

# A Statistical Measure of Educational Disparities Due to Zero Tolerance Policies

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*Abstract:* We use the disproportion statistic to quantify the differences among ethnic groups and school settings. Patterns of disciplinary actions in four school settings, Non–Title I Non–Charter, Non–Title I Charter, Title I Non–Charter, and Title I Charter schools are examined. Analysis is based on the most recent data provided by the U. S. Office of Civil Rights. The importance of this research is that it is one of the first studies to show that not only are there differences in disparities due to zero tolerance policies among ethnic groups, but there exists statistically significant differences in disparities among school settings as well.

*Key–Words:* Disparity, Disproportion Statistic, Zero Tolerance

## 1 Introduction

The term *disparities* indicates unfair or unjust differences. A statistical index of disparity is often used to compare the degree of racial / ethnic disparities among groups in such fields as healthcare [6][1][5], and education [2]. We present a new statistical measure of disparity not previously used in the field of education, the disproportion statistic. This rigorous measure is suitable for educational disparities because it deliberately does not weigh each subgroup by its fraction of the overall population, but averages the absolute differences between the proportion of members of each subgroup who receive the particular type of treatment and the proportion in the total population. To formulate the disproportion statistic, we apply a modification of the mean deviation of group rates to disparities in education [4]. We also theoretically derive its mean square error.

In schools, zero tolerance refers to the concept that certain types of disciplinary offenses will not be tolerated and will automatically result in suspension or expulsion. We focus on zero tolerance policy disparities among Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, Na-

tive Americans, Pacific Americans, and Asians. The school settings we focus on are Non–Title I Non–Charter schools, Non–Title I Charter schools, Title I Non–Charter schools, and Title I Charter schools. Non–Charter schools are traditional public schools. A Charter school is a publicly funded independent school. In order for a school to be classified as Title I, at least 40% of the students must be low income as define by the U. S. Department of Education.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents an application of the disproportion statistic. Section 3 evaluates the estimation quality of the disproportion statistic by theoretically deriving its mean square error. Conclusions are provided in Section 4.

## 2 Disproportion Statistic Application

To determine if disparity is consistent over the four populations (school settings), we determine the disproportion statistic  $d$  for the four populations: Non–Title I Non–Charter, Non–Title I Charter, Title I Non–Charter, and Title I Charter schools. The dispropor-

tion statistic is the fraction of the entire population that did not receive the most disciplinary placements relative to the group who did receive the most placements [3].

We also determine the statistic  $d_i, i = 1 \dots 6$  for the six subgroups: Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, Native Americans, Pacific Americans, and Asians. Each statistic is scaled by a factor  $10^2$  since values are close to zero. The overall disproportion statistic  $d$  is determined for each of the four school settings, and the  $i^{th}$  disproportion statistic  $d_i$ , is determined for each of the six ethnic groups within each of the four school settings.

Each table that follows represents one of the four school settings. Specifically, tables contain the sample size of each of the 6 ethnic groups, the number of students in their particular ethnic group who were expelled due to zero tolerance, and each ethnic group's corresponding disproportion statistic  $d_i, i = 1 \dots 6$ . Additionally, the overall  $d$  statistic is calculated for each table.

The overall  $d$  statistic for Table 1 is  $d = 0.0848$ . This value will be compared to  $d$  values for the remaining three tables, and will be used to determine if there are disparities among school settings. Pairwise comparisons of  $d$  are provided in Table 5. The overall  $d$  statistic for each table is the sum of the  $d_i, i = 1, \dots, (k - 1)$  for each ethnic group. Figure 1

Table 1: **Non-Title I Non-Charter schools** total students enrolled, total students expelled due to zero tolerance policies, and the disproportion statistic  $d_i$  for each ethnic group. For the group that has the highest level of disciplinary placements,  $d_i = 0$ . The overall  $d$  statistic for the table is the sum of the  $d_i, i = 1, \dots, (k - 1)$  for each ethnic group:

Ethnicity	Enrolled	Expelled	Disp., $d_i$
Black	1150984	1362	0.0078
White	5546608	4380	0.0631
Hispanic	1328719	1763	0.0068
Native Amer.	84937	150	0.0000
Pacific Amer.	36199	45	0.0002
Asian	431582	177	0.0068

depicts disparity of disciplinary placements based on zero tolerance policies received by Native Americans, who received the highest level of disciplinary placements, as compared to the five ethnic groups who received less than Native Americans in Non-Title 1 Non-Charter schools.

Table 2 contains data for Non-Title I Charter

Disparity of Discipline for Native Americans

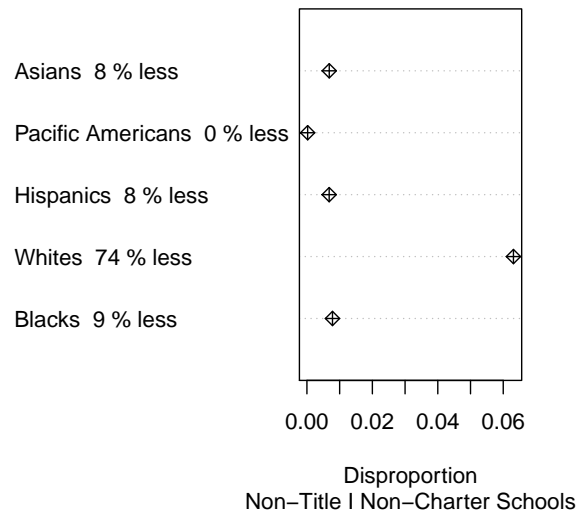


Figure 1: Dot chart displays disparity of disciplinary placements based on zero tolerance policies received by Native Americans, who received the highest level of disciplinary placements, as compared to the five other ethnic groups who received less than Native Americans in Non-Title 1 Non-Charter schools.

Table 2: **Non-Title I Charter schools** total students enrolled, total students expelled due to zero tolerance policies, and the disproportion statistic  $d_i$  for each ethnic group. For the group that has the highest level of disciplinary placements,  $d_i = 0$ . The overall  $d$  statistic for the table is the sum of the  $d_i, i = 1, \dots, (k - 1)$  for each ethnic group:

Ethnicity	Enrolled	Expelled	Disp. ( $\times 10^2$ )
Black	20299	22	0.0509
White	51515	54	0.1310
Hispanic	24530	12	0.0758
Native Amer.	1647	6	0.0000
Pacific Amer.	384	0	0.0012
Asian	3640	0	0.0130

schools. The scaled  $d$  statistic for Table 2 is  $d = 0.2722$ . Figure 2 demonstrates the disparity of disciplinary placements based on zero tolerance policies received by Native Americans, who received the highest level of disciplinary placements, as compared to the five other ethnic groups who received less than Native Americans in Non-Title 1 Charter schools.

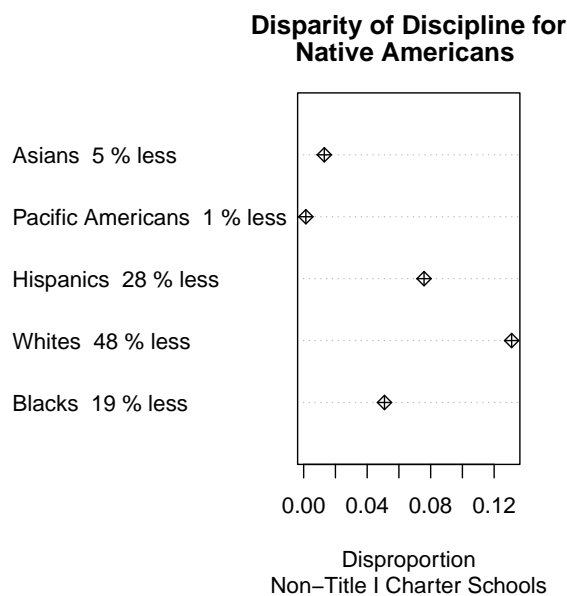


Figure 2: Dot chart displays disparity of disciplinary placements based on zero tolerance policies received by Native Americans, who received the highest level of disciplinary placements, as compared to the five other ethnic groups who received less than Native Americans in Non-Title 1 Charter schools.

Table 3: **Title I Non-Charter schools** total students enrolled, total students expelled due to zero tolerance policies, and the disproportion statistic  $d_i$  for each ethnic group. For the group that has the highest level of disciplinary placements,  $d_i = 0$ . The overall  $d$  statistic for the table is the sum of the  $d_i, i = 1, \dots, (k - 1)$  for each ethnic group:

Ethnicity	Enrolled	Expelled	Disp. ( $\times 10^2$ )
Black	678278	1477	0.0092
White	922809	1024	0.0447
Hispanic	1237654	2486	0.0236
Native Amer.	49808	129	0.0000
Pacific Amer.	19583	20	0.0010
Asian	146045	67	0.0102

The scaled  $d$  statistic for Table 3 is  $d = 0.0886$ . Figure 3 shows disparity of disciplinary placements based on zero tolerance policies received by Native Americans, who received the highest level of disciplinary placements, as compared to the five other ethnic groups who received less than Native Americans in Title 1 Non-Charter schools.

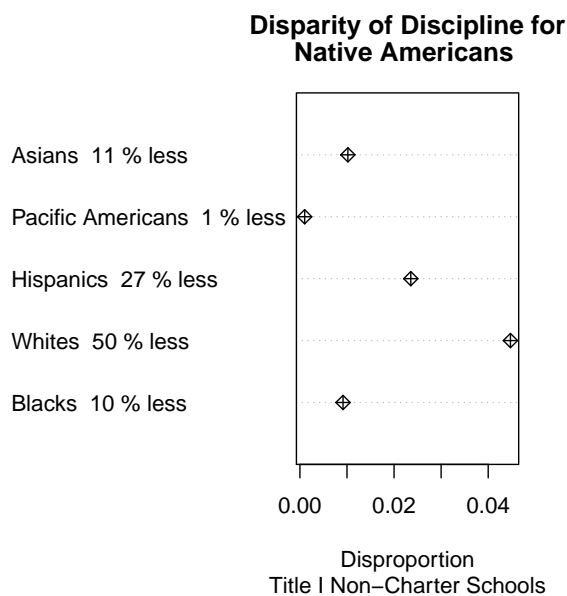


Figure 3: Dot chart displays disparity of disciplinary placements based on zero tolerance policies received by Native Americans, who received the highest level of disciplinary placements, as compared to the five other ethnic groups who received less than Native Americans in Title 1 Non-Charter schools.

Table 4: **Title I Charter schools** total students enrolled, total students expelled due to zero tolerance policies, and the disproportion statistic  $d_i$  for each ethnic group. For the group that has the highest level of disciplinary placements,  $d_i = 0$ . The overall  $d$  statistic for the table is the sum of the  $d_i, i = 1, \dots, (k - 1)$  for each ethnic group:

Ethnicity	Enrolled	Expelled	Disp. ( $\times 10^2$ )
Black	45526	101	0.0000
White	28632	28	0.0293
Hispanic	41492	58	0.0281
Native Amer.	1879	4	0.0001
Pacific Amer.	332	0	0.0006
Asian	3102	2	0.0040

Table 4 contains data for Title I Charter schools. The scaled  $d$  statistic for Table 4 is  $d = 0.0623$ . Figure 4 highlights disparity of disciplinary placements based on zero tolerance policies received by Blacks, who received the highest level of disciplinary placements, as compared to the five other ethnic groups who received less than Blacks in Title 1 Char-

ter schools.

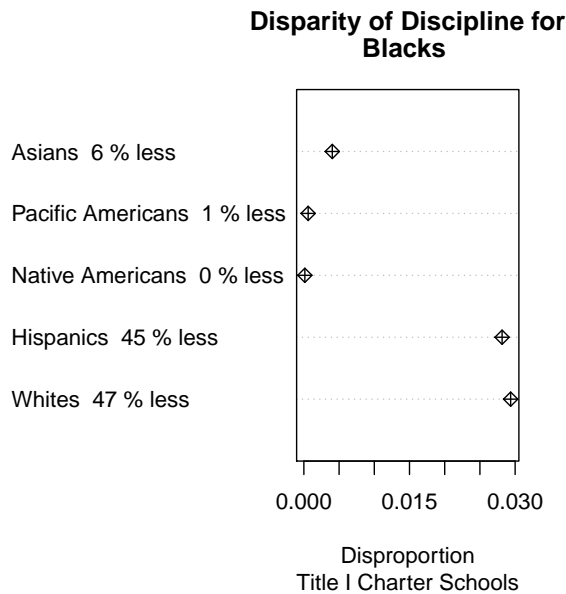


Figure 4: Dot chart displays disparity of disciplinary placements based on zero tolerance policies received by Blacks, who received the highest level of disciplinary placements, as compared to the five other ethnic groups who received less than Blacks in Title I Charter schools.

Table 5: **Pairwise Comparisons** of disparity between schools, p-value, and statistical significance.

Comparison	p-value	significant
$d_{table1}, d_{table2}$	$2.000 \times 10^{-1}$	yes
$d_{table1}, d_{table3}$	$0.002 \times 10^0$	yes
$d_{table1}, d_{table4}$	$2.000 \times 10^{-16}$	yes
$d_{table2}, d_{table3}$	$2.000 \times 10^{-16}$	yes
$d_{table2}, d_{table4}$	$2.000 \times 10^{-16}$	yes
$d_{table3}, d_{table4}$	$2.000 \times 10^{-16}$	yes

To test the disproportion statistics,  $d$  from the four tables, we perform a test of equality for multiple proportions. The null hypothesis is all proportions are equal, and the alternative is at least one proportion is different. The test statistic is  $d$ . The p-value for the given data set is  $3.432 \times 10^{-24}$ . Therefore, reject the null hypothesis at the  $\alpha = .01$  level of significance. Conclude that not all school systems are equal with respect to disparity. Therefore, it is important to determine which school systems are different. We use the  $R$  function *pairwise.prop.test* to calculate pairwise comparisons between pairs of the four  $d$  statistics,

then use the Holm procedure to adjust the p-values for multiple testing. The function *pairwise.prop.test* enables us to simultaneously test pairs of proportions. From Table 5 conclude that all pairs of school settings have statistically significant differences with respect to disparity due to zero tolerance policies.

### 3 Mean Square Error of Disproportion Statistic

Since we can usually apply more than one disparity measure in a particular situation, a difficulty that may arise is the task of choosing the best estimator. Therefore, we need some criteria such as the mean square error to evaluate the quality of an estimator. The mean square error of an estimator  $\hat{\theta}$  of a parameter  $\theta$  is defined as the expected value

$$MSE(\hat{\theta}) = E[(\hat{\theta} - \theta)^2]. \quad (1)$$

**Theorem 1** Let  $d$  be the disproportion statistic. Since  $d$  is defined to be a proportion, the Mean Square Error of the estimator  $MSE(\hat{d}) = \left(\frac{pq}{n}\right) \left(\frac{N-n}{N-1}\right)$ . Where  $p$  represents the fraction of the entire population that did not receive the most disciplinary placements due to zero tolerance policies relative to the group who did receive the most placements, and  $q = 1 - p$ . The variable  $N$  represents the population size (total students enrolled in a school setting). The variable  $n$  represents subgroup size.

**Proof:** Let  $d \in R$ , and let  $\hat{d}$  be an unbiased estimator of  $d$ . The population mean of  $d$  is  $\mu$ . From the definition of mean square error,

$$\begin{aligned} MSE(\hat{d}) &= E[(\hat{d} - d)^2] \\ &= E[(\hat{d} - \mu + \mu - d)^2] \\ &= E[(\hat{d} - \mu)^2 + 2(\hat{d} - \mu)(\mu - d) + (\mu - d)^2] \\ &= E[(\hat{d} - \mu)^2] + E[2(\hat{d} - \mu)(\mu - d)] + E[(\mu - d)^2] \\ &= Var[\hat{d}] + 2(\mu - d)E[(\hat{d} - \mu)] + (\mu - d)^2 \\ &= Var[\hat{d}] \\ &= \left(\frac{pq}{n}\right) \left(\frac{N-n}{N-1}\right), \end{aligned}$$

from the fact that  $E[(\hat{d} - \mu)] = 0$ , and the sample proportion is an unbiased estimator of the population proportion.

### 4 Conclusions

Creating a fair and positive school environment and devising creative approaches to discipline are strategies being considered to replace the rigid punishments

associated with zero tolerance policies. Prior research shows that there are disparities among ethnic groups regarding the enforcement of zero tolerance policies. The importance of this research is that for one of the first times it is shown that there are statistically significant differences in disparities due to zero tolerance policies among school settings, as well.

To quantify these differences, we compute the disproportion statistic for each ethnic group and for each of the four school settings, Non–Title I Non–Charter, Non–Title I Charter, Title I Non–Charter, and Title I Charter schools. Findings show disciplinary disparities based on zero tolerance policies are largest among Native Americans and Blacks, who receive the greatest level of disciplinary placements, and that of Whites who receive the least. Findings also show that all pairs of school settings have statistically significant differences with respect to disparity due to zero tolerance policies.

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