




## Special Edition on Racism in America

The Special Edition on Racism in America provides scholarly information on the insidious nature of racism and offers solutions in an effort to eliminate it from society.

# Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, Zero-Tolerance Discipline, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

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## Abstract

Zero-tolerance discipline policies led to the introduction of police on school campuses and have resulted in a disproportionate number of in-school arrests and referrals of Black middle-school students, subjecting them to the school-to-prison pipeline. Data shows the negative effects of zero tolerance; however, less is known regarding alternative evidence-based strategies such as the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). Grounded in the labeling theoretical framework, this study examined whether JDAI status (pre-JDAI and post-JDAI) could predict arrests and referrals while controlling for race, gender, and age. Secondary data were collected from a juvenile court in northwest Georgia on 1,303 middle-school students. The students who formed this purposive sample for the study were arrested or referred 2 years prior to the implementation of the JDAI School Referral Reduction Program and 2 recent years post-JDAI. Binary logistic regressions were conducted for each of the outcomes of arrests and referrals to ascertain the predictive relationships of JDAI, race, gender, and age. The results found only gender and age to be significant predictors of arrests and referrals. However, additional findings reported Black students were 89.4% of the students arrested or referred to the juvenile court, and 93.2% of those arrests and referrals occurred during the 2-year period pre-JDAI. This research is significant for stakeholders involved in education and juvenile justice reform who want to positively effect social change through the use of programs and policies that narrow the academic achievement gap and reduce the disproportionate number of Black students' contact with the criminal justice system.

**Keywords:** *Zero-tolerance discipline; School-to-prison pipeline; Exclusionary discipline, Disproportionate minority contact, Juvenile justice*

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## Introduction

School discipline is designed to control behavior, promote safety, and advance academic achievement within the school environment (Curran, 2016). The culture and nature of discipline in the U. S. educational system have changed drastically over the past 25 years. Many public schools across the country have employed zero-tolerance policies as an approach to disciplining youth misbehavior. Zero-tolerance discipline describes policies that mandate specific punitive penalties for a variety of behaviors. They are intended to be applied uniformly regardless of the circumstance, context, or severity of the behavior (Noelle, 2019).

Currently, these zero-tolerance strategies remain in place in school districts throughout the United States, but the disparate and disproportionate impact is particularly pronounced in the South. A recent study conducted by Smith and Harper (2015) revealed that in 346 Southern U.S. school districts, Black students comprised 75% of those suspended. The study also reported that in 181 districts, Black students were 100% of those expelled from public schools and that school districts in the South accounted for 50% of the expulsions of students of color nationwide.

Black students and those with disabilities have been disproportionately subjected to the exclusionary discipline of zero-tolerance policies, often for minor infractions. These students are not only exposed to more instances of discipline, but the length and degree of punishment meted out by school administrators is often greater than that imposed on other students (Steinberg & Laco, 2017). This criminalization of misbehavior has garnered a great deal of criticism over the years and is the subject of debate in the discussion on juvenile justice reform.

Zero-tolerance policies led to the introduction of police on school campuses and, although the U.S. juvenile crime rate is the lowest it has been in two decades, evidence suggests an increase in in-school arrests. Research suggests the upsurge of in-school arrests is the direct result of the growth of police presence on school campuses and has given rise to an increase in student contact with the criminal justice system, thus creating the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) phenomenon (Mallett, 2017). The literature discusses the negative effects of zero tolerance; however, limited research has been presented on specific evidence-based approaches that mitigate or reverse these policies.

Recently, various practices have been introduced to replace zero-tolerance discipline; however, empirical support is needed to promote them as evidence-based alternatives (Daley et al., 2016). This study aimed to contribute to the scholarly literature by examining the Annie E. Casey Foundation's (AECF) Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) and its effects, if any, on exclusionary discipline and student contact with the criminal justice system. The JDAI is being used in nearly 300 local jurisdictions across the country to reduce the number of student court referrals from school administrators and law enforcement (Maggard, 2015). Recent research has also encouraged further study of alternatives to zero tolerance (Schiff, 2018) that support improvements in student performance, in-school retention rates, and less contact with the criminal justice system.

## Literature

Disproportionately exposing Black students and those with disabilities to excessive exclusionary discipline has rendered zero-tolerance policies ineffective and expensive (DeMitchell & Hambacher, 2016). This disparate treatment of Black students and those with disabilities is systemic. Valant (2018) noted that findings from recent studies indicate disparate discipline has been attributed to discriminatory practices by school administrators, thereby contributing to the racial gaps in student academic achievement.

## Labeling Theory

Zero-tolerance discipline has broadened the academic achievement gap by excluding an inordinate number of Black students and those with special needs from the school system (Kiema, 2015). Many of these students are subsequently exposed to the criminal justice system, resulting in them being labeled as delinquent and deviant (Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016). Tannenbaum (1938) introduced labeling theory to explain delinquency and asserted individuals learn criminal behavior from their communities when criminal activity is present. However, once individuals are introduced into the criminal justice system and formally labeled as a criminal, the potential for criminal behavior increases (Noelle, 2019). Expounding on Tannenbaum's perspective on labeling and Mead's (1934) concept of social interaction, sociologist Edwin Lemert (1951) introduced two categories of deviance: primary and secondary.

Lemert (1951) identified primary deviance as the initial stage of deviance where an individual may violate a norm or rule but is not stigmatized or made to suffer long-term consequences for doing so. Lemert proclaimed secondary deviance is behavior that manifests after an official label of delinquency is applied to an individual who violates social norms. Howard Becker (1963) laid the responsibility of deviant behavior on society instead of the individual. Becker argued the deviant label is created and applied by social groups to those whom they deem outsiders. Thus, labeling drives an individual toward deviant social groups because they share the common experience of being stigmatized and labeled as outsiders.

Labeling theory assumes the stigma associated with the label promotes a deviant self-identity within the individual. This self-identity fosters a camaraderie with others who are similarly labeled (Noelle, 2019). The alienation from society and defiance of being rejected advance delinquent behavior and increase delinquent recidivism. Educational and correctional institutions use their authority to formally label juveniles as delinquent, and this contact reduces their educational and socioeconomic opportunities. Formal delinquent labeling increases youths' chances to recidivate by changing both their opportunity structure and their self-meaning (Kroska et al., 2017). Evidence has also indicated the labels educators placed on students are often influenced by their implicit biases, which determine the type and degree of discipline exacted (Yang et al., 2019).

The literature is robust on the disparate use of zero-tolerance discipline for Black students labeled with learning disabilities. Kennedy-Lewis and Murphy (2016) grounded their study in labeling theory as they examined middle-school students' perceptions of being labeled "frequent flyers" by their teachers and administrators. These students labeled as bad were repeatedly referred for disciplinary action. The succession and frequency of this disciplinary action reinforced the labeling, which subsequently led to them being suspended or expelled from school. The study's findings indicated that, although these students rejected being labeled, their response and resistance to being labeled led them to exhibit negative behavior. Similarly, Algraigray and Boyle (2017) referenced the influence of Becker's (1963) labeling theory in their study on the impact of labeling students with special educational needs. The study's findings also indicated these students were subjected to exclusion, stigmas, and discrimination that broadened the academic achievement gap and worsened their potential life outcomes.

It is the duty and responsibility of educators to nurture child and adolescent development. However, the prevalence of zero-tolerance discipline indicates a basic misunderstanding of this process. It is normal for children and adolescents to challenge and question authority during this stage of development. During this stage, they are also vulnerable to peer pressure and influence and do not fully comprehend the consequences of their actions (Yu et al., 2016). Zero-tolerance discipline reinforces these developmentally regressive environments and, in doing so, disproportionately impacts Black students and those with learning disabilities.

Black students with learning disabilities are often labeled as lower achievers, thus furthering the academic achievement gap (Abramson, 2018). Labeling theory also serves as a foundation for the current study as it

provides a framework to understand how labeling students impacts the degree and extent to which they are subjected to zero-tolerance discipline. Furthermore, reducing the negative effects of zero-tolerance discipline on this population will reduce the number of students subjected to the STPP.

### **The Fear Narrative**

In the mid-1990s, political scientist John Dilulio and his colleagues fueled the flames of fear by labeling certain groups of youth as superpredators (Drum, 2016). They instilled public panic by predicting that youth, particularly inner-city, low-income, uneducated Black male students between the ages of 14 and 17, were marauding, gun-toting criminals who would wantonly deal drugs, rob, and murder without remorse. According to the superpredator theorists, this population of juvenile deviants was responsible for the rise in violent crimes. Furthermore, they warned that these youths were destined to create social disorder as violence would spill over to the so-called decent suburban and rural communities (Berkowitz, 2015).

The superpredator narrative is consistent with labeling theory, particularly as it was created and applied to define a group considered outsiders. Schulman (2005) argued that the social group holds the power to impose deviant labels that dictate the narrative of how others will be perceived and treated. Further, he claimed being branded as deviant may be predicated on demographics instead of behavior. This notion supports the premise that racial profiling by those who enforce the rules may be an underlying factor in what is unacceptable behavior.

### **The Policing of Public Schools**

Coinciding with the rise of punitive discipline was an increase in the presence of police officers in public schools. Spearheading this effort, the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Policing Services (COPS) established the Cops in Schools grant program in 1999, which was extremely instrumental in the influx of police on school campuses (U.S. Department of Justice [DOJ], 2014). Since its inception, COPS has granted over \$14 billion to state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies and has funded over 130,000 new law enforcement officer positions nationwide (Community Policing Dispatch, 2018). Ironically, as the number of school police soared, the number of school counselors drastically decreased (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2019). In 2013, shortly after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, the federal government allotted \$46.5 million to fund school security initiatives while only allocating \$12.3 million for school counseling initiatives (ACLU, 2017).

The literature opposed to police on school campuses has posited school resource officers (SROs) who are assigned to school districts at the lower end of the socioeconomic and educational spectrums have a higher police presence and perform more law enforcement related duties (Kupchik, 2019). The ACLU (2017) argued that the combination of zero-tolerance policies and school police exacerbates student misbehavior, and the racial disparities in how discipline is dispensed are glaringly evident. Similar literature suggested a police presence and increased disciplinary measures may promote an adversarial climate in schools by stigmatizing disciplined students and subjecting them to suspension or expulsion (Sparks, 2018).

### **Exclusionary Discipline and the School-to-Prison Pipeline**

#### **Suspension and expulsions**

Exclusionary discipline is punishment imposed on students in the form of suspension or expulsion from the learning environment. Research conducted during the 2015–2016 year school reported 2.7 million K–12 students were issued one or more out-of-school suspensions, while over 120,000 students were expelled nationwide (U.S. Department of Education OCR, 2019). The NAACP Legal Defense Fund (2017) reported 35% of Black middle and high school students have experienced suspension or expulsion. Miguel and Gargano (2017) found a high correlation between students who have been suspended or expelled and future

imprisonment. Furthermore, exclusionary discipline aggravates and perpetuates the racial disparities that exist within the nation's criminal justice system.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2018) conducted a study during the 2013–2014 school year examining patterns of discipline employed in public schools and the challenges educators and criminal justice practitioners faced in addressing school misbehavior. Data was collected from schools in California, Georgia, Massachusetts, North Dakota, and Texas. These states were identified as having high levels of suspensions of Black, male, and learning-disabled students. The study's findings reported that although Blacks represented 15.5% of public-school students, they accounted for 39% of students subjected to exclusionary discipline. Also, boys accounted for over 51% of K–12 students yet represented nearly 75% of students expelled during the 2013–2014 school year (GAO, 2018). Similarly, the study found students with disabilities represented nearly 12% of the K–12 student population; however, they accounted for over 25% of students who were excluded from the educational process by either suspension, expulsion, or arrests (GAO, 2018).

### **The school-to-prison pipeline**

A large body of research has argued the STPP is exacerbated by zero-tolerance discipline and the prevalence of police in schools. Critics of the STPP proclaimed these excessive and aggressive policies have forced students out of schools and into the criminal justice system (Barnes & Motz, 2018; Johnson and Muhammad, 2018; Lindsay & Hart, 2017). The educational and criminal justice systems were developed to enrich and improve the lives of children and were not intended to work in conjunction with one another. However, over the past few decades, schools and courts have developed a paradoxical relationship that has been detrimental to students of color, especially those who are Black and those with special educational needs who are subjected to zero-tolerance discipline.

McCurdy (2014) reported that during the 2009–2010 academic year, 96,000 students were arrested on school campuses, and over 240,000 received referrals to juvenile courts. Similarly, research conducted on the 2015–2016 school year found 290,600 students were arrested or received referrals to the criminal justice system (U.S. Department of Education OCR, 2019). Furthermore, the presence of police on school campuses has been reported to exponentially increase student arrests, and many of those arrests and referrals were for acts of disobedience or status offenses, which are noncriminal offenses considered violations only because of the student's status as a minor (Pigott et al., 2018). Barnes and Motz (2018) asserted tacit racial biases of some teachers may contribute to the negative labeling of Black students. They further noted these biases likely contributed to the inordinate number of referrals for minor infractions that subsequently lead to the STPP. The Sentencing Project (2015) also reported that nationwide, Black youth were over four times as likely to be confined in secure facilities as were White youth. They further noted in some states the disparity was more evident as Black youth were more than 10 times as likely as White youth to be committed to secure facilities.

Recently, researchers conducted a mixed-methods longitudinal study to determine several factors relating to the disproportionate minority contact (DMC) in Georgia's juvenile justice system (Gonzales et al., 2018). The study examined all 159 counties in the state to determine which had the highest rates of DMC, what if any differences existed across racial lines, and which referral stage accounted for DMC in Georgia. The authors' findings indicated punitive school discipline was a significant factor in the referral decision point (Gonzales et al., 2018). Yang et al. (2018) reported students who suffer from emotional and mental disorders (EMD) are 13 times more likely to be arrested for behavioral infractions than non-EMD students. These students lack the support and resources needed to help them cope with these stressors that manifest as behavioral issues (Schiff, 2018).

A recent meta-analysis examined the effects of alternative approaches on disparate discipline practices (Welsh & Little, 2018). The study's findings revealed that although some of the emerging programs showed decreases in suspensions and referrals across all groups, the interventions did not appear to substantially reduce suspensions and referrals for Black students (Welsh & Little, 2018). These findings affirmed the present

study's assumption that teacher racial bias may be an underlying factor in how discipline is dispensed to Black students.

The racial disparity and human costs of exclusionary discipline are a major concern of education and criminal justice stakeholders. The budgetary costs of incarceration are another salient downside of exclusionary discipline driving the need for reform. The literature revealed that since the inception of zero-tolerance discipline, juvenile court dockets have risen exponentially from school referrals (Justice Center, 2015). These referrals lead to commitment and contribute to the burgeoning number of youth in detention. The annual cost of housing each of these young offenders is reported to range between \$149,000 to \$188,000 (Sawyer, 2018). States are burdened with most of these costs and many have been seeking reform through diversion alternatives to reduce expenditures associated with court proceedings and incarceration.

### **Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI)**

JDAI was developed by the AECF in 1992 to address the rise in the number of youths confined in secure facilities nationwide for status offenses and non-violent acts (Voices for Georgia's Children, 2017). The purpose of JDAI is to reduce jurisdictions' reliance on the predisposition detention of juveniles in secure facilities. Its goal is to create more effective and sustainable policies and procedures that will enhance public safety, benefit youth and the community, reduce racial and ethnic disparities, and generate significant savings for taxpayers (AECF, 2017).

JDAI is guided by eight strategic principles: collaboration; use of accurate data; objective admissions decisions; alternatives to confinement; accelerated case processing; specialized detention cases; improving conditions of confinement; and the reduction of racial and ethnic disparities (Guckenburger et al., 2019). Since its launch in 1992, JDAI has been implemented at 197 sites in 300 counties within 40 states, as well as the District of Columbia (AECF, 2017). JDAI has emerged as a juvenile diversion program that has gained national attention as an approach to dismantle the zero-tolerance structure and phase out the STPP.

### **JDAI in Georgia**

In 2001, AECF launched its first attempt at a state-wide replication of JDAI in Georgia, but it was not successful on such a large scale (Slay, 2019). However, in 2003 Clayton County Chief Juvenile Court Judge Steven C. Teske observed a staggering increase in cases from school-related offenses and partnered with AECF to implement JDAI on a county level. According to Teske (2011), the dramatic rise in-school referrals began after police were placed in the county's middle and high schools in 1996, and numerous students were arrested and referred for low-level offenses resulting from zero-tolerance discipline policies. By 2003, Clayton County's public-school graduation rate reached a record low of 58%. Of equal importance is that the number of school referrals to the county's juvenile court increased by an alarming 1000%, and 80% of those students referred were Black (Teske, 2015). This study investigated the efficacy of JDAI within this jurisdiction in Georgia.

## **Method**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of JDAI on zero-tolerance-related student arrests and referrals. Binary logistic regression was conducted to predict JDAI's influence on arrests and referrals while controlling for race, gender, and age. According to Salkind (2017), researchers use a binary logistic regression design to evaluate the relationship between various predictor variables and an outcome that is binary. The independent or predictor variable was JDAI status (pre-JDAI and post-JDAI). The binary dependent variables were arrests and referrals. The study's control variables were race, gender, and age. The following research questions and hypotheses served to examine these variables and are aligned with the problem statement and purpose of the study:

**RQ1:** Does JDAI status predict arrests and referrals while controlling for race, gender, and age?

**H<sub>0</sub>:** JDAI status does not predict arrests and referrals while controlling for race, gender, and age.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** JDAI status does predict arrests and referrals while controlling for race, gender, and age.

Based on this study's research questions and hypotheses, two binary logistic regression analyses were employed to analyze the secondary data collected. The sample was drawn from middle-school students in a northwest jurisdiction in Georgia who were subjected to school discipline that resulted in contact with the criminal justice system. I chose to use homogeneous sampling as the type of purposive sampling for the study because it focused on candidates who shared similar characteristics. The goal of homogenous sampling is to focus on a specific similarity and how it relates to the topic being studied (Etikan et al., 2016). The sample for the study was based on the jurisdiction being located in a state with a documented practice of disproportionate exclusionary discipline (Gonzales et al., 2018). Also, the jurisdiction selected for the study had a total of 18 middle schools, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the sample helped to ensure a thorough assessment of a fully operational JDAI site.

## Results

I was able to obtain aggregate data for a 2-year period (2001–2002) prior to the implementation of the JDAI School Reduction Referral Program and the most recent 2-year period (2017–2018) post-JDAI. The data received from the Juvenile Court consisted of 1,364 cases. However, 61 cases were omitted based on the students' race. Cases where students were listed as either Hispanic, Asian, or Other/Unknown were removed from the data to conform with the purpose and direction of the study. After removing the aforementioned cases, the sample size resulted in 1,303 cases. These cases reflected male and female middle-school students who were Black or White and who were either arrested or referred to the juvenile justice system.

### Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiatives and Arrests

This first binary logistic regression was conducted to determine if JDAI status (pre-JDAI and post-JDAI) could significantly distinguish between students with and without arrests while controlling for race, gender, and age. The logistic regression model was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(2) = 21.091, p < .0005$ . Of the four predictor variables, only gender and age were significant contributors to the model. Race did not add any significant contribution to the model. When adding the predictor variable JDAI status, the model remained significant,  $\chi^2(2) = 21.091$ , with gender ( $p = .001, \beta = -.478$ ) and age ( $p = .015, \beta = 1.327$ ). However, the predictor variable, JDAI, did not add any additional contribution to the model. Male students had 2.09 times higher odds of being arrested than female students. For each unit reduction in age, the odds of being arrested increased by a factor of 1.38. Table 1 shows the regression summary for arrests.

**Table 1:** Variables in the Equation Arrests Regression Summary

	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp ( $\beta$ )
Step 1 JDAI (1)	.147	.303	.235	1	.628	1.159
Students' race	-.425	.330	1.655	1	.198	.654
Students' gender	-.739	.221	11.157	1	.001	.478
Middle-school-aged students between 12 and 14 years old	.283	.116	5.893	1	.015	1.327
Constant	-2.178	.171	161.807	1	.000	.113

**Note.** Variable(s) entered on Step 1: JDAI, students' race, students' gender, middle-school-aged students between 12–14 years old.

## Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiatives and Referrals

The second binary logistic regression was conducted to determine if JDAI status (pre-JDAI and post-JDAI) could significantly distinguish between students with and without referrals while controlling for race, gender, and age. The logistic regression model was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(2) = 21.091, p < .0005$ . Of the four predictor variables, only gender and age were significant contributors to the model. Race did not add any significant contribution to the model. When adding the predictor variable JDAI status, the model remained significant,  $\chi^2(2) = 21.091$ , with gender ( $p = .001, \beta = 2.093$ ) and age ( $p = .015, \beta = .754$ ). However, the predictor variable, JDAI, did not add any additional contribution to the model. Table 2 depicts the regression summary. Based on the Wald statistic, female students had 2.09 times higher odds of being referred than male students. For each unit decrease in age, the odds of being referred were increased by a factor of 1.33. Table 2 provided a summary of the regression analysis for referrals.

**Table 2:** Variables in the Equation Referrals Regression Summary

		$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	Wald	<i>df</i>	Sig.	Exp ( $\beta$ )
Step 1	JDAI (1)	-.147	.303	.235	1	.628	.863
	Students' race	.425	.330	1.655	1	.198	1.530
	Students' gender	.739	.221	11.157	1	.001	2.093
	Middle-school-aged students between 12 and 14 years old	-.283	.116	5.893	1	.015	.754
	Constant	-2.178	.171	161.807	1	.000	8.826

**Note.** Variable(s) entered on Step 1: JDAI, students' race, students' gender, middle-school-aged students between 12–14 years old.

## Discussion

Student contact with the criminal justice system has increased exponentially as law enforcement replaced discipline to address student misbehavior (Owens, 2017). Prior research indicated these exclusionary discipline strategies have been particularly damaging to Black male students, who are suspended and expelled three times more than White students (Berwick, 2015). Furthermore, these suspensions and expulsions decrease the educational and employment opportunities for Black male youth while increasing their likelihood of incarceration (Hattar, 2018). Nearly 70% of the U.S. imprisoned population did not complete high school, and a substantial portion of that percentage can be attributed to years of zero-tolerance discipline policies (Passero, 2020). JDAI was developed as a program to confront the rise in the number of youths confined in secure facilities nationwide for status offenses and non-violent acts such as those associated with zero-tolerance discipline (Teske, 2015).

## Interpretation of the Findings

Participants in the study included 1,303 Black and White middle-school students from a jurisdiction in northwest Georgia who were arrested or referred and subsequently detained by the juvenile justice system. Although the study revealed race was not a significant predictor of arrests and referrals, findings demonstrated that Black students were 89.4% of those arrested or referred, compared to White students, who



accounted for 10.6%. These results support previous researchers who found that Black middle-school children are disproportionately subjected to zero-tolerance discipline and the STPP (Dunning-Lozano, 2018). The results in this study indicated that gender was a significant predictor for arrests and referrals, and these findings also coincided with the literature. The results for gender showed 68.5% of students arrested or referred as a result of zero-tolerance discipline were male, while female students accounted for 31.5% of the cases of arrests and referrals. These findings are similar to prior studies that reported male students, as a group, are overrepresented when it comes to school discipline (Barnes & Motz, 2018).

The findings for age, which were also determined to predict arrests and referrals, paralleled the literature as data from this study found 29% of the students arrested or referred to the juvenile court were 12 years of age. However, as students' age increased, so did the number of arrests and referrals. Thirteen-year-old students represented 36.5% of arrests and referrals, while 34.2% of the students arrested and referred were 14 years of age. These findings are also similar to the literature that found the majority of students arrested at school were under the age of 15 years old (Owens, 2017).

These same findings also affirmed the rationale of examining middle-school students' arrests and referrals through labeling theory. Labeling theorists (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951; and Schur, 1971) contended the label of deviance is applied to individuals who allegedly violate social norms, and the alienation from society and defiance of being rejected advances delinquent behavior. Thus, students who are labeled as lower achievers and deviant, or those who have special educational needs, are prone to negatively respond to this type of learning environment and will either misbehave or disengage from the educational process altogether (Sparks et al., 2018). Relative to labeling theory, this study found that of the 1,303 students who were arrested and referred to the juvenile court, 1,165 of those students were Black. These findings further support the literature that proposed labels placed on students by educators may be influenced by their implicit biases and is reflected in how they administer discipline (DeMatthews, 2016).

## Recommendations

Based on this study's findings, it is recommended that a longitudinal study be conducted on school districts in those southern states where a disproportionate number of Black students are subjected to exclusionary discipline. It is recommended such a study explore the efficacy of detention alternatives in these jurisdictions to determine if any systemic changes have been implemented to curb Black student contact with the criminal justice system. Also, further research of a qualitative nature on JDAI's School Reduction Referral Program is needed to determine the perception of its efficacy by teachers, administrators, and SROs. The findings of this type of study may offer insight into whether factors such as teacher and officer implicit biases are being addressed.

Finally, this study, like so many others, indicated Black male students are overrepresented in the STPP. However, Black female students are often overlooked in discussions of zero-tolerance discipline and the STPP, even though it has been reported they are six times more likely to be suspended than White female students and one and a half times more likely to be suspended than White male students (Kaba, 2017). Black female students are subjected to the disparate and disproportionate zero-tolerance discipline policies and are also being funneled through the STPP (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017). More research is recommended to examine the long-term psychological and socioeconomic impact of these practices on this under-reported population.

## Implications

The theoretical findings of this study contributed to the literature on zero-tolerance discipline and juvenile justice by explaining how labeling theory is intrinsic to reforming the practice of zero-tolerance discipline and the STPP. This information is necessary for stakeholders involved in education and juvenile justice reform and can serve to guide decisions on policies and programs that promote positive social change that will improve the life outcomes of marginalized students. Furthermore, this information is meant to encourage honest conversations about the biases that are at the root of the subjective and disparate disciplinary practices that funnel Black students through the STPP. The effects of positive social change will be reflected in students' success and can be measured by an increase in graduation rates, the narrowing of the academic achievement gap, and the decrease in the number of Black students coming in contact with the criminal justice system.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the efficacy of JDAI on zero-tolerance-related arrests and referrals. Several of this study's findings supported the need for policy- and decision-makers to take a look at the merits of JDAI or similar programs that promote alternatives to juvenile detention, are cost effective, and allow all children the opportunity to achieve a quality education, thereby improving their chances for positive life outcomes. Although Georgia's legislators implemented sweeping juvenile justice reform in 2013 with the passing of House Bill 242 (AECF, 2013), which required all judicial circuits to implement juvenile detention alternatives, more effort and more research are needed to address the systemic socioeconomic and racial biases that exist in our schools and criminal justice system and are at the core of zero tolerance and the criminalization of youth misbehavior.

Change must begin in our schools, which can no longer be an extension of our criminal justice system. However, to get there, changes must also be made in the training and hiring practices of school administrators, teachers, counselors, and SROs, that require racial implicit bias training and education. It is only then that honest conversations can take place to positively effect change that will dismantle zero-tolerance discipline practices and derail the STPP.

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