



A policy that mandates **structural limitations** on suspensions *reduced overall suspensions.*

However, the absence of **functional alternatives** *preserved racial suspension gaps.*



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## Structural limitations and functional alternatives reducing suspensions and preserving racial suspension gaps

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### Introduction

From 2009 to 2012, the *Chicago Public Schools* suspended ~30% of high school students, with **39% of Black males** receiving out-of-school suspension (David et al, 2015). However, such use of exclusionary discipline is not unique to Chicago.



#### Exclusionary discipline (OSS, ISS, expulsion)

out-of-school & in-school suspension, and expulsion's consequences:

- failed to decrease school violence (DeVoe Jill et al., 2004)
- increased suspensions and expulsions (Skiba et al., 2009)
- negative student outcomes like **dropping out** (Lee et al., 2011)
- collateral consequences for those not suspended (Perry & Morris, 2014)



#### Racial suspension gaps' explanation

- Black students' disciplinary violations (Petras et al., 2011)
- Teacher bias: objective vs. subjective offenses (Skiba et al., 2002)
- Segregation in urban schools (Roch & Edwards, 2017)
- Contemporary form of racism (Gillborn, 2008)

**Table 4.** Racial suspension gaps between majority black schools and counterfactual schools, 2013 and 2015.

Variable	2013			2015			Difference
	Majority Black (1)	Counter (2)	Racial gap (3)	Majority Black (4)	Counter (5)	Racial gap (6)	2013 – 2015 (7)
<i>Mean OSS rates</i>							
Counterfactual group:							
Other schools (n = 49)	37.19 (3.19)	14.81 (1.51)	22.37** (2.96)	24.25 (2.73)	8.16 (1.13)	16.09** (2.96)	-6.28* (4.19)
Majority mixed (n = 17)		7.82 (1.39)	29.37** (4.35)		3.05 (0.66)	21.20** (4.35)	-8.17* (6.15)
Majority Hispanic (n = 24)		17.48 (2.08)	19.71** (3.95)		11.53 (1.89)	12.71** (3.95)	-6.98* (5.59)
Majority Black and Hispanic (n = 8)		21.68 (4.42)	15.51** (6.46)		8.90 (1.80)	15.35** (6.46)	-0.16* (9.13)
<i>Mean ISS rates</i>							
Counterfactual group:							
Other schools (n = 49)	29.57 (4.60)	9.22 (1.86)	20.34** (4.50)	31.03 (4.86)	9.52 (1.65)	21.50** (4.50)	1.15 (6.36)
Majority mixed (n = 17)		2.94 (1.21)	26.64** (6.86)		2.47 (0.81)	28.56** (6.86)	1.92 (9.71)
Majority Hispanic (n = 24)		10.16 (2.46)	19.41** (6.12)		13.42 (2.76)	17.61** (6.12)	-1.81* (8.66)
Majority Black and Hispanic (n = 8)		19.79 (7.12)	9.78 (10.32)		12.85 (3.61)	18.18* (10.32)	8.39 (14.59)

Columns 1 and 2 show the mean school suspension rates in 2013 for a category of schools (majority Black, mixed, etc.). Column 3 shows the disparity between majority Black schools and the counterfactual school. Columns 4, 5, and 6 are similar to Columns 1, 2, and 3, with just a different year (2015). In both 2013 and 2015, the racial disparities are statistically significant. Column 7 shows the difference between 2013 and 2015, with reductions in OSS but increases in ISS. Standard errors are written in parentheses. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

### Results

Significant decrease in overall OSS rates by 2015, not as significant for ISS rates.

Racial suspension gaps persevered despite the policy.

In-school suspensions also persevered with no clear alternatives to suspensions.

### Discussion

- **Structural limitations:** institutional mechanisms that raise awareness on issue, specify restrictions, and design accountability systems
- **Functional alternatives:** processes that substitute for previous procedures that had practical purposes
- Policy did not fully work because of race-neutrality/ color-blindness.
- OSS may morph into ISS use, if alternatives are not present.

### Methods

Dependent variable: OSS and ISS rates per school

Independent variables: majority Black schools vs. counterfactual schools

Modified difference-in-differences

$$Y_{srt} = \alpha + \theta \text{Black}_r + \lambda d_t + \pi (\text{Black}_r \cdot d_t) + \epsilon_{srt}$$

where  $Y_{srt}$  is the suspension rate at school  $s$  with racial category  $r$  in time  $t$ ,  $\text{Black}_r$  is a dichotomous variable for majority Black schools, and  $d_t$  is a time dummy that switches on for observations in 2015 (i.e. after SERP).  $\text{Black}_r \cdot d_t$  is the interaction between majority Black school and time after policy change. The  $\theta$  coefficient provides the racial suspension gap before the intervention (2013),  $\lambda$  provides the racial suspension gap after the intervention (2015), and  $\pi$  provides the difference between the two racial gaps (2013-2015), all of which can be tested if statistically significant.