

High incidence and racially disparate use of discipline in Louisiana public schools associated with regional estimates of implicit bias

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Background

- Louisiana rates of suspension and expulsion are among the highest in the nation
- Despite accounting for 44% of school enrollment, Black students account for:
 - 72% of expulsions
 - 66% of suspensions
- No evidence of disproportionate rates of misbehavior among Black students
- Unconscious bias may affect school discipline decisions

Methods

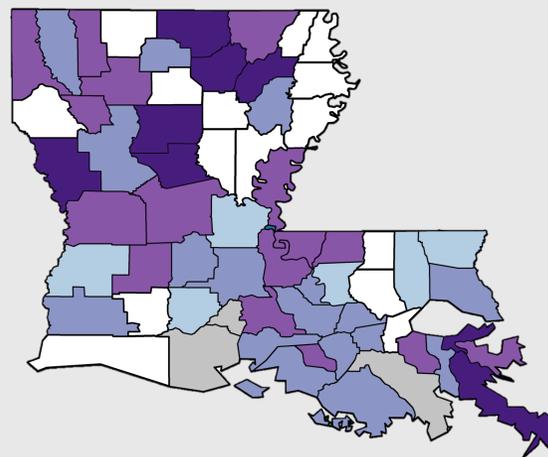
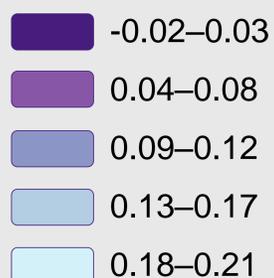
- Examined data from all parishes (N=64) during 2015–19 school years
- Using *Louisiana Department of Education* data, assessed disparities in proportion of Black students suspended or expelled relative to White peers
- Implicit bias derived from respondent scores on *Implicit Association Test*
 - Nationally-standardized test that measures unconscious bias
 - **Positive scores** demonstrate a **pro-White/anti-Black bias**; negative scores reflect the opposite
 - Test date used to stratify results by school year, with August 1, 201X–July 31, 201X+1 constituting one year
- Multilevel regression modeling identified parish-level differences in rates of discipline as associated with implicit bias

Findings

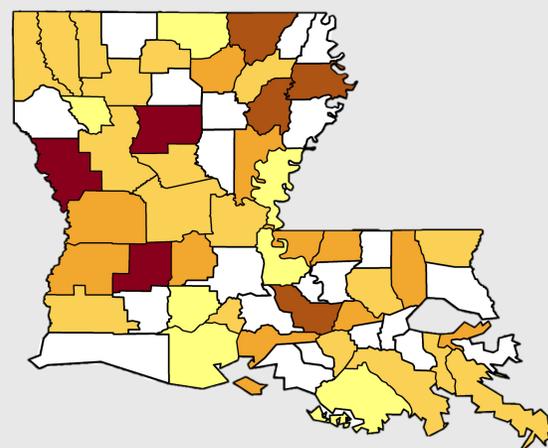
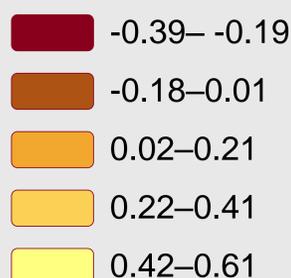
- Implicit bias scores (n=10,652) ranged from -1.588 to 1.712
- Most scores (7,567) were positive, demonstrating a **greater proportion of pro-White/anti-Black implicit bias in Louisiana**
- Relative to White students, models showed *significant positive association* ($p < 0.0001$) between implicit bias scores with the disparity in proportion of *in-school suspension* rates for Black students

Implicit bias is significantly associated with racial disparities in the use of in-school suspension

In-School Suspension Score Difference



Average Implicit Bias Scores



Note: **Map 1** shows difference in proportion of in-school suspension rates experienced by Black vs. White students; lighter colors reflect greater difference. **Map 2** shows average implicit bias scores of all respondents; lighter colors reflect stronger pro-White/anti-Black bias.

Final Model

	β	P
Intercept	0.085	0.004
Race		<.0001
Asian	-0.015	
Black	-0.006	
Other	-0.010	
Age	-0.0002	<.0001
IAT Score	0.009	<.0001

Discussion

- Findings suggest a **permeation of racism into the Louisiana public school system** when administering consequences for behaviors that do not meet criteria for out-of-school suspension
- **School discipline is considered a public health crisis** because of its association with absenteeism, grade repetition or failure, dropout, and justice system contact

Conclusion

- **Education is a social determinant of health**, predictive of life expectancy, morbidity, health behavior, and economic stability
- Potential solutions include school **benchmarks** to track reduction in biased discipline, **engagement** of minorities to improve school cohesion, implicit bias training, multi-tiered behavioral interventions, and **restorative justice**