Reducing racial disproportionality in discipline using the Disproportionality in Discipline Assessment for Schools (DDAS)

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Samantha Bindman

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“This past spring, the archivist for Seattle Public Schools unearthed a yellowed slip of paper that C.S. Barbo, former principal of Meany Junior High, had tucked into a time capsule in 1963.

In three brief paragraphs, Barbo lamented what he called the “cultural, racial and economic disadvantages” that he believed slowed the learning of some of his students.

“If this box is ever opened,” his letter reads, “I would assume the problems we face today in understanding the racial differences will have been resolved. Personally, I trust this will happen.””

--Morton, N., The Seattle Times, Jan. 12, 2018
What is racial disproportionality in discipline?

Racial group 1
Racial group 2

“Disciplined”

20 students
5 disciplined
(20/5)*100 = 25%

20 students
7 disciplined
(20/7)*100 = 35%
Is this disproportional?

Racial group 1

Racial group 2

“Disciplined”

20 students
5 disciplined
(20/5)*100 = 25%

15 students
5 disciplined
(15/5)*100 = 33%
Is this disproportional?

“Disciplined”

Racial group 1

Racial group 2

Racial group 3

Racial group 4

25%

25%

25%

50%--but caution!
Figure 2. Suspension Rates over Time by Race/Ethnicity, K-12°

Data Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights
The challenge

Most teachers, school leadership, and administrators feel deeply concerned about disproportionality

BUT

Few feel like they know what to do about it
Disclaimer

- Race is a social construction
- Race does not equal culture or socioeconomic status
- While race is strongly associated with life experiences, no group is monolithic
- Researchers often study disproportionality using race in a comparative framework—e.g. comparing all other races against white
  - We acknowledge this is problematic, as it reifies white hegemony
Key strengths of DDAS theory of change

- **Intentional & Logical**—no random acts of intervention! Activities are designed to be:
  - Based on *need* as well as *feasibility*
  - *Feasible*—implementable, minimizes resistance and maximizes staff buy-in, focuses on bite-sized chunks
  - Logically *connected* to desired outcomes
- **Evidence-based/evidence-informed**
- **Multicomponent**—no quick solutions, easy answers, or “silver bullets”
DDAS Theory of Change

School-Wide Assessment
- Countering Implicit Bias & Structural Racism
- Discipline Policy
- Reactive Behavior Management
- Proactive Behavior Management

Understanding of School Strengths & Needs
- Culturally-Responsive Pedagogy
- Screening & Selective Supports
- Data-Based Decision Making

Intentional Prioritization & Decision Making

Alignment of Intervention Strategy with School Needs

Effective Implementation of Intervention Strategy

Lower Rates of Racial & Ethnic Disproportionality

Quality of Teaming Processes (Aim 2)
- Experiences addressing behavior, discipline, and REDD
- Understanding and recognition of bias and structural racism
- Leadership support
- Diversity of roles & perspectives
- Group process (e.g., collaboration, communication, well-defined roles)
DDAS Components

Program Assessment

Reflection & Prioritization

Assessment to- Action Menu
DDAS Program Review Self-assessment

School teams (Racial Equity Teams, PBIS teams, School Leadership teams) rate themselves on several items within each of the 8 factors on a three point scale—1 = Not in place, 2 = Needs Improvement, 3 = In place

Items were generated by our team and drawn from schoolwide assessment measures such as the SWPBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory

Teams develop consensus scores, a process of discussion and debate among team members
Racial Bias and Structural Racism

Explicit and implicit racial bias are associations that one makes between certain racial groups and personal characteristics that are primed by pervasive and systemic stereotypes encountered in society. Racial bias impacts educators; interpretation of and reaction to student behavior, ability to build strong relationships, expectations for students’ academic success and socio-emotional competencies, and responsiveness in instruction and classroom management. These biases have been associated with student outcomes, including academic achievement and discipline.

Example items:
- New domain – no current items.

Citations: Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2017; Gilliam et al., 2016; Girvan et al., 2017; Halberstadt et al., 2018; Kumar et al., 2015; Papageorge et al., 2018; Peterson et al., 2016; van den Bergh et al., 2010
Screening & Selective Supports

Teacher referral is the most common procedure for disciplinary action or recommendation for supports, but is vulnerable to subjective bias. Often, students of color are referred to punitive discipline while their white counterparts are referred to counselors and other supportive services at disproportionate rates. Consistent, race-neutral methods to identify students who are struggling with behavioral and emotional problems and refer them to supportive services.

Example items:
- The school screens or assesses social, behavioral, emotional, and academic needs of students using culturally relevant screens.

Effective discipline policy considers the situation and the function or reason underlying a student’s behavior in order to develop an effective response. Zero-tolerance discipline policy and punitive procedures are often associated with racial and ethnic disproportionality.

**Example items:**

- Discipline procedures focus on alternatives to exclusion and emphasize teaching prosocial skills

Citations: APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Cornell & Sheras, 2006; Cornell, Maeng, Huang, Shukla, & Konold, 2018; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Fenning et al., 2008; Gregory, 2018; Hoffmann, 2014; Karp & Breslin, 2001; Olweus & Limber, 1999; Skiba & Peterson, 1999;
Proactive Behavior Management

Proactive behavior management involves setting clear expectations and recognition systems so that students know what behavior is considered acceptable. It also involve designing engaging classroom structures that focus students on learning. Many or most teachers have not received substantive training in evidence-based practices for proactively managing student behavior and, thus, are vulnerable to using reactive practices.

Example items:
- Students’ cultures are considered when designing behavioral expectations and recognition systems

Citations: Bal, 2016; Bal, Kozleski, Schrader, Rodriguez, & Pelton, 2014; Bal, Schrader, Afacan, & Mawene, 2016; Bradshaw et al., 2018; Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Cook et al., 2018; Larson, Pas, Bradshaw, Rosenberg, & Day-Vines, 2018; Swain-Bradway et al., 2014
Reactive Behavior Management

Racial disparities are also perpetrated in the moment when an individual educator decides a) that a behavior requires disciplining and b) which disciplinary action should be implemented as a response to the incident. Extant research has demonstrated that Black and Latinx youth receive more exclusionary discipline consequences for mild and moderate offences, and that race remains a significant predictor of the severity of a disciplinary action regardless of the severity of the misbehavior.

Example items:
- School staff try to understand the root cause of a behavior and provide skills instruction, rather than relying solely on punishment.

Data-based Decision Making

Data about disciplinary actions are often collected in multiple ways, but may not always be used to inform decision making to reduce disproportionality. By disaggregating disciplinary data, schools can identify the places (e.g. cafeteria, classrooms), people, and events that are most contributing to disproportionality.

**Example items:**
- Discipline data reports are disaggregated by race

Citations: Blake, Gregory, James, & Hasan, 2016; Boneshefski & Runge, 2014; Gilbert, 2013; Gregory, Skiba, & Mediratta, 2017; McIntosh, Ellwood, McCall, & Girvan, 2018; McIntosh, Girvan, Horner, & Smolkowski, 2014; McIntosh, Mercer, Hume, & Frank, 2013; Nakasato, 2000; Osher et al., 2015; Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2014; Scott, Hirn, & Barber, 2012; Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2005; Washington State, 2015
Teacher-Student-Family Relationships

Relationships are at the heart of any learning environment, and the quality of relationships between teachers, students, and parents impacts how teachers respond to problem behaviors, how students behave in school. Similarly, the response that teachers have to problem behaviors impacts their relationships with students and parents. Although most teachers endorse the importance of positive educator-student relationships, many are unlikely to espouse an intentional approach to cultivating relationships.

Example items:

- School staff can clearly describe the specific strategies they use to build relationships with students and families.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally-responsive pedagogy aims to minimize misalignment between students’ home and school cultural by incorporating students’ identities and backgrounds into the learning experience. Through the use of classroom materials, lesson topics, and instructional practices that reflect students’ cultural backgrounds and frames of reference, learning is made more relevant and effective.

Example items:
- New domain – no current items.

Identify school strengths and needs for addressing disproportionality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical components</th>
<th>Benchmarks of Quality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RET team</td>
<td>- There is a team focusing on ensuring racial equity in the school</td>
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<td>- The team has support from school administration</td>
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<td>- The team meets regularly (at least monthly)</td>
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<td>- The team has established a clear mission/purpose and sticks to it.</td>
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<td>- Students from diverse backgrounds are engaged with the RET team in authentic ways</td>
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<td>- Families from diverse backgrounds are engaged in the RET team in authentic ways</td>
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<td>- The team has identified the schools’ strengths and needs related to racial equity</td>
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<td>- The team designs and implements clear action steps to promote equity, based on the schools’ strengths and needs</td>
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<td>Discipline policy and interpretation</td>
<td>School policies, goals, and mission statements focus explicitly on enhancing equity</td>
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<td>- School policies are reviewed to ensure equity</td>
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<td>- Teachers and staff have clear, consistent understanding of discipline policy and practice</td>
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<td>- Discipline policies reflect and respect the cultural values of the community</td>
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<td>- Discipline policies have a clear purpose linked to educational outcomes</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check one</th>
<th>In place</th>
<th>Needs improvement</th>
<th>Not in place</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
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Reflection

In small groups, discuss:

○ How appropriate, feasible, and effective would the program assessment be for your school/district organization to conduct?

○ Which of the 8 domains resonate most with you regarding having an impact on disproportionality within your context
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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Greatest Strength</th>
<th>Greatest Need</th>
<th>Most Practical</th>
<th>Most motivating</th>
<th>Most closely tied to goals</th>
<th>Already being addressed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline policy</td>
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<td>Screening &amp; selective supports</td>
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<td>Proactive Behavior Management</td>
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<td>Clean &amp; useful data</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher- student-family relationships</td>
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Overall Goal: Significantly decrease disproportionality in discipline at the school and foster stronger teacher-student relationship for an equitable, safe and enjoyable learning environment for the entire school community using a race and equity lens through cultural responsiveness and evidence-based practices.

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<th>No.</th>
<th>MENDR Factors</th>
<th>Action steps</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>S.M.A.R.T GOALS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teacher-student-family relationships</td>
<td>Training on the Establish-Maintain-Restore Method to improve relationships. Schools create purposeful, culturally responsive and diverse family engagement and outreach. Teachers intentionally establish relationships through “child time”, acknowledgement, validation, and learning about child. Teacher greets children individually every day. After negative interaction, teacher intentionally reconnects with the student. Teacher and school staff intentionally connects to families, provides all families with positive information about each child. Teacher and school staff works to move beyond cultural barriers and reach out to families of different races and ethnicities.</td>
<td>Teachers are less likely to use punitive discipline with youth they understand and have a positive relationship. Teachers who know students well have a better understanding of what types of behavior management works best for the student. Students who have a relationship with teachers feel connected, safe, and respected. This makes students more likely to learn, engage in desired behaviors, and respond to attempts to control behavior. Cross-cultural relationships are more difficult to form due to less shared understanding, implicit bias, and different interpretations of the meaning of behavior, and must therefore receive additional emphasis.</td>
<td>Improve relations with teachers. Improved behavior and time on task. Improved positive attitudes. Strong school climate scores. Students of color report relationships with educators that are as strong as white and Asian students.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>School and district discipline policy, and interpretation of policy by teachers, students, and families</td>
<td>Development of screening and selective interventions in collaboration with MTSS/PBIS. Identification and implementation of evidence-based Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Ensure that students of color have equal access to and engagement with interventions.</td>
<td>Some students have more intensive behavioral health needs and these may require more intensive supports. Often, youth are selected for behavioral health supports in culturally biased ways and often based on the interpretation of teachers, with African American students more likely to be punitively disciplined for behavior and white students more likely to be referred to Tier 2/3 interventions. Universal, culturally-appropriate, and evidence-based screening efforts can be a fairer way to identify students in need and connect them with appropriate supports. Once referred, schools may need to engage in extra efforts to build trust, reassure students and parents about the purpose of the supports, and provide resources to eliminate barriers to engaging in and continuing with the supports. Supports should be culturally appropriate, warm, and engaging for all youth, and extra efforts should be made to engage students and families of color.</td>
<td>Improve and increase screening and selective to support students’ needs. Students of color engage in and are retained in services at rates equal to white and Asian students.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Universal screening and effective supports for students in need</td>
<td>GREET-STOP-PROMPT and other trainings on Proactive Classroom Management and effective reactive discipline strategies. Teachers maintain relationships and reinforce positive behavior through 5:1 ratio of positive to negative interactions. Reward and recognition systems incorporate student's culture. Additional positive reinforcement strategies used at the beginning of school year and with students whose behavioral expectations differ between the school and home.</td>
<td>Prevention problems from happening in the first place is the most effective way to reduce discipline problems, but one of the most common areas of teacher complaint is that they have not received sufficient training on proactive behavior management. Students are less likely to misbehave if they understand expectations, are rewarded for good behavior, and feel a close bond with the teacher, classroom, and school. Teachers are less likely to use punitive discipline if they feel effective and in control of their classroom, if they understand their own implicit biases and how to mindfully interrupt those biases, and if they understand the source of student misbehavior.</td>
<td>Increased use of screening and selective interventions</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Effective proactive behavior management and classroom leadership</td>
<td>MENDR has a menu!</td>
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**MENDR has a menu!**
MENDR Assessment-to-Action Menu

1. Rationale
2. Strategies
3. Resources
4. Proximal Outcomes
Next Steps!

● Measurement grant proposal submitted to the Institute of Education Sciences in August 2019
● Build consensus on measure items, pilot and conduct psychometric testing, build a user interface to improve the utility of measure results
● Should funding occur, we will be seeking research partners:
  ○ Experts (teachers, practitioners, researchers, administrators, or others) in disproportionality and/or discipline
    ■ Expert advisory focus groups
  ○ Schools to help pilot the measure and the beta online feedback system