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Disciplinary Consequence Assignment Differences by Degree of Economic Disadvantage: A Texas Statewide Investigation

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Abstract

Examined in this study was the extent to which discipline consequence assignments differed by student economic status (i.e., Not Poor, Moderately Poor, or Extremely Poor). Statewide data were obtained from the Texas Education Agency Public Education Information Management System on all middle school students for the 2013-2014 through the 2015-2016 school years. Inferential statistical procedures yielded statistically significant differences for all school years examined. For each year, in each grade level, a stair-step effect was present. Students who were Extremely Poor received statistically significantly higher rates of in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension than either students who were Moderately Poor and students who were Not Poor. Students who were Moderately Poor had statistically significantly higher rates of both discipline consequences than students who were Not Poor. Implications are discussed and suggestions for policy and practice are made.

1. Introduction

Education is the means of achieving the American dream [1]). As such, educators are responsible for ensuring students are taught as much as they can learn, as well as identifying and responding to disparities in discipline practices that inhibit student academic success [1, 2]. With these ideas in mind, it is imperative that equitable practices, specifically in relation to disciplinary actions, be established and maintained. Over three decades ago, [3] noted "discipline is the most essential and the most difficult aspect of education" (p. 80). The prevalence of that idea still holds true today. As seen in recent news headlines, public school discipline is a topic that continuously generates public interest and concern [4, 5].

With respect to the state of interest in this investigation, in the 2013-2014 school year, 13,469 discipline consequences were administered to Texas elementary students in Grade 5 [6, 7]. Of those 13,469 consequences, 12,326 discipline consequences were assigned to students who were economically disadvantaged and the remaining 1,143 discipline consequences were assigned to students who were not economically disadvantaged. A similar trend was evident in data for the 78,570 discipline consequences assigned to Texas elementary school students in Grade 6 [6, 7]. More than 71,000 discipline

consequences were assigned to students who were in poverty, whereas only about 7,000 discipline consequences were assigned to students who were not in poverty. These statistics may be interpreted to mean that with regard to economic status, disparities exist in discipline consequence assignment in Texas elementary schools [6, 7].

The academic and social behaviors of Black students in poverty affect educational experiences. Black students in poor urban school districts face a particular set of challenges that increases the likelihood of academic failure [8]. Challenges faced by Black students in poor urban school districts include poverty, underfunded schools, less experienced teachers, little parent participations, and a scarcity of community resources. Each challenge alone has negative effects on student performance. Equally concerning is that the combination of these challenges can bring about substantial obstacles for the learning experiences of Black students [8].

Inequitable discipline consequences based on economic status are not limited to Black students. As noted by [9], student receipt of in-school suspension as a disciplinary consequence for Texas Grade 6 students occurred most often for Hispanic students, followed by Black students, and then for White students. Hispanic students received 33,233 in-school suspensions, 86% of which were assigned to Hispanic students in poverty. Regarding Black students, 82% of the 13,899 in-school suspensions they received were assigned were to Black students who were economically disadvantaged [9]. White students received a total of 14,902 in-school suspensions, of which 51% were assigned to White students in poverty. Similarly, the receipt of out-of-school suspension in Grade 6 by these ethnic/racial groups mirrored this pattern. Again, Hispanic students received the most out-of-school suspensions, 86% of 14,377 were assigned to Hispanic students in poverty. Black students received a total of 8,458 out-of-school suspensions, of which 86% were assigned to Black students in poverty. Lastly, 57% of the 3,658 out-of-school suspensions assigned to White students were administered to White students who were economically disadvantaged [9]. With regard to Discipline Alternative Education Program placements, 5,256 assignments were to students who were in poverty, whereas 848 Discipline Alternative Education Program assignments were assigned to students who were not in poverty. This difference reflected an inequity of 72% more placements for students in poverty than for students who were not economically disadvantaged [9]. These dissimilar percentages may be interpreted to mean that inequities are present in the assignment of disciplinary consequences, as a function of student economic status in Texas Grade 6.

Regardless of ethnicity/race, students who are poor receive disproportionate discipline consequences than students who are not poor. As noted by [10], White students who are in poverty experience discipline disparities, similar to the discipline disparities experienced by their Hispanic and Black counterparts. Regarding Grade 8 White students who were not economically disadvantaged, 1.30% received a Discipline Alternative Education Program placement. In contrast, 4.70% of White students who were in poverty were assigned to a Discipline Alternative Education Program placement. Grade 8 White students who were in poverty received a Discipline Alternative Education Program placement at a rate three times that of their White peers who were not poor [10]. Similarly, less than 1% of Grade 7 students who were not in poverty received a Discipline Alternative Education Program placement, in comparison to 3.6% of Grade 7 students who were in poverty [10]. Approximately 400 more Grade 7 White students, more than four times the percentage, who were in poverty were placed in a Discipline Alternative Education Program program than Grade 7 White students who were not economically disadvantaged [10]. The effects of poverty are not limited to any particular racial or ethnic group [9, 10].

"Family income is now a better predictor of children's success in school than race" [11, para. 6]. To provide an equal opportunity for each child's success, discipline practices must be monitored to decrease the disproportionality of discipline consequence assignments. These inequitable discipline practices can negatively influence the widened achievement gap where advantaged students clearly outperform their peers who are in poverty [11].

Another contributing factor to the achievement gap noted between rich and poor students, is the implementation of prison-like practices, in efforts to maintain safety at impoverished schools [12]. This practice is a result of the School-to-Prison Pipeline that was created from the Reagan Administration's zero tolerance movement. Zero tolerance policies are policies that mandate suspensions or expulsions for behaviors such as fighting, harassment, assault, as well as for minor infractions such as disobedience, truancy, and obscene language [12]. The implementation of zero tolerance policies has resulted in much harsher discipline methods in schools in lower-income neighborhoods. These harsher methods, ones that remove students from the classroom setting, interfere with student learning. As a result of the implementation of zero tolerance policies, students who are economically disadvantaged have a greater chance of facing criminal involvement than they do, of attaining a quality education [12].

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Numerous researchers [e.g., 13, 14, 15, 11, 16] have documented the presence of achievement gaps as a function of economic status. Students in poverty do not perform as well academically as students who are not in poverty [13, 14, 15, 11, 16]. Furthermore, inequitable discipline assignment practices based on economic status may widen achievement gaps [11]. It is imperative that educators identify and respond to these disparities in discipline [2]. A detailed analysis of school discipline data can be insightful to educators and provide direction for appropriate and effective responses to

inequitable practices. Educators ranging from teachers to policymakers can be informed and influenced by findings from this study.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which discipline consequence assignments were assigned differentially as a function of student degree of economic disadvantage. The specific focus in this investigation was on the degree to which student level of economic disadvantage (i.e., Extremely Poor, Moderately Poor, or Not Poor) was related to the assignment of discipline consequences. These discipline consequences assignments were analyzed for the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years in Texas public schools. As such, data from this multiyear analysis permitted a determination of trends in the differential assignment of discipline consequences by student economic status.

1.3. Significance of the Study

Through legislation such as the [17] and the [18], emphasis has been placed on providing equal education opportunities to public school students, regardless of their gender, ethnicity/race, or economic status. Inequitable practices in discipline consequences and reasons based on economic status may exacerbate already existing achievement gaps. With reference to the state of interest in this investigation, numerous initiatives have been implemented in Texas to provide equal learning opportunities to students in poverty.

The focus of this study was different from previous researchers who have addressed inequities in discipline consequence assignment. That is, instead of comparing only students in poverty to students who are not in poverty, in this investigation, students in poverty were separated into two groups: those students who qualified for the reduced price lunch program (i.e., Moderately Poor) and those students who qualified for the free price lunch program (i.e., Extremely Poor). Students who did not qualify for either program are referred to as the Not Poor group in this investigation. It is the results from this more nuanced approach in this article that will add substantially to the extant research literature in this area.

It is imperative that educators identify and respond to these disparities in discipline practices to support the academic success of students in poverty [2]. Thorough analysis of school discipline data may be informative to educators and provide direction for appropriate and effective responses to inequitable practices. Educators ranging from teachers to policymakers can be informed and influenced by findings from this study.

1.4. Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study: (a) What is the difference in in-school suspension assignment by degree of economic disadvantage?; (b) What is the difference in out-of-school suspension assignment by degree of economic disadvantage?; (c) To what extent does a trend exist in the assignment of in-school suspension by degree of economic disadvantage for the 2013-2014 through the 2015-2016 school years?; and (d) To what extent does a trend exist in the assignment of out-of-school suspension by degree of economic disadvantage for the 2013-2014 through the 2015-2016 school years? Each of these research questions was analyzed separately for students in Grades 6, 7, and 8 and for the 2012-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years. As such, a total of 20 research questions constituted this empirical statewide investigation.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

In this multiyear investigation, a non-experimental, causal comparative research design was used [19, 20]. The data that were analyzed herein constituted archival data that had already occurred [20]. Moreover, the independent variable of student economic status cannot be manipulated. The dependent variables were discipline consequence assignments of in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension for the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years in the State of Texas. Because both the independent variable and the dependent variables had already occurred, extraneous variables could not be controlled in this study.

2.2. Participants and Instrumentation

Data for this study were requested and obtained from the Texas Education Agency Public Education Information Management System through a Public Information Request form. The Public Information Request form was submitted to the Texas Education Agency, following approval from this researcher's doctoral dissertation committee. The discipline consequence assignments of in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension were analyzed separately for each school year by degree of student economic disadvantage and for each grade level. All Texas middle school students who received a disciplinary consequence during the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years were participants in this study. Specific data that were analyzed were (a) student economic status, (b) student grade level, (c) and discipline consequence assigned. Because the data had been audited by the Texas Education Agency, an assumption of minimal errors was made. Archival data were imported into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software from the Excel file that was provided by the Texas Education Agency.

For this study, the relationship between the degree of economic disadvantage and major discipline consequences for all Grade 6, 7, and 8 students was determined. The [7] defines economically disadvantaged as students in Texas who are eligible for the federal free- and reduced-lunch program. Eligibility for the federal free- and reduced-lunch program is determined by family income. Students from families with an

income of 130% or less of the federal poverty line are eligible for free-lunch and were referred to as Extremely Poor for the purpose of this study [21]. Students from families with an income of 131% to 185% of the federal poverty line are eligible for the reduced- lunch program and were referred to as Moderately Poor in this study [21]. Students in Texas who were not eligible for federal free and reduced lunch program were referred to as the Not Poor group in this study.

Major discipline consequences were limited to in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension. In-school suspension is an initial disciplinary consequence that results in the removal of a student from the regular classroom by placing the student into a separate classroom [22]. Out-of-school suspension consequence is the removal of a student from the regular classroom as a disciplinary consequence that does not allow the student to attend school for a day and not to exceed three days in a row [22].

3. Results

In this investigation, the degree to which differences were present in discipline consequence assignments as a function of economic status for Grade 6, 7, and 8 students was examined. Data were analyzed for all middle school students in Texas who had been assigned a disciplinary consequence of in-school suspension and/or out-of-school suspension in the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years. Statistical procedures were then conducted to determine the degree to which student economic status might be related to the assignment of discipline consequences.

To address all of the research questions, regarding the extent to which differences were present in the assignment of in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension by degree of economic disadvantage, Pearson chi-square procedures were calculated. This statistical procedure was viewed as the optimal statistical procedure to use because frequency data were present for both categorical variables: economic status and discipline consequence assignment. With the large sample size, the available sample size per cell was more than five. Therefore, the assumptions underlying a Pearson chi-square were met for each research question [23, 24]. Results will now be provided, beginning with the 2013-2014 school year and with Grade 6 students and ending with the 2015-2016 school year and with Grade 8 students.

3.1. Grade 6 Results for In-School Suspension

With regard to the 2013-2014 school year, a statistically significant difference was present in the assignment of in-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 8965.52$, $p < .001$, to Grade 6 students. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small,. 16 [25]. As shown in Table 1, Grade 6 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than twice as often as their peers who were Not Poor. Students who were Extremely Poor were assigned in-school suspension almost 50% more often than their peers who were Moderately Poor. Over one and a half times as many Grade 6 students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an in-school suspension than were students who were Not Poor. As such, a stair-step effect [26] was present with respect to in-school suspension. As poverty increased, so too did the instances of in-school suspension that were assigned to students.

Table 1. *Frequencies and Percentages of In-School Suspension Assignment by Economic Status for Grade 6 Students in the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 School Years.*

School Year and Economic Status	Received an In-School Suspension *n* and % age of Total	Did Not Receive an In-School Suspension *n* and % age of Total
2013-2014		
Not Poor	(*n* = 13,880) 9.1%	(*n* = 139,141) 90.9%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 4,066) 14.5%	(*n* = 24,020) 85.5%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 38,790) 20.9%	(*n* = 147,050) 79.1%
2014-2015		
Not Poor	(*n* = 14,185) 8.8%	(*n* = 14,7401) 91.2%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 3,499) 13.0%	(*n* = 23,372) 87.0%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 37,350) 20.0%	(*n* = 148,935) 80.0%
2015-2016		
Not Poor	(*n* = 14,012) 8.6%	(*n* = 149,025) 91.4%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 3,268) 13.0%	(*n* = 21,824) 87.0%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 37,523) 19.5%	(*n* = 154,803) 80.5%

Concerning the 2014-2015 school year, the Pearson chi-square revealed a statistically significant difference in the assignment of in-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 8837.90$, $p < .001$, by degree of economic disadvantage to Grade 6 students. The Cramer's V was .15, a small effect size [25]. Similar to the previous year results, Grade 6 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than two times as often as their peers who were Not Poor. Students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than one and a half times more often than their peers who were Moderately Poor. Students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an in-school suspension almost one and a half times more often than students who were Not Poor. As such, a stair-step effect [26] was present in the receipt of in-school suspension by student economic status. Delineated in Table 1 are the frequencies and percentages of the assignment of in-school suspension by degree of economic disadvantage for Grade 6 students in this school year.

With respect to the 2015-2016 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the assignment of in-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 8568.72$, $p < .001$, by degree of economic disadvantage to Grade 6 students. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small,. 15 [25]. Grade 6 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than twice as often as students who were Not Poor. Students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than 50% more often than students who were Moderately Poor. Students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an in-school suspension almost one and a half times more often that students who

were Not Poor. Congruent with the previous two school year results, a stair-step effect [26] was present in that as student poverty increased, so too did the assignment of in-school suspension. The frequencies and percentages for the assignment of in-school suspension by degree of economic disadvantage for Grade 6 students in this school year are revealed in Table 1.

3.2. Grade 7 Results for In-School Suspension

With respect to Grade 7 students in the 2013-2014 school year, a statistically significant difference was revealed in the assignment of in-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 10934.28$, $p < .001$, by economic status. The Cramer's V or effect size was .17, small [25]. More than two times as many Grade 7 students who were Extremely Poor received an in-school suspension in comparison to their peers who were Not Poor. Grade 7 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than 50% more often than their peers who were Moderately Poor. Slightly over 50% more Grade 7 students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an in-school suspension, in comparison to Grade 7 students who were Not Poor. The frequencies and percentages for disciplinary consequences assigned to Grade 7 students by their economic status in this school year are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Frequencies and Percentages of In-School Suspension Assignment by Economic Status for Grade 7 Students in the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 School Years.*

School Year and Economic Status	Received an In-School Suspension *n* and % age of Total	Did Not Receive an In-School Suspension *n* and % age of Total
2013-2014		
Not Poor	(*n* = 16,929) 10.6%	(*n* = 143,241) 89.4%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 4,644) 16.2%	(*n* = 23,983) 83.8%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 45,340) 24.1%	(*n* = 142,563) 75.9%
2014-2015		
Not Poor	(*n* = 17,114) 10.3%	(*n* = 148,302) 89.7%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 4,083) 15.3%	(*n* = 22,535) 84.7%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 42,394) 23.2%	(*n* = 140,540) 76.8%
2015-2016		
Not Poor	(*n* = 16,313) 9.8%	(*n* = 150,299) 90.2%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 3,731) 14.6%	(*n* = 21,793) 85.4%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 41,560) 22.2%	(*n* = 145,462) 77.8%

For the 2014-2015 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the assignment of in-school suspension to Grade 7 students, $\chi^2(2) = 10204.41$, $p < .001$, by degree of economic disadvantage. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small,. 17 [25]. Grade 7 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than two times more often than students who were Not Poor. Students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than 50% more often than students who were Moderately Poor. Students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than 50% more often than students who were Not Poor. As such, a stair-step effect was demonstrated [26]. Presented in Table 2 are the frequencies and percentages for the assignment of in-school suspension by degree of economic disadvantage for Grade 7 students in the 2014-2015 school year.

Concerning the 2015-2016 school year, a statistically significant difference was revealed, $\chi^2(2) = 10049.49$, $p < .001$, in the assignment of in-school suspension to Grade 7 students by their degree of economic disadvantage. The effect size, or Cramer's V, was .16, a small effect size [25]. Grade 7 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than two times more often as their peers who were Not Poor. Students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than 50% more often as their peers who were Moderately Poor. Congruent with results from the previous two years, Grade 7 students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an in-school suspension almost 50% more often than their peers who were Not Poor. Congruent with the Grade 6 results and with the previous two school year results for Grade 7 students, a stair-step effect [26] was present in that as student poverty increased, so too did the assignment of in-school suspension. Table 2 contains the frequencies and percentages for the assignment of in-school suspension to Grade 7 students by degree of economic disadvantage for this school year.

3.3. Grade 8 Results for In-School Suspension

Concerning Grade 8 in the 2013-2014 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the assignment of in-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 9918.57$ $p < .001$, by economic status. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small,. 16 [25]. More than two times as many Grade 8 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension, in comparison to Grade 8 students who were Not Poor. Grade 8 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than 50% more often than students who were Moderately Poor. Grade 8 students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an in-school suspension one and a half times more often that Grade 8 students who were Not Poor. A stair-step effect [26] was present in this school year. Table 3 contains the frequencies and percentages for the assignment of in-school suspension to Grade 8 students by their degree of economic disadvantage for the 2013-2014 school year.

Table 3. *Frequencies and Percentages of In-School Suspension Assignment by Economic Status for Grade 8 Students in the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 School Years.*

School Year and Economic Status	Received an In-School Suspension *n* and % age of Total	Did Not Receive an In-School Suspension *n* and % age of Total
2013-2014		
Not Poor	(*n* = 19,055) 11.5%	(*n* = 146,915) 88.5%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 4,675) 16.8%	(*n* = 23,144) 83.2%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 44,286) 24.5%	(*n* = 136,389) 75.5%

School Year and Economic Status	Received an In-School Suspension *n* and % age of Total	Did Not Receive an In-School Suspension *n* and % age of Total
2014-2015		
Not Poor	(*n* = 18,982) 11.0%	(*n* = 153,304) 89.0%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 4,304) 16.0%	(*n* = 22,619) 84.0%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 42,867) 23.6%	(*n* = 138,911) 76.4%
2015-2016		
Not Poor	(*n* = 17,955) 10.5%	(*n* = 152,346) 89.5%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 4,003) 16.0%	(*n* = 21,083) 84.0%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 40,552) 22.4%	(*n* = 140,780) 77.6%

With regard to the 2014-2015 school year, a statistically significant difference was revealed in the assignment of in-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 9769.75$, $p < .001$, by economic status. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small,. 16 [25]. Grade 8 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than two times more often than their peers who were Not Poor. Students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than 50% more often than their peers who were Moderately Poor. Grade 8 students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than 50% more often than their peers who were Not Poor. A stair-step effect [26] was present in this school year. The frequencies and percentages for the assignment of in-school suspension to Grade 8 students by their degree of economic disadvantage in the 2014-2015 school year are delineated in Table 3.

For the 2015-2016 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the assignment of in-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 8873.83$, $p < .001$, to Grade 8 students by their economic status. The Cramer's V was .15, a small effect size [25]. Grade 8 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than two times more often than their peers who were Not Poor. Grade 8 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned in-school suspension more than 40% more often than their peers who were Moderately Poor. Grade 8 students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an in-school suspension more than 50% more often than their Grade 8 peers who were Not Poor. Congruent with the previous two school year results, a stair-step effect [26] was present in that as student poverty increased, so too did the assignment of in-school suspension. Table 3 contains the frequencies and percentages of the assignment of in-school suspension to Grade 8 students by their degree of economic disadvantage in the 2015 -2016 school year.

3.4. Trends for In-School Suspension

Across the three years of data that were analyzed and across the three different grade levels, a stair-step effect [26] in the assignment of in-school suspension was clearly established. As student level of poverty increased, the frequency of in-school suspension increased. Students who were the most economically disadvantaged (i.e., the Extremely Poor group) were assigned an in-school suspension at rates that were statistically significantly higher than the in-school suspension rates for students who were Not Poor and for students who were Moderately Poor. Students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an in-school suspension at statistically significantly higher rates than were students who were Not Poor. These results were commensurate across all three grade levels and across all three school years.

3.5. Grade 6 Results for Out-of-School Suspension

With respect to the 2013-2014 school year, the Pearson chi-square revealed a statistically significant difference in the assignment of out-of-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 7974.70$, $p < .001$, by economic status. The Cramer's V, or effect size was .15, a small effect size [25]. Grade 6 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension more than three times more often than their peers who were Not Poor. Grade 6 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension almost twice as often as their peers who were Moderately Poor. Students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension almost two-thirds more often than students who were Not Poor. The results were reflective of a stair-step effect [26]. Revealed in Table 4 are the frequencies and percentages for the assignment of out-of-school suspension by student economic status in the 2013-2014 school year for Grade 6 students.

Table 4. *Frequencies and Percentages of Out-of-School Suspension Assignment by Economic Status for Grade 6 Students in the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 School Years.*

School Year and Economic Status	Received an Out-of-School Suspension *n* and % age of Total	Did Not Receive an Out-of-School Suspension *n* and % age of Total
2013-2014		
Not Poor	(*n* = 6,372) 4.0%	(*n* = 153,798) 96.0%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 1,886) 6.6%	(*n* = 26,741) 93.4%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 24,573) 13.1%	(*n* = 163,330) 86.9%
2014-2015		
Not Poor	(*n* = 4,784) 3.0%	(*n* = 156,802) 97.0%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 1,315) 4.9%	(*n* = 25,556) 95.1%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 18,821) 10.1%	(*n* = 167,464) 89.9%
2015-2016		
Not Poor	(*n* = 6,344) 3.8%	(*n* = 160,198) 96.2%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 1,485) 5.8%	(*n* = 24,039) 94.2%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 22,395) 12.0%	(*n* = 164,627) 88.0%

Concerning the 2014-2015 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the assignment of out-of-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 7255.22$, $p < .001$, by student economic status. The effect size, or Cramer's V, was .14, a small effect size [25]. Out-of-school suspension was assigned to Grade 6 students who were Extremely Poor more than three times more often than to students who were Not Poor. Out-of-school suspension was assigned to Grade 6 students who were Extremely Poor more than twice as often as Grade 6 students who were Moderately Poor. Grade 6 students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension almost two-thirds more often than to Grade 6 students who were Not Poor. The results were reflective of a

stair-step effect [26]. The frequencies and percentages for the assignment of out-of-school suspension by student economic status in the 2014-2015 school year for Grade 6 students are presented in Table 4.

Regarding the 2015-2016 school year, a statistically significant difference was revealed in the assignment of out-of-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 8178.20$, $p < .001$, by student economic status. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small,. 15 [25]. Grade 6 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension more than three times more often than their peers who were Not Poor. Grade 6 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension more than two times more often than their peers who were Moderately Poor. Grade 6 students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension more than 50% more often than Grade 6 students who Not Poor. A stair-step effect [26] was clearly evident in these results. Table 4 contains the frequencies and percentages for the assignment of out-of-school suspension by student economic status in the 2015-2016 school year for Grade 6 students.

3.6. Grade 7 Results for Out-of-School Suspension

For the 2013-2014 school year, a statistically significant difference was revealed in the assignment of out-of-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 9174.65$, $p < .001$, to Grade 7 students by economic status. The Cramer's V or effect size was .16, small [25]. Almost three times more Grade 7 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension in comparison to their peers who were Not Poor. Grade 7 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension almost twice as often as their peers who were Moderately Poor. More than 50% more Grade 7 students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension than were Grade 7 students who were Not Poor. A stair-step effect [26] was clearly evident in these results. The frequencies and percentages of out-of-school suspensions assigned to Grade 7 students by their economic status in the 2013-2014 school year are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. *Frequencies and Percentages of Out-of-School Suspension Assignment by Economic Status for Grade 7 Students in the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 School Years.*

School Year and Economic Status	Received an Out-of-School Suspension *n* and % age of Total	Did Not Receive an Out-of-School Suspension *n* and % age of Total
2013-2014		
Not Poor	(*n* = 7,779) 4.7%	(*n* = 158,191) 95.3%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 2,004) 7.2%	(*n* = 25,815) 92.8%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 24,390) 13.5%	(*n* = 156,285) 86.5%
2014-2015		
Not Poor	(*n* = 6,641) 4.0%	(*n* = 158,775) 96.0%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 1,614) 6.1%	(*n* = 25,004) 93.9%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 22,262) 12.2%	(*n* = 160,672) 87.8%
2015-2016		
Not Poor	(*n* = 6,344) 3.8%	(*n* = 160,198) 96.2%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 1,485) 5.8%	(*n* = 24,039) 94.2%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 22,395) 12.0%	(*n* = 164,627) 88.0%

In the 2014-2015 school year, the Pearson chi-square revealed a statistically significant difference in the assignment of out-of-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 7891.64$, $p < .001$, by degree of economic disadvantage to Grade 7 students. The Cramer's V was .15, a small effect size [25]. Similar to the previous year results, Grade 7 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension more than three times more often than their peers who were Not Poor. Students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension twice as often as their peers who were Moderately Poor. More than 50% as many Grade 7 students who were Moderately Poor were an assigned out-of-school suspension, in comparison to Grade 7 students who were Not Poor. Evident in these results was the presence of a stair-step effect [26]. Delineated in Table 5 are the frequencies and percentages of the assignment of out-of-school suspension by degree of economic disadvantage for Grade 7 students in 2014-2015 school year.

With respect to the 2015-2016 school year, the Pearson chi-square revealed a statistically significant difference in the assignment of out-of-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 8178.20$, $p < .001$, by economic status. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small,. 15 [25]. Congruent with results from the previous two years, more than three times as many Grade 7 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension in comparison to their peers who were Not Poor. Students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension more than twice as often as their peers who were Moderately Poor. Grade 7 students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension more than 50% more often than Grade 7 students who were Not Poor. Across the three school years for Grade 7 students, a stair-step effect [26] was clearly evident in these results. Table 5 contains the frequencies and percentages of the assignment of out-of-school suspension by degree of economic disadvantage for Grade 7 students in the 2015-2016 school year.

3.7. Grade 8 Results for Out-of-School Suspension

Regarding Grade 8 in the 2013-2014 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the assignment of out-of-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 8234.47$ $p < .001$, by economic status. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small,. 15 [25]. Almost three times as many Grade 8 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension in comparison to Grade 8 students who were Not Poor. Grade 8 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension almost twice as often as Grade 8 students who were Moderately Poor. Grade 8 students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension more than 50% more often than Grade 8 students who were Not Poor. Evident in these results was the presence of a stair-step effect [26]. Table 6 contains the frequencies and percentages for the assignment of out-of-school suspension to Grade 8 students by their degree of economic disadvantage in the 2013-2014 school year.

Table 6. *Frequencies and Percentages of Out-of-School Suspension Assignment by Economic Status for Grade 8 Students in the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 School Years.*

School Year and Economic Status	Received an Out-of-School Suspension *n* and % age of Total	Did Not Receive an Out-of-School Suspension *n* and % age of Total
2013-2014		
Not Poor	(*n* = 7,779) 4.7%	(*n* = 158,191) 95.3%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 2,004) 7.2%	(*n* = 25,815) 92.8%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 24,390) 13.5%	(*n* = 156,285) 86.5%
2014-2015		
Not Poor	(*n* = 7,729) 4.5%	(*n* = 164,557) 95.5%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 1,769) 6.6%	(*n* = 25,154) 93.4%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 23,433) 12.9%	(*n* = 158,345) 87.1%
2015-2016		
Not Poor	(*n* = 7,623) 4.5%	(*n* = 162,678) 95.5%
Moderately Poor	(*n* = 1,690) 6.7%	(*n* = 23,396) 93.3%
Extremely Poor	(*n* = 22,737) 12.5%	(*n* = 158,595) 87.5%

For the 2014-2015 school year, a statistically significant difference was revealed in the assignment of out-of-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 8070.57$, $p < .001$, by economic status. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small,. 15 [25]. Grade 8 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension almost three times as often as their peers who were Not Poor and almost twice as often as their peers who were Moderately Poor. Grade 8 students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension almost 50% more often than their peers who were Not Poor. Evident in these results was the presence of a stair-step effect [26]. The frequencies and percentages for the assignment of out-of-school suspension to Grade 8 students by their degree of economic disadvantage in the 2014-2015 school year are delineated in Table 6.

Concerning the 2015-2016 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the assignment of out-of-school suspension, $\chi^2(2) = 7442.70$, $p < .001$, to Grade 8 students by their economic status. The Cramer's V was .14, a small effect size [25]. Grade 8 students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension almost three times as often as their peers who were Not Poor and almost twice as often as their peers who were Moderately Poor. Grade 8 students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension almost 50% more often than their peers who were Not Poor. Evident in these results was the presence of a stair-step effect [26]. Table 6 contains the frequencies and percentages of the assignment of out-of-school suspension to Grade 8 students by their degree of economic disadvantage in the 2015-2016 school year.

3.8. Trends for Out-of-School Suspension

Consistent across the three years of data that were analyzed for the three different grade levels was the clear presence of a stair-step effect [26] in the assignment of out-of-school suspension. As student level of poverty increased, so too did the frequency of out-of-school suspension. Students who were the most economically disadvantaged (i.e., the Extremely Poor group) were assigned an out-of-school suspension at rates that were statistically significantly higher than the out-of-school suspension rates for students who were Not Poor and for students who were Moderately Poor. Similarly, students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an out-of-school suspension at rates that were statistically significantly higher than the out-of-school suspension rates for students who were Not Poor.

4. Discussion

In this study, the degree to which differences were present in the assignment of discipline consequences as a function of economic status was examined for students in Texas middle schools during the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years. Over this 3-year time period, statistically significant differences in the assignment of discipline consequences as a function of the degree of economic status in each school year at each grade level were yielded. The presence of trends in the assignment of discipline consequences by degree of economic status was determined, subsequent to the statistical analyses. Results will now be summarized.

Throughout the 2013-2014 through the 2015-2016 school years, across each of the three grade levels, students who were Extremely Poor received the highest rates of in-school suspension. In-school suspension rates ranged from 19.5% to 20.9% for Grade 6 students, from 22.2% to 24.1% for Grade 7 students, and from 22.4% to 24.5% for Grade 8 students in these three school years for students who were Extremely Poor. For students who were Moderately Poor, in-school suspension rates ranged from 13.0% to 14.5% for Grade 6 students, from 14.6% to 16.2% for Grade 7 students, and from 16.0% to 16.8% for Grade 8 students in these three school years. In comparison to these in-school suspension rates, the in-school suspension rates for students who were Not Poor ranged from 8.6% to 9.1% for Grade 6 students, from 9.8% to 10.6% for Grade 7 students, and from 10.5% to 11.5% for Grade 8 students in these three school years. Findings were strongly aligned with [26] of the presence of a stair-step effect in the assignment of in-school suspension by student economic status. Readers are directed to Table 7 for a summary of effect sizes for in-school suspension rates by economic status for Grade 6, 7, and 8 students across the three school years.

Table 7. *Summary of Effect Sizes for In-School Suspension Assignment by Economic Status for Grade 6-8 Students in the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 School Years.*

Grade Level and School Year	Cramer's V	Effect Size Range	Highest ISS Rate
Grade 6			
2013-2014	.16	Small	Extremely Poor
2014-2015	.15	Small	Extremely Poor
2015-2016	.15	Small	Extremely Poor
Grade 7			
2013-2014	.17	Small	Extremely Poor
2014-2015	.17	Small	Extremely Poor
2015-2016	.16	Small	Extremely Poor
Grade 8			
2013-2014	.16	Small	Extremely Poor
2014-2015	.16	Small	Extremely Poor
2015-2016	.15	Small	Extremely Poor

For the 2013-2014 through the 2015-2016 school years, across each of the three grade levels, higher percentages of students who were Extremely Poor received an out-of-school suspension. Out-of-school suspension rates ranged from 10.1% to 13.1% for Grade 6 students, from 12.0% to 13.5% for Grade 7 students, and from 12.5% to 13.5% for Grade 8 students in these three school years for students who were Extremely Poor. For students who were Moderately Poor, out-of-school suspension rates ranged from 4.9% to 6.6% for Grade 6 students, from 5.8% to 7.2% for Grade 7 students, and from 6.6% to 7.2% for Grade 8 students in these three school years. In comparison to these out-of-school suspension rates, the out-of-school suspension rates for students who were Not Poor ranged from 3.0% to 4.0% for Grade 6 students, from 3.8% to 4.7% for Grade 7 students, and from 4.5% to 4.7% for Grade 8 students in these three school years. The presence of a stair-step effect [26] in the assignment of out-of-school suspension by student economic status was clearly established. A summary of the effect sizes for out-of-school suspension rates by student economic status for Grade 6, 7, and 8 students across the three school years is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. *Summary of Effect Sizes for Out-of-School Suspension Assignment by Economic Status for Grade 6-8 Students in the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 School Years.*

Grade Level and School Year	Cramer's V	Effect Size Range	Highest OSS Rate
Grade 6			
2013-2014	.15	Small	Extremely Poor
2014-2015	.14	Small	Extremely Poor
2015-2016	.15	Small	Extremely Poor
Grade 7			
2013-2014	.16	Small	Extremely Poor
2014-2015	.15	Small	Extremely Poor
2015-2016	.15	Small	Extremely Poor
Grade 8			
2013-2014	.15	Small	Extremely Poor
2014-2015	.15	Small	Extremely Poor
2015-2016	.14	Small	Extremely Poor

4.1. Implications for Policy and for Practice

Over the 3-year time period analyzed, statistically significant disparities were evident in the assignment of discipline consequences to Grade 6, 7, and 8 students based on their degree of poverty. Students who were Extremely Poor were assigned an in-school suspension and an out-of-school suspension much more often than their peers who were either Moderately Poor or Not Poor in all three school years and in all three grade levels. Moreover, students who were Moderately Poor were assigned an in-school suspension and an out-of-school suspension much more often than their peers who were Not Poor in all three school years and in all three grade levels. Readers should note that empirical evidence is not present that students in poverty commit more misbehaviors than their peers who are not poor. As such, school leaders are encouraged to examine their discipline programs to determine the degree to which student poverty in their districts and campuses is related to discipline consequence assignment. Such audits can be used to drive changes where needed in existing programs and new programs in cases where the existing discipline programs are ineffective.

Another implication for practice, in an effort to reduce the disparaging flow of students in poverty through the School-to-Prison pipeline, codes of conduct should be reviewed and revised. School district and school campus leaders are encouraged to create codes of conduct with outlined consequences for discipline violations to decrease administrator subjectivity and allow for a systematic assignment of consequences contingent upon the infraction and irrespective of student economic status. Periodic analysis of discipline data would increase educator awareness of discipline disparities. Cognizance of campus and school district discipline data trends could create the opportunity for necessary intervention and ongoing support for teachers and administrators. A final implication for practice would be to determine the underlying reasons for the inequities in the assignment of discipline consequences by student economic status. Do students who are poor have sufficient cultural or social capital to respond appropriately to conflict situations at school? To what degree were [9] correct when they contended that "students in poverty may lack the experience or knowledge they need to behave in accordance with school norms" (p. 42)? Should [9] be correct in their hypothesis, then school leaders and counselors would need to develop programs to increase student cultural and social capital.

4.2. Recommendations for Future Research

In this study, the relationship between student level of poverty and the assignment of discipline consequences, specifically in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension, to students in Grades 6, 7, and 8 was examined. Future researchers could extend this study by analyzing in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension data by level of economic status separately for White, Hispanic, and Black students. Such a detailed analysis would permit a determination of whether the results obtained herein are similar across ethnic/racial groups of students. Because data on only middle school students were analyzed in this investigation, researchers are encouraged to extend this study to students enrolled in lower grade levels, such as elementary schools. Such an analysis would be helpful to ascertain whether the inequities documented herein are also occurring at the elementary school level. Researchers are also recommended to extend this investigation to students enrolled in high schools. Another recommendation would be for investigators to extend this study to other states. The degree to which the inequities delineated herein are generalizable to students in other states is not known.

Researchers are encouraged to examine discipline consequences as a function of other student characteristics such as English Language Learner, at-risk students, gender, and gender within ethnic/racial groups. Having a more detailed understanding of the presence of inequities in the assignment of in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension would add to the existing literature on discipline.

Research should also be conducted on the disciplinary consequences of Discipline Alternative Education Placement, Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Placement, and expulsion to ascertain whether inequities exist in their assignment. A final recommendation for future research would be to analyze the reasons why students are assigned a discipline consequence. To what degree are students who commit the same misbehavior given a different discipline consequence, one based on their personal characteristics rather than on the misbehavior?

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which discipline consequence assignments were assigned differentially as a function of student degree of economic disadvantage. The degrees of student economic disadvantage were Not Poor, Moderately Poor, and Extremely Poor. Evidenced in this 3-year statewide data analysis was the presence of statistically significant differences in the assignment of discipline consequences as a function of student degree of economic disadvantage. For the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years, students who were Extremely Poor were assigned statistically significantly more often to in-school suspension and to out-of-school suspension than were their peers who were Moderately Poor and their peers who were Not Poor. Students who were Moderately Poor were assigned to an in-school suspension and to an out-of-school suspension statistically significantly more often than were students who were Not Poor. Results of this 3-year statewide investigation were congruent with previous researchers that inequities exist in the assignment of discipline consequences. Of note in this study was the presence of a consistent stair-step effect in discipline consequence assignment by student degree of poverty.

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