



The Intersections of Culturally Responsive Education and School Discipline

A Youth Participatory
Action Research Case Study
of Texas Public Schools



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Meet the Student Research Team

IDRA's four student researchers, Manav Lund, Kennedy Moore, Josué Peralta de Jesús, and Shreya Selvaraju, were members of IDRA's Youth Advisory Board in 2022. The Youth Advisory Board selected 10 high school students from across Texas who received training on research, advocacy and community engagement strategies to sharpen students' relationship-building, presentation and advocacy skills. Throughout 2022, this powerful group of students gave IDRA actionable recommendations to ensure our initiatives continue centering the expertise, needs and dreams of young people and their families.

At the time of their research, Manav Lund and Shreya Selvaraju attended Round Rock ISD, Kennedy Moore attended Leadership Prep School in Frisco ISD, and Josué Peralta de Jesús attended Harmony Public Schools in San Antonio. IDRA Senior Policy Researcher Dr. Joanna Sánchez and IDRA Research Analyst Christina Quintanilla-Muñoz served as research mentors for the students. Comments and questions about this project may be directed to Dr. Sánchez or Ms. Muñoz via email at joanna.sanchez@idra.org and christina.munoz@idra.org.



[top] Josué Peralta de Jesús, San Antonio; Kennedy Moore, Frisco.
[bottom] Manav Lund, Austin; Shreya Selvaraju, Austin

Watch the students' webinar discussing their study and findings at <https://idra.news/YPARteam>



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Culturally Responsive Education and School Discipline in Texas Schools: A Mixed-Methods Case Study

Youth Participatory Action Research Presentation



Abstract

During the 2022-23 school year, IDRA's Youth Advisory Board student research team led a project to examine the intersections of culturally responsive education and school discipline in Texas public schools. With youth participatory action research (YPAR) as the guiding framework, this study employed mixed-method research methodologies to assess student peers' perspectives through a survey and focus group interviews at high schools in central and north Texas.

The student researchers recruited 47 high school students from their respective high schools to take the online survey and 16 students to voluntarily participate in 60-minute virtual focus group interviews.

While the study did not establish a strong causal or correlational link between these aspects, it did uncover valuable insights. By leveraging these insights, educators and policymakers can work collectively to foster a more inclusive, equitable and supportive educational environment for all students.

The findings reflect themes of academic and social alienation, racial profiling, discriminatory disciplinary practices and other harmful experiences students had in their schools at the time of our study.

Overall, students reported concern for weak administrative attention to incidents of race- and identity-based discrimination. Students also reported the hostile sociopolitical landscape present in the Texas education system with the rise of classroom censorship and other restrictive policies contributing to these patterns.

Findings suggest that exposure to culturally diverse curricula in the classroom and teachers' efforts to create spaces for discourse on current social justice issues would lead to greater academic engagement and an overall sense of belonging in schools.

This study employed mixed-method research methodologies to assess student peers' perspectives through a survey and focus group interviews at high schools in central and north Texas.

Introduction

Sociologists have coined the term “school-to-prison-pipeline” to denote systemic inequity that pervades and links the arenas of public education and the prison-industrial complex, particularly within the socioeconomic landscape of the United States. As we embarked on this study, as students ourselves, we found it essential to look at the scholastic environment holistically, examining the interplays between what happens in the classroom with what happens in the hallways, in the passing periods, after school and outside of school.

We chose to respond to gaps in the literature related to awareness of issues involving social inequity and punitive discipline practices in schools to contribute to the development of solutions to systemic inequities.

We find administrative attention to the genuine repair of systemic discrimination lacking or, at times, artificial. Although curricula usually call for instructors to address topics such as slavery, civil rights movements, and immigration policy, we, as well as countless activists and academics, perceive these lessons to be one-dimensional, glossed over or lacking context.

Many school environments fail to establish meaningful connections between the historical oppression faced by marginalized groups and the lingering structural effects of inequity in today’s society. Whether this is deliberate or subconscious, it negatively impacts all students’ understanding of the critical histories of excluded communities from mainstream curricula. And the practice of simplifying, altering or omitting cultural and historical facts reduces their acknowledgment of diverse cultural perspectives.

If students of color and other underrepresented students perceive hostility or a lack of belonging in their school environment, it is logical to conclude that their holistic scholastic environment, of which their academics are a subset, would reflect similar strains of hostility.

The question then is: To what extent does the mending of such hostility in the school environment positively impact the mending of systemic inequities faced by these students, by school leaders and, possibly, the criminal justice system?

Another factor to consider is the recent, politically driven resistance to inclusive and culturally responsive education. Classroom censorship, particularly in the form of book bans, has become a staple of mainstream political factions, particularly in order to attack anti-racist and LGBTQ+ inclusive curricula. Allegations of curricula becoming too “divisive” or “political” can transform educational institutions into a minefield of sorts, to the detriment of students, as administrations often prioritize avoiding political and financial backlash over cultivating equity. This unfortunate and increasingly common situation has the potential to intensify institutional systems of oppression within schools by adding pressure to already hostile school environments.

Allegations of curricula becoming too “divisive” or “political” can transform educational institutions into a minefield of sorts, to the detriment of students, as administrations often prioritize avoiding political and financial backlash over cultivating equity.

Culturally responsive education (sometimes referred to as culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and culturally sustaining teaching) encompasses the incorporation of pedagogy and practice in education that heightens students' sense of cultural belonging, knowledge of diverse cultural perspectives, and deepened awareness of social justice in students (Caldera & Rodríguez, 2021).

Previous studies have suggested that culturally responsive education is a beneficial factor in improving academic performance in K-12 students and, by extension, educational attainment and academic engagement. For example, anti-racist curricula administered within a San Francisco school district were associated with increased graduation rates, overall attendance and postsecondary education attainment (Bonilla, 2020).

At a school district in Tucson, Arizona, the incorporation of ethnic studies courses at campuses was linked to the increased likelihood of student achievement on state standardized exams and increased graduation rates among high school students in the district (Cabrera, et al., 2012).

Even with such previous investigation on the effects of culturally responsive education on the academic environment, there are gaps in the research literature on the impact of these curricular elements on various aspects of the social scholastic environment, including punitive discipline practices, harassment, racial and ethnic profiling, and other products of systemic inequity.

Systemic inequity resulting in discriminatory discipline practices at schools, in and of itself, is a topic of high and keen interest in literature. Research has demonstrated links between academic disengagement, attrition, excessive discipline, suspensions and expulsions of at-risk, underrepresented populations in schools with notable trends of exceedingly high incarceration rates within those same populations (Barnes & Motz, 2018).

This project's research question was: What role do culturally responsive pedagogy and curricula play in reducing punitive discipline practices at the school campus level?

To address this question, our team conducted a small-scale, mixed-methods study through a survey and focus group interviews, exploring our peers' perspectives on school safety and climate, culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy, and schools' discipline practices. Our findings are aimed at advocates and adults to inform education policies developed at the school, district and state levels.

Context:

IDRA's Youth Engagement Initiatives

The youth participatory action research framework provided the ideal structure for this project because it has proven successful in past experiences and activities. Literature and research exist but what has been most generative for IDRA has been our long experiences with creating projects that highlight and support the inherent intelligence, motivation, and drive in students to take on interesting and projects that make clear relevant educational and social challenges.

IDRA supports student leadership in education with a variety of projects. Student-led projects help challenge adultist notions through actions that spotlight the intelligence, leadership, and maturity of students, from middle school through high school. In its rich, 51-year history, IDRA has focused on empowering students who are labeled at-risk of dropping out, considered not college material, and are economically disadvantaged, of color, emergent bilingual, or recent immigrants. Some examples of youth-centered programs and initiatives include the following.

ARISE Adelante environmental justice project in colonias (unincorporated communities) of south Texas – A team of students took on a study in some very poor neighborhoods, inquiring rigorously about the presence of open sewage sites by their homes. The team succeeded in making technical presentations to municipal and county officials that led to major grants acquired by those bodies to create healthier waste treatment plants.

IDRA Valued Youth Partnership – For 40 years, VYP has modeled the concept of truly valuing students as critical assets in schools by positioning students considered “at-risk” of dropping out as school tutors for elementary school peers.

IDRA VisionCoders – This eighth-grade computer science course invites middle school students considered “at-risk” to become coders and tech mentors to early childhood students. By creating and demonstrating digital games and facilitating the use of these resources, students learn about the power of near-peer mentorship.

IDRA Youth Advisory Board – Students selected to serve on the youth board provide IDRA actionable recommendations to ensure our work reflects the needs of youth, their peers and their families. These high school students expand their education policy knowledge and are equipped with critical research, policy and advocacy skills that help them to continue to activate meaningful change in their schools and communities.

MAS for Our Schools – Teams of high school students study the state of Mexican American Studies in their area schools. Our first student cohort investigated the status of MAS their school district, targeting teachers and students currently participating in MAS. Their report was released in March 2024.

Digital Ambassadors – Through our partnership with grassroots organizations, such as ARISE Adelante in south Texas, we have a two-decade history of collaborating in youth and intergenerational projects where youth initiatives and leadership continue to benefit their communities. IDRA is working with ARISE Adelante high school youth teams through our Digital Ambassadors program, a project designed to train youth activists as digital experts who can provide peer and family training to ultimately close the digital divide in Texas.

“Without student voices and student testimonies you lose pinnacle insight on ways to improve issues and miss the opportunity encourage students in taking authority and agency in their own communities.”

– Shreya Selvaraju

Importance of Student-Led Research and Advocacy

In 2022, IDRA established its inaugural Youth Advisory Board with 10 high school students from across Texas who shared key insights about equity in education and advocacy and extended actionable recommendations for ensuring youth are prioritized in IDRA's initiatives. The Youth Advisory Board provided a more focused way for IDRA to engage with youth to center their communities' expertise, needs and visions for equity in its work. Throughout our program, we received training on research, advocacy and community engagement strategies to sharpen our network-building, presentation and analytic skills to navigate the Texas education policy and advocacy landscape more confidently.

Our team's research project is grounded in YPAR as the guiding framework. YPAR is a youth-centric form of critical participatory action research that defines youth as assets and autonomous agents in the research process (Brion-Meisels & Alter, 2018). The YPAR framework is a transformative approach in which student researcher-activists resolve social problems that impact their communities by identifying and researching relevant issues (Schensul & Berg, 2004).

Therefore, our study was conducted through the YPAR framework to prioritize those most impacted and position them "to critique, redefine and overcome" inequities experienced in their schools (Caraballo, et al., 2017).

Our experiences on the Youth Advisory Board taught us the power of youth voices and our critical role in shaping education reform. Youth research is essential to elevating the voices of those enduring these systems affected by policies. Without using student voices, institutions, such as schools and government, lose pinnacle insight on ways to improve issues. They miss the opportunity to encourage students to take authority in their communities.

We believe that, as students, we have a personal stake to claim in ensuring that our own institutions are dedicated to achieving equity, combating prejudice and teaching the truth. We find it imperative to mobilize, as both researchers and activists, to bring awareness and a course for change regarding inequities in our systems of education. Our hope is that our research will provide us with an avenue to produce viable policy recommendations, both at the level of the legislature and individual school administrations.

IDRA research staff served as team advisors during this project and adapted lessons available at the University of California Berkeley's YPAR Hub, a comprehensive collection of curricula and resources, to guide and enrich student training. IDRA provided training on such topics as promoting positive youth development, navigating healthy professional youth-adult relationships, YPAR principles, the research process, and survey development. This training informed their development of the survey instrument that we piloted with peers.

We believe that, as students, we have a personal stake to claim in ensuring that our own institutions are dedicated to achieving equity, combating prejudice and teaching the truth.

"You are uncovering something that's previously been unexplored, and you are solving a problem. That's something that really got me into research."

– Manav Lund

Methodology

Data Collection

Our team used quantitative and qualitative research methods to gather our data. A mixed-methods approach helped us capture a more comprehensive perspective from respondents. We conducted our analysis by evaluating our peers' perspectives through a student experience survey and focus group interviews at the high schools we attend (n=3) in central and north Texas. Each researcher recruited peers from their respective city "hub" to serve as independent case studies that represent the perspectives of students from three major cities in Texas: Austin, Frisco and San Antonio.

To support recruitment, we connected with our school leadership and teachers, student peers, and grassroots organizations that specialize in youth engagement and are in coalition with IDRA. Our team recruited 47 students in grades 9-12 across our three locations to take the online survey.

After a two-month survey data collection period, each researcher aimed to recruit five student respondents to participate in a focus group interview from the pool of students at each school who took the online survey. Of the survey respondents, each researcher recruited three to five peers for a total of 16 students to participate in a voluntary, 60-minute focus group Zoom interview outside of regular school hours.

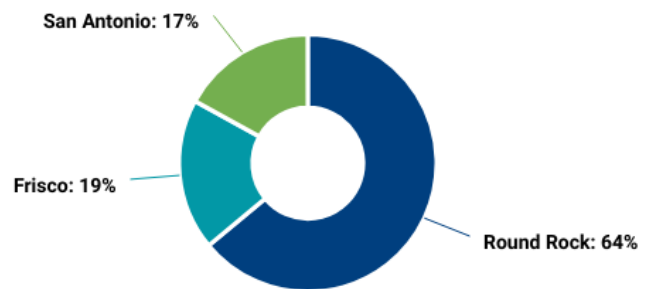
In total, we conducted three focus groups, one per campus. Each team member facilitated one hour-long focus group after school hours via Zoom. Our team developed a focus group facilitation guide that included questions about attitudes toward classroom instruction and materials, school climate and safety, and perspectives and experiences with school discipline. The objective of the questions was to stimulate conversation and enable participants to share anecdotal stories, opinions, and ways in which they see the change that can be made.

Student Experience Survey

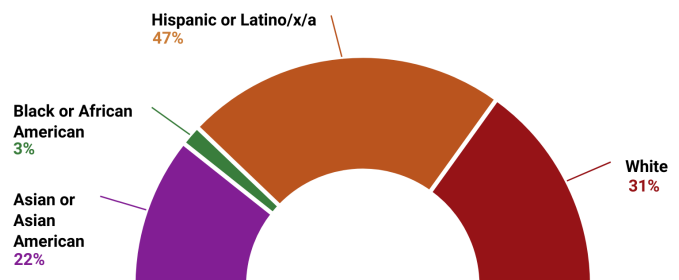
We designed our survey to evaluate peers' attitudes about their class curriculum and the overall climate at their schools surrounding school discipline and student safety.

Among all survey respondents, 20% attended school in Frisco ISD, 17% attended school in San Antonio ISD, and 64% attended school in Round Rock ISD. Almost half (47%) were Hispanic or Latino/x/a, 31% were white, 22% were Asian or Asian American, and 3% were Black.

Regions Represented by Survey Respondents



Race-Ethnicity of Survey Respondents



Focus Groups

In conjunction with a student experience survey, we conducted the qualitative analysis using three virtual focus group interviews with a sample of 16 peers from our high school campuses and school districts. Below, we highlight students' perspectives on culturally responsive teaching practices and the overall climate around school discipline at their schools.

Data Confidentiality

Conversations were recorded and completely anonymized. All participation was completely voluntary.

Data Analysis

Following each focus group, each researcher transcribed their focus group audio, eliminating any identifiers. We analyzed qualitative data using Dedoose to identify thematic areas focused on answering the project research questions. Dedoose is a qualitative analytic software used in mixed methods research with text, audio, videos, spreadsheet data and other multimedia data.

We analyzed survey data using descriptive statistics configured in R, which is statistical software used in quantitative research. Our analysis of the student survey and focus group data helped us identify critical information on where action is needed in Texas public education.

Findings

The findings presented in this section reflect academic and social alienation, racial profiling, discriminatory disciplinary practices and other harmful experiences students experienced in their schools at the time of our survey and student focus groups. These findings highlight a critical need for systemic changes in both educational practices and school policies to address inequities and discrimination present in these and other schools in Texas.

Two major themes emerged from our analysis of student focus groups that described the mechanisms in which students experienced inequities and discrimination in their schools: alienation in both academic and non-academic settings and administrative inaction to address discriminatory behavior. Students across the various sites reported feelings of alienation in school due to limited curriculum content and biases of teachers present in the delivery of this content.

Overall, students reported concern about weak administrative attention to incidents of race- and identity-based discrimination. Moreover, students reported the hostile sociopolitical landscape present in the Texas education system with the rise of classroom censorship and other restrictive policies.

Findings from the survey suggest that exposure to culturally diverse curricula in the classroom and teachers' efforts to create spaces for discourse on current social justice issues would lead to greater academic engagement and an overall sense of belonging in schools.

On the student experience survey, student respondents rated 20 statements using a five-point Likert scale with the following assigned values: 1 = 'Strongly disagree'; 2 = 'Somewhat disagree'; 3 = 'Neither agree nor disagree'; 4 = 'Somewhat agree'; 5 = 'Strongly agree'. The table on Page 12 details the median level of agreement by respondents for each survey item.

The statements with the highest level of agreement (as denoted by their median) corresponded to seven survey items related to students' interest in greater exposure to classroom curriculum that highlights diverse cultural perspectives and contexts and to peer discussions designed to elevate students' engagement in lessons.

The top box on the next page lists the statements with the highest level of agreement ("somewhat agree" on the Likert scale) by all respondents.

Students reported concern about weak administrative attention to incidents of race- and identity-based discrimination.

Statements with the Highest Level of Agreement
 (“somewhat agree” on the Likert scale)

I feel more engaged in class when we have group discussions about differing cultural experiences and backgrounds.
My teachers’ history lessons have addressed topics pertaining to social justice, civil rights, or discrimination on the basis of race, culture, immigrant status or country of origin.
I feel that my history lessons addressing topics pertaining to social justice, civil rights, or discrimination on the basis of race, culture, immigrant status or country of origin are engaging, accurate, and relevant to current events.
My language arts curricula contain literature (books, short stories, poetry) addressing topics pertaining to social justice, civil rights, or discrimination on the basis of race, culture, immigrant status or country of origin.
I feel that literature in language arts classes that pertain to social justice, civil rights, or discrimination on the basis of race, culture, immigrant status or country of origin are engaging and relevant to current events.
I feel that history lessons and literature addressing discrimination, social justice, civil rights, and differing cultural perspectives and backgrounds make me feel seen or acknowledged in regard to my cultural identity.
I feel more engaged in class when we have history lessons and read literature addressing discrimination, social justice, civil rights, and differing cultural perspectives and backgrounds.
<i>Source: IDRA, 2024</i>

By contrast, statements with the lowest level of agreement corresponded to four survey items related to students’ sense of safety and belonging in their class and school environments, their exposure to punitive school practices, and their interactions with the juvenile justice system. Below are the statements with the lowest level of agreement (i.e., “strongly disagree” on the Likert scale) by all respondents

Statements with the Lowest Level of Agreement
 (“strongly disagree” on the Likert scale)

My teachers’ curricula have made me feel alienated or uncomfortable regarding my cultural or racial background.
I have felt racially profiled or discriminated against by my teachers, administrators or SROs (school resource officers).
I have been unfairly or wrongly punished in my school due to racial profiling or discrimination (referrals, in-school suspensions, out of school suspensions).
I have experienced discriminatory in-school discipline practices that have resulted in interactions with the criminal/juvenile justice system (including but not limited to arrests, time in a correctional facility, or court proceedings).
<i>Source: IDRA, 2024</i>

Student Experience Survey Results



“Our results aren’t simply statistics they are individual students who are affected by discriminatory practices.”

– Josué Peralta de Jesús

Alienation

The vast majority of respondents from all sites in our focus groups indicated a plurality of alienating experiences that contribute to an overall sense of inequity and discrimination in the school environment.

Culturally limiting or excluding aspects of curricula fall into the academic category.

“They won’t even call [India] a developing country. They would just say ‘third world country’ and move on.”

Experiences stemming directly from the actions of teachers, peers or administrators themselves fall into the non-academic category.

“[He] also tries to push Christianity on us. Sometimes at the end of class he encourages us to chant ‘amen.’”

It is important to note that these categories are often intertwined and that both must be acknowledged and understood by themselves and in the context of the other to develop more inclusive school environments. Personal, injurious alienation is rarely encoded directly in a curriculum guide. Instead, it is a result of a combination of institutional factors that limit curricula (academic) with institutional factors that contribute to personal bias and prejudice exhibited by educators and administrators (non-academic).

This schema can be applicable to the restorative aspects of the educational environment as well as degenerative aspects. As some focus group participants stated:

“They’re just going off of what the book tells them to teach. The only time it’s really personalized is when a teacher themselves is from the culture.”

“What’s taught is done for the book, and sometimes it’s hard to include the extra stuff that the teacher feels like adding that should be known because there’s not enough time because the end goal is a test.”

Although these excerpts happen to concern degenerative aspects of the curriculum, detailing a lack of authenticity within the lesson themselves, their invocations of “personalization” and aspects “the teacher feels like adding” bring about a critical point. A curriculum that prescribes a historically accurate, restorative and thoroughly inclusive piece of literature or information will not be effective without any equally effective, competent and passionate educator. The actions of teachers and administrators themselves play an essential role in whether a lesson could be accurate and engaging or inaccurate and ineffective.

The vast majority of respondents from all sites in our focus groups indicated a plurality of alienating experiences that contribute to an overall sense of inequity and discrimination in the school environment.

Administration Inaction Toward Discrimination

Another common theme we found was that most respondents expressed concern about administrative inaction toward discrimination. They expressed that because race and identity have become such taboo subjects, school administrations tend not to address them at all – even the times when ignorant or racist things are said.

“I think how [redacted] was talking about cancel culture and teachers are very tiptoe around this stuff. I feel like [redacted] disciplines physical threats and stuff like that very well, but when it comes to race, ethnicity, and identity, they tend to shy away from disciplining people who make rude comments, like [redacted] saying, “You need to go back to Africa” to a [Black student]. I feel like they don’t discipline according to race and identity because it is such a touchy topic, but it’s an essential part of who some people are.”

This is critical to hear because the polarization of our society has become so intense that plainly racist comments go unaddressed because of fear of reprisal and uncertainty about appropriate responses. With the rise of classroom censorship laws, it has been incredibly challenging for educators to keep up with the new legislation being produced. Policies can be confusing to implement and are not written to be easily understood by the public. The language used to develop these policies is often inaccessible and difficult to interpret. And the result is confusion, inaction and diversion.

Properly addressing identity and race is not harmful; it is essential.

Identity and race are intrinsic to who people are, and they shape their experiences, mindsets and paradigms. Ignoring racist antics or claiming to be “color-blind” only deflects from the problem at hand. The entire point of school is to foster a healthy learning environment free from unnecessary distractions. Ensuring that there are no deflections requires attention and direct action. Otherwise, the quality of learning is clouded by ignorance that becomes more pervasive the longer it goes unchecked.

With the rise of classroom censorship laws, it has been incredibly challenging for educators to keep up with the new legislation being produced.

Discussion

This YPAR project centers the needs and expertise of young people by exploring how schools can adopt more culturally responsive instruction that “acknowledges and affirms students’ cultural identities” (Caldera & Rodríguez, 2021) and focuses on inclusivity and community-building as keystone aspects of creating safe and restorative school environments.

Our study of culturally inclusive pedagogy and disciplinary practices in relation to school discipline has revealed a nuanced perspective. While the study did not establish a solid causal or correlational link between these aspects, it has uncovered valuable insights.

One noteworthy observation is the concern among students regarding the authenticity, accuracy, and cultural inclusivity of their social studies and English curricula. Various participants expressed dissatisfaction with lessons that perpetuated harmful stereotypes or overlooked crucial historical movements, such as civil rights, Chicano, Asian American, and LGBTQ+ movements.

Through our focus group conversations with peers, it is apparent that students place a considerable responsibility on educators to address these shortcomings and to create an engaging learning environment. This shared sentiment emphasizes the critical role of teachers in incorporating culturally inclusive and accurate content despite potential challenges posed by systemic educational censorship policies.

Non-academic alienation emerged as another prominent theme within this study. In our conversations, students recounted personal experiences of discrimination based on race or identity. Instances such as raids by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) within public schools and unwarranted “guilty by association” judgments appeared to stem from biases potentially rooted in the administrative levels of educational institutions.

“We live in society that loves the concept of being colorblind and ignoring the integral parts of culture and identity in their students. The resistance to having these conversations plays into a climate of non-responsiveness and inaction.”

– Kennedy Moore

Participants expressed dissatisfaction with lessons that perpetuated harmful stereotypes or overlooked crucial civil rights historical movements.

Recommendations

By exploring qualitative data, this study's findings hold the potential for informing policy recommendations on various scales, including individual, schoolwide and statewide.

Proactively ensure curricula and lesson plans reflect cultural sensitivity and inclusivity.

Individual Level

Findings from our research suggest educators should proactively ensure their curricula and lesson plans reflect cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. This involves rectifying any instances of censored or incomplete material to provide students with a genuine and comprehensive educational experience.

Students advise teachers to engage in open, safe dialogue with their students, conduct thorough research on the subjects they teach, and collaborate with experienced peers in the realm of culturally sensitive content, particularly in ethnic studies, literature and history.

Enhance practices regarding culturally sensitive curriculum and provide schoolwide professional development.

School Level

Our research strongly encourages school districts and schools to review and enhance current practices regarding culturally sensitive curriculum, specifically through means of professional development that provides teachers, staff and administrators opportunities to further develop skills in cultural competency, diversity and equity via seminars, tutorials and workshops.

Schools also are encouraged to seriously address biases or omissions in administering culturally sensitive content. This can be done through a committee that is dedicated to prioritizing inclusivity and accuracy in the administration.

Reduce punitive discipline policies and practices by engaging parents and students.

Schools could achieve greater success in reducing punitive discipline policies and practices by engaging parents and students when discussing discipline policies and increasing awareness of restorative justice practices.

Provide guidelines for culturally sensitive content that values authenticity and inclusivity.

State Level

Our findings emphasize the need for guidelines for culturally sensitive content that can serve as a foundation for schools and teachers to administer curricula that value authenticity and inclusivity.

Require training in cultural competency for teacher certification.

These guidelines can be extended to create a statewide ethnic studies program or possibly even revise the requirements for teacher certification in a way that requires training in cultural competency and the creation of inclusive learning environments.

Our findings offer substantial insights into the importance of culturally inclusive pedagogy and its potential implications for school discipline. By leveraging these insights, educators and policymakers can work collectively to foster a more inclusive, equitable and supportive educational environment for all students.

Resources

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IDRA SEEN School Resource Hub

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- ★ Informed by students, families & educators
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Appendix A: Qualtrics Survey for Students Enrolled in MAS MAS for Our Schools Research Survey

Thank you for participating in our study! This study is being conducted by the IDRA Youth Advisory Board youth participatory action research (YPAR) team. IDRA is a non-profit organization focused on education justice for K-12 students. We support public schools through our research, policy advocacy, educator support, and family & student collaboration on issues like school funding, bilingual education, restorative practices, and curriculum diversity. To prioritize students in our decision-making, our Texas-based Youth Advisory Board offers IDRA actionable recommendations to ensure our initiatives continue centering the expertise, needs, and dreams of young people and their families.

Your responses to this survey will be utilized to inform our team's research and analysis on the intersections of culturally responsive teaching and the school-to-prison pipeline. We aim to provide policymakers with this crucial information to aid the state of Texas in creating policy amendments catered to the success of Texas high school students. These questions are entirely confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside of research purposes.

Participant Consent

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Review, sign, and submit this study consent form. Minors interested in participating must get consent from a parent or guardian prior to submitting their signed consent form. Once you submit informed consent, you will complete an online Qualtrics survey that will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

After completing your survey, you will have the option to provide the student research team your contact information to be invited to participate in optional virtual focus group discussions.

Content Questions

Are you enrolled in a Mexican American Studies (MAS) course at school?

- Yes
- No

On a scale of 1-5 (1. Strongly disagree, 2. Moderately disagree, 3. Neutral, 4. Moderately agree, 5. Strongly agree), please rate the level to which you agree with the following statements.

Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

My teachers address

curriculum topics from multiple cultural perspectives, including, but not limited to, race, culture, immigrant status and country of origin.

In class, we have group

discussions about our own various cultural backgrounds and perspectives.

Following the questionnaire, there is an optional demographic section meant to better inform our research. Please feel free to skip this section if you do not feel comfortable filling out this section. You are not obligated to complete this section.

Within the demographic section, there will be a space for you to provide your contact information. This is an optional section that will allow the research team to reach out to survey respondents interested in participating in additional virtual focus groups.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our YPAR student research liaison Shreya Selvaraju at shreya.selvaraju@idra.org or IDRA's research analyst Christina Quintanilla-Muñoz at christina.munoz@idra.org.

Thank you for your time and cooperation!
- IDRA Youth Advisory Board Youth Participatory Action Research Team

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you are free to not answer any questions. You can stop this survey at any time without consequence.

Are you 18 years or older?

- Yes
- No

Please have your parent or caretaker sign below to give permission for your participation in this study:

Do you consent to completing this survey?

- Yes
- No [Skip To: End of Survey]

Lessons and group discussions about differing cultural experiences and backgrounds have made me feel seen or acknowledged.

I feel more engaged in class when we have group discussions about differing cultural experiences and backgrounds.

My teachers' history lessons have addressed topics pertaining to social justice, civil rights, or discrimination on the basis of race, culture, immigrant status or country of origin.

I feel that my history lessons addressing topics pertaining to social justice, civil rights, or discrimination on the basis of race, culture, immigrant status or country of origin are engaging, accurate, and relevant to current events.

My language arts curriculums contain literature (books, short stories, poetry) addressing topics pertaining to social justice, civil rights, or discrimination on the basis of race, culture, immigrant status or country of origin.

I feel that literature in language arts classes that pertain to social justice, civil rights, or discrimination on the basis of race, culture, immigrant status or country of origin are engaging and relevant to current events.

I feel that history lessons and literature addressing discrimination, social justice, civil rights, and differing cultural perspectives and backgrounds make me feel seen or acknowledged in regard to my cultural identity.

I feel more engaged in class when we have history lessons and read literature addressing discrimination, social justice, civil rights, and differing cultural perspectives and backgrounds

Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the breadth of your school's curriculum? _____

On a scale of 1-5 (1. Strongly disagree, 2. Moderately disagree, 3. Neutral, 4. Moderately agree, 5. Strongly agree), please rate the level to which you agree with the following statements

Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

My teachers' curriculums have made me feel alienated or uncomfortable regarding my cultural or racial background.

My teachers' speech, actions or assumptions have made me feel alienated or uncomfortable in regard to my cultural or racial background.

My peers' speech, actions or assumptions have made me feel alienated or uncomfortable in regard to my cultural or racial background.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have felt racially profiled or discriminated against by my teachers, administrators, or SROs (school resource officers).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have been unfairly or wrongly punished in my school due to racial profiling or discrimination (referrals, in-school suspensions, out of school suspensions).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have experienced discriminatory in-school discipline practices that have resulted in interactions with the criminal/juvenile justice system (including but not limited to arrests, time in a correctional facility, or court proceedings).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that my school's discipline practices are biased and discriminatory on the basis of race or culture.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school's SROs (school resource officers) tend to do more harm than good	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At times, I feel my school prioritizes disciplining students over teaching them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel an overall lack of attention to cultural awareness in my school contributes to a discriminatory or negative environment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your school's discipline practices and overall climate?

- Definitely not
- Probably not
- Might or might not
- Probably yes
- Definitely yes

Demographic Questions

This is an optional demographic section. Please feel free to skip this section if you do not feel comfortable filling out this section. You are not obligated to complete this section. There will also be a space for you to provide your contact

What grade level are you currently?

- 6th grade
- 7th grade
- 8th grade
- 9th grade (Freshman)
- 10th grade (Sophomore)

information. This is an optional section that will allow the research team to reach out to survey respondents interested in participating in additional virtual focus groups.

Name _____

- 11th grade (Junior)
- 12th grade (Senior)

Name of School District _____

State _____

Race/ethnicity

- Hispanic or Latino/x/a
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian or Asian American
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Other: _____

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third-gender
- Prefer not to say

Follow Up Questions

Alongside this survey, the research team is selecting people for focus groups and individual interviews. This is another method of obtaining more data through personal stories and experiences. By filling out the contact information below you are consenting to be reached out to for potential virtual focus group and interviews. Thank you again for your participation!

Would you like to be contacted following this survey to participate in a group interview?

- Yes
- No

Please provide your contact information to be connected with a focus group interview:

Email (optional): _____

Phone (optional): _____

Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol and Facilitation Guide

Focus Up Questions

Driving Question: What are the intersections of culturally responsive teaching and the school-to-prison pipeline?

Script/Introduction:

Hello! My name is ____, and I am a student and member of IDRA's Youth Advisory Board. This research project aims to analyze the intersections of culturally responsive teaching and the school-to-prison pipeline across many cities throughout the state of Texas. The Youth Advisory Board is conducting this focus group to gather primary source information on the student and educator experience, so we can better understand the problems facing Texas students and make changes to our education system.

This is a space of complete safety and honesty. We encourage all participants to share as much as they are willing to, with no fear of backlash. We are here to discuss learning experiences and all information will remain confidential and no identifiers will be present in any future reports, data, or discussions. All participation is voluntary. If you wish to withdraw participation at any point, you are more than welcome to do so. You are always able to skip a question if you prefer not to say.

We please ask all participants to keep the conversation between our peers and comments by peers confidential after this session is over.

Do you have any questions?

Establish understanding by providing background on often used terms throughout the focus group:

- Culturally Responsive Teaching: a practice that uses students' customs, characteristics, experiences, and perspectives as tools for better classroom instruction.
- Restorative Justice Program: affirming statements, community-building circles, building classroom social contracts, and circle time.
- 5 R's: Relationship, Respect, Responsibility, Repair, and Reintegration.
- School-to-Prison pipeline: connection between the school environment, practices, and disciplinary actions leading student for higher incarceration risk.

Icebreakers

- Do you know what culturally responsive teaching is? If so, what practices are the most memorable and if so, why?
 - Encourage students to recall the moments they had felt the most “heard” with a lesson pertaining to a topic surrounding culture or social justice.
 - Critically examine the differences these experiences made on the student’s overall learning environment.
 - If your school doesn’t have culturally responsive teaching, how do you think it would influence your learning environment? How do you feel it has affected you? Good, bad, or indifferent?
1. Describe scholastic experiences (during an academic lesson or not) that have made you alienated, uncomfortable or discriminated against in regard to your personal background.
 - a. Did the inaccuracy or insensitivity of a lesson play a role?
 - b. Did a teacher or student’s personal biases and prejudices play a role?
 - c. Do you think there are structural aspects that play a role → discuss potentially established systems of education or discipline that perpetuate ignorance or discrimination. As ideas become more abstract, we can gradually lean into a more free-form style discussion surrounding the topic.
 2. Describe a lesson or aspect of a curriculum that concerned social justice or civil rights.
 - a. How accurate do you feel it was?
 - b. Did it contribute to a sense of heightened awareness or belonging? How would you describe it based on your understanding of the issue and/or your personal identity?
 - c. Do you feel that you or your classmates were more or less engaged, and why?
 3. Describe a time when you felt included or acknowledged in your classroom.
 - a. What aspect of this experience facilitated the sense of inclusion? (Was it the teacher or curriculum)
 - b. How did feeling represented in the lesson impact your learning experience?
 - c. What aspects of a lesson do you believe are most critical in remaining culturally responsive and bias conscious?
 4. Can you name a time when you felt alienated or ostracized by a teacher, administrator, or curriculum?
 5. Can you name a time you’ve felt unfairly punished or profiled in your school due to racial profiling?
 6. Describe your perception of the recent resistance towards inclusive and culturally responsive education (book bans, curriculum censorship, at school board meetings)
 - a. Where do you think the controversy stems from? Who generates it, and who is affected (discuss political implications if they would like)?
 - b. Do you feel that critics have any merit? Are there any dangers or downsides of what is considered to be “inclusive education”?
 - c. Have you had conversations about opposition to culturally responsive education? Describe them. What positions do your peers, instructors and family members take, if any? Are there any patterns in these positions with respect to age?
 7. What are some ways you can see your school improving with inclusion and not prioritizing punishment? Please describe methods you believe can be utilized to improve the distribution of culturally responsive education and practices.
 - a. What are some ways schools can encourage students to take responsibility for their actions without solely relying on punishment?
 - b. Could you give an example of inclusion-based methods for addressing disciplinary problems in school?
 - c. What methods should be avoided to ensure schools remain inclusive while still enforcing expectations?
 8. Now after hearing other’s stories and learning more about culturally responsive teaching & punitive practices, what are some ways you can envision improvements at school or in the classroom?
 9. What are some key takeaways from the discussion?
 - a. Did you learn something new?
 - b. Did it inspire you?

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