Public School District (Data)	Columbia Public School District (Data)	Franklin County Public School District (Data)
South Tippah County School District (Data)	Pontotoc City School District (Data)		

Bay St. Louis Public School District (Excessive Fee Requested)	Brookhaven Public School District (No Data)	Columbus Public School District (Excessive Fee Requested)	Copiah County School District (Excessive Fee Requested)
Corinth Public School District (Denied Public Records Request)	Covington Public School District (Denied Public Records Request)	Desoto County Public School District (Excessive Fee Requested)	Greene County Public School District (Letter indicating they do not have records)
Gulfport Public School District (Letter Requesting Clarification)	Hattiesburg County Public School District (Letter Requesting Clarification)	Hancock County Public School District (Excessive Fee Requested)	Hinds County Public School District (Excessive Fee Requested)
Itawamba Public School District (Excessive Fee Requested)	Jefferson Davis County School District (Denial of Public Request)	Lafayette County Public School District (Pending Receipt of Data)	Leake County Public School (No Data)
Lee County School District (No Data)	Louisville Municipal School District (Excessive Fee Requested)	Lowndes County School District (No Data)	Mound Bayou Public School District (No Data)
Marshall County School District (Excessive Fee Requested)	Okolona School District (No Data)	Philadelphia Public School District (No Data)	Pontotoc City School District (Excessive Fee Requested)
Greenwood Public School District (Excessive Fee Requested)	Jackson County Public School District (Excessive Fee Requested)	Vicksburg-Warren Public School District (Excessive Fee Requested)	West Jasper Public School District (Excessive Fee Requested)

Table 8 below highlights the public school districts that did not respond in an y form to the public records request. Some of the school districts noted below are school districts in counties where CDF has a stakeholder interest.

**Table 8: Districts That Did Not Respond to Public Records Request**

Attala County Public School District	Benoit Public School District	Calhoun County School District	Clay County School District
Drew Public School District	Durant Public School District	East Jasper Public School District	Enterprise Public School District
Greenville Public School District	Holly Springs Public School District	Holmes County Public School District	Houston Separate Public School District
Humphreys Public School District	Jefferson County Public School District	Jones Public School District	Kemper Public School District
Kosciusko Public School District	Lauderdale Public School District	Meridian Public School District	New Albany Public School District
North Bolivar Public School District	Noxubee County Public School District	Quitman Public School District	Quitman County Public School District
Rankin County Public School District	Scott County Public School District	Smith County Public School District	South Delta Public School District
South Panola County Public School District	Union City Public School District	Webster Public School District	Western Line Public School District
Wilkinson County Public School District			