

SCHOOL DROPOUT OR STUDENT PUSHOUT? A CASE STUDY
OF THE POSSIBLE VIOLATION OF PROPERTY RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES
BY THE DE FACTO EXCLUSION OF STUDENTS FROM THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

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and

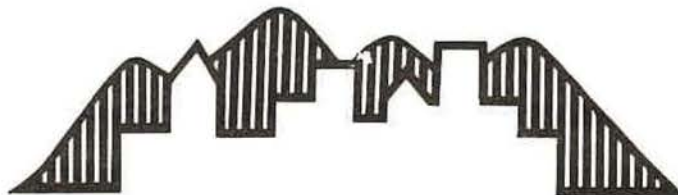
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WORKING PAPER NO. 8

Spring, 1977

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The purpose of the present case study is to demonstrate that the disproportionate numbers of poor, minority and working class students represented among the population of "school dropouts" are, objectively, the victims of an institutional syndrome of systematic exclusion referred to as "the student pushout" phenomenon.

The Southern Regional Council¹ defines "the pushout" as "the student, who through discriminatory treatment is excluded from school or else is so alienated by the hostility of the school environment that he or she leaves." The Children's Defense Fund² states, "The children most likely to be out of school are those who can least afford to be. And those children have been maneuvered out of school by officials who resort to unethical, if not illegal, and certainly immoral action and lack of action to rid the schools of unwanted youngsters." The pushout theory is also held by some quarters of "the establishment," for Bell³, a juvenile court judge, is of the opinion that the delinquents appearing before him are "pushouts" for whom "lack of support by school and community" has set into motion a pattern of forces which lead to a "lack of success in school and ultimately into the realm of juvenile crime." The Southern Regional Council goes on to take the position that school systems should be held legally accountable for the "student pushout," who, in their view, is a victim of de facto exclusion. The law not only provides us with a cogent definition of the functions of schooling and the harmful effects of exclusion, but specifically provides the basis, not for placing blame, but objectively placing responsibility and even liability for the deprivation of educational opportunities.

McClung ⁴ points out that:

The California Legislature had codified the conventional wisdom regarding some of the harmful effects of being out of school:

The Legislature finds and declares: (1) that young people who have dropped out of high school, thereby failing to receive a minimum education are faced with limited opportunities and employment barriers because of their lack of training and skills; (2) that such young people comprise a disproportionately large segment of the unemployed or unemployables in this State; (3) that such people are disproportionately involved in juvenile delinquency and youth offenses; (4) that such young people comprise a disproportionate share of those on the welfare rolls".

Kubik ⁵ observes that, "The U.S. Supreme Court in *Goss v. Lopez* . . . holds that students facing suspension have property and liberty interests that qualify for due process protection under the Fourteenth Amendment." . . . The *Goss* court found that by providing a system of free, public education and compelling school attendance, the state had preferred a property interest on students-an entitlement to public education". In discussing the "liberty" aspects of the case, the court went on to point out that suspensions might "interfere with later opportunities for higher education and employment." Snyder ⁶ goes on to point out that, "Due process liberties are not restricted to constitutionally guaranteed liberties". But that liberty includes" the right to acquire useful knowledge."

However, advocates of the "pushout" phenomenon, base their position primarily upon anecdotal evidence and conjecture rather than empirical study. The only "hard evidence" is limited to percentage analysis provided by the Children's Defense Fund and the Urban Appalachian Council. ⁷ The former present a nationwide survey which reveals that poor, minority and working class students are disproportionately represented in the "dropout" population. The latter demonstrate that "urban Appalachians" are a disproportionately lower socio-economic "cultural minority" who also suffer extraordinarily high "dropout" rates.

The Southern Regional Council's demonstration of institutionally racist patterns of suspension is limited to schools which have just recently undergone court ordered desegregation.

Research attempting to define the predictors of "dropping out" generally takes the form of comparing samples of "dropouts" with samples of students who are "academically gifted," "college bound," . . . Such researchers demonstrate that "dropouts" have higher rates of absenteeism behavior problems and mobility, and lower rates of achievement, self concept and IQ and generally negative attitudes toward school ⁸ Busk ⁹ specifically relates independent variables of segregated black and segregated white vs. "integrated racial composition of schools with self esteem and achievement."

A small subset of these researchers raise the possibility that the relationship between these independent variables and "dropping out" is systemic. Hunt and Clawson¹⁰ historically trace these relationships as they have effected poor, minority and immigrant groups. They conclude with the assertion that such groups have consistantly suffered "prejudicial treatment at the hands of school personnel. Although Musholt ¹¹ acknowledges the general failure to define the causal relationships between self concept and achievement, he demonstrates that remedial programs can not only improve self concept achievement, he demonstrates that remedial programs can not only improve self concept but can concretely reduce absenteeism and fighting among students. Yudin et. al. ¹² take the position that

"The magnitude of the differences, however, and the time of two groups (dropouts and college bound) as they progress through school, seem to indicate the existence of systematic factors operating to produce the eventual outcome. "(Dropping out)

It is the courts which specifically raise suspensions as an independent variable by posing the following hypotheses in the Lopez case;

. . . The effects of suspension are not uniform. Most suspended students respond in one or more of the following ways:

1. The suspension is a blow to the student's self-esteem.
2. The student feels powerless and helpless.
3. The student views school authorities and teachers with resentment, suspicion and fear.
4. The student learns withdrawal as a mode of problem solving.
5. The student has little perception of the reasons for the suspension. He does not know what offending acts he committed.
6. The student is stigmatized by his teachers and school administrators as a deviant. They expect the student to be a troublemaker in the future.

A student's suspension may also result in his family and neighbors branding him a troublemaker. Ultimately repeated suspension may result in academic failure.¹³

Yudin et.al.¹⁴ go on to raise the possibility of a distinction between "good" and "bad" schools, leaving us with the question of: "whether rigorous criteria of differentiation can, or should be, developed, remains to be seen."

Significance of the Study

The present case study of the Cincinnati Public Schools differs from the mainstream of "school dropout" studies in several significant respects.

1. The study attempts to establish the "student pushout" syndrome as a form of de facto exclusion from the public schools.
2. An attempt is made to establish a relationship between "dropping out" as a dependent variable and other independent variables not merely by an analysis of variance between "dropouts" and groups such as "college bound students," "academically gifted students," . . .but also by multiple regression techniques.

3. The study also moves beyond Busk's¹⁵ definition of the social composition of schools by including the "cultural minority" of Appalachians, S.E.S. and including dependent variables other than self esteem and achievement in the analysis.
4. The study is far more generalizable than the Southern Regional Council's study of "pushouts" which only looked at schools which had recently undergone court ordered desegregation.
5. The unit of analysis is aggregate school data rather than individual students. Thus in Yundin's terms, we can begin establishing criteria for "differentiation between good and bad schools."

LIMITATIONS

The Cuban government's definition of the situation brings to mind some limitations of the study. They give the following reason for using the terms "dropouts" and "pupil expulsion" interchangeably:

"...the factors leading to so-called dropouts are social factors of a coercive nature, entirely alien to the will of the child or youth who does not attend school because of circumstances which even heads of family find difficult to overcome."¹⁶

They go on to point out that;

"To try to eliminate 'pupil expulsion' by means of educational formulas would be equivalent to attacking the branches of the problem. But the roots are found in the socioeconomic structure and only a change will make its liquidation possible."¹⁷

In the Cuban point of view, the micro-sociological focus on schools as institutions, in the narrow sense, is "equivalent to attacking the branches of the problem." The possibilities of changing "the roots found in the socioeconomic structure" will not be explored. In statistical terms, the study will be attempting to account for a small part of the variance. Therefore, correlations of .4 and above will be construed as practically significant.

Methodology

Data was obtained from the entire population of Junior and Senior High Schools in the city of Cincinnati for the academic year 1972/1973. However, it should be kept in mind that the individual school rather than the individual student was the unit of analysis. Analysis included Pearson Correlation Matrices for the analysis of continuous variables and stepwise regression for the analysis of discrete variables. The population was stratified by school composition criteria including 1) Segregated Black Schools 2) Segregated White Schools 3) Integrated Schools 4) Appalachian Schools 5) S.E.S.

For purposes of statistical analysis, Cincinnati's Junior and Senior High Schools were viewed as a population, therefore, while tests of statistical significance were deemed inappropriate, correlation coefficients of .40 or greater were deemed of "practical significance" for purposes of the present case study. A complete list of the variables considered is included in the following section.

1. Appalachian Origin

The proportion of pupils of Appalachian origin (first or second generation) attending each school was determined by distributing questionnaires to parents which asked for birthplace, by state and county, of pupils and parents.

2. Racial Composition

The racial composition of each school was available in the form of proportions of Black and White students.

3. Suspensions

The Civil Rights Reports uses the following definition in gathering its data " . . .pupil suspended for at least one day, but not more than 20 consecutive days."

4. Suspension Rates: Total, Black and White

Total suspension rates as well as suspension rates by race were determined by appropriately dividing suspensions by students for each of the three indices.

5. Suspensions Days or Duration of Average Suspension: Total, Black and White

In an effort to determine the duration of the average suspension for the total student body as well as by race, days were appropriately divided by suspensions for each of the three indices.

6. Stratification of Population by Composition of Student Body

a. Racial Composition; Segregated White, Segregated Black and Integrated

A school was defined as segregated if its student body was composed of 30% or more of any given race.

A school was defined as "integrated" if it contained no less than 30% or more than 70% of any given race.

b. Appalachian Schools

A school was defined as "Appalachian" if it contained a minimum of 40% students of Appalachian origin."

c. Socio-Economic Status

Socio-economic status was defined as low, medium and high corresponding to the proportion of "low income" students as follows: less than 10%, 10%-25% and more than 25% respectively.

7. Drop-Out Rate in Percent

The Junior and Senior high school drop outs are actual "drop outs" who have stopped attending school, but have not transferred anywhere.

8. Mobility

Mobility is a total of: % transfers into and out of the school to another school within the Cincinnati Public School System; the % of new students who moved into the public school system; and the % of students who move out of the individual school.

9. Absenteeism

Absenteeism is the average percent of students absent on every school day during the year.

10. Percent Children from Low Income Families

Low income is the definition used by the Welfare Department, which is usually a family earning \$2,000 or less or its equivalent.

11. Self Concept

Self concept is based on a questionnaire which was given to each pupil. Randomly distributed throughout the questionnaire were questions which

9
were considered to be self attitude evaluations. The self evaluations had a composite score of 1-100, thus the closer to 100 the score, the higher the self attitude of the students in the school.

2. Average Reading Achievement Scores

Average reading achievement scores is the average reading score for each pupil in the school which they received on the achievement tests. The Junior High scores were taken in the 8th grade and the elementary scores came from the 6th grade. No achievement tests are given to high school students.

3. Average Math Achievement Scores

Average math achievement scores is the average math score for each student in the school which they received on the achievement test. These scores came from the same grade level as the reading score.

4. Hypotheses

I Based upon studies previously cited, in which individual students rather than schools were the unit of analysis it might be expected that: High drop out rates were associated with:

1. High rates of absenteeism
2. High rates of mobility
3. Low average self concept scores
4. Low rates of achievement in reading and math

II Based, in part, upon the work of the Southern Regional Council, it might be expected that: High drop outs were associated with;

1. High suspension rates
2. Lengthy duration of suspensions

III Based upon the work of Dusk¹⁹ and the Southern Regional Council,²⁰ it would be expected that the varying social composition of schools may change the dynamics of the pushout process, however; One or more of the predictors will be associated with drop out rates in all cases.

Results

Rates of mobility, absence, self concept and achievement were all found to be associated with drop out rates at a "practically significant level" in at least three or more strata. Suspension rates and duration of suspension were both found to be associated with drop out rates at a "practically significant level" in at least two or more strata. Therefore, the first two hypotheses were confirmed (See Table 1).

The third hypothesis was also confirmed for it appears that the dynamics of the "pushout" process do, in fact, vary in different strata (See Table 2).

The analysis of strata as discrete variables by means of step wise regression indicates that the social composition of the schools is not a strong determinant of dropout rates (See Table 3).

However, the profile of the strata indicates that the severity of conditions reflected by rates of mobility, absence, self concept and achievement generally worsen as the social composition of schools declines in status (See Table 4).

The situation of Integrated and Appalachian schools deserves some special attention. Although, conditions reflected by mobility, absence, self concept and achievement appear to be better in Segregated White than Segregated Black schools, with Integrated schools falling in the middle,

the situation of Appalachian schools appears only slightly better than that of Segregated Black schools thus confirming the concerns of Maloney and Mauner.²¹

The fact that Integrated schools were the only ones in which self concept was not significantly associated with dropout rates is consistent with previous research indicating that self concept is improved in integrated schools.²²

However, the lack of significant differences in the rate of suspension between strata, with slightly higher suspension rates and days in Integrated schools tends to substantiate the findings of the Southern Regional Council.

The pattern of suspensions as it relates to the socioeconomic index utilized is particularly ambiguous. Two factors really help to account for this. First, the proportion of students whose families are living at the poverty level is an extremely limited socioeconomic index, excluding not only upper and middle class elements but even underemployed, marginally employed and non-union blue collar workers. In view of the exodus from the cities by people with the means to do so, sometimes referred to as "flight to the suburbs" the urban population is skewed in the direction of the latter three categories. Furthermore, the fact that socioeconomic status is so integrally tied to race combined with the limitations of the index, gives rise to a situation in which some of the socioeconomic strata include more than one racial strata.

The suspension rates which were the only data available by race as well as by school indicate that racism as an intervening variable throughout the school system may be a source of additional clarity.

Table 5 reveals that the disparity between Black and White suspensions can be as severe as the situation in 1973-74 in which Black suspension rates were almost twice as high as those of whites.

Conclusions

The present study provided some worthwhile insights for educational policy makers seeking viable alternatives to the present programs and studies which deal with the school drop out phenomenon as a fait accompli to be described, predicted and profiled. Programs of prevention would seek to improve or eliminate those conditions and policies which give rise to high rates of mobility, absence, suspension, duration of suspension and low rates of achievement and self concept, in all schools regardless of social composition.

Student advocates in Appalachian schools and Segregated Black schools must be particularly alert to factors which constitute the "pushout" phenomenon. Where necessary, persuasion and community pressure may be supplemented by legal remedies based upon the concept of education as a constitutionally defined "liberty" and "property right." The situation of suspensions is even more clearly defined, for the question of "due process" comes into play. The intervening variable of racism, which appears present throughout the school system provides the basis for utilizing existing and explicit Civil Rights legislation.

The situation of Integrated schools is somewhat more ambiguous. The advantages in the areas of mobility, absence, self concept and achievement are not offset by the substantiation of the Southern Regional Council's observations on suspension as a means for "pushing out" Black students, in response to court ordered desegregation.

First, the Southern Regional Council data indicates that this is a temporary phenomenon which tends to decrease over time. In addition, the legal remedies provided by "due process" and existing Civil Rights legislation are more explicit than the "liberty" and "property rights" conceptions. Based upon a new awareness of the "pushout" phenomenon, preventive measures could be drawn into forthcoming desegregation decisions.

Many of the data limitations of this study also have legislative implications which might be incorporated into desegregation plans. The only predictor of dropout rate for which data was gathered by race was suspension and it should be recalled that this was in response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 rather than being included as part of the general School Survey. Legislative and/or judicial action should be taken to insure that the other predictors of dropout rate or rather "pushout" factors are also gathered by race as well as school. Drop out rates themselves should also kept by race. This is the only way in which the "pushout" phenomenon can be accurately monitored.

Given the present study's substantiation of Maloney and Wagner's position that Appalachians constitute a cultural minority or certainly a group whose needs are not objectively met by the school system, the category of "Appalachian Origin" should also be included in the process of data collection. Furthermore, in view of the recognition of "socio-economic segregation" reflected in the renewed emphasis and rationale for metropolitan approaches to desegregation and the limitations of present socioeconomic indexes revealed by this study, additional socioeconomic indexes should be generated and incorporated into the process of data collection. Careful inspection of Table 3 lends encouragement to this line of inquiry.

Finally, the recent proliferation of legislation and litigation around the question of sex role stereotyping reveals a need for the incorporation of sex as an independent variable in data collection.

Table 5 has particular significance for this study and also for future studies by introducing a historical factor in the dynamics of the "pushout" phenomenon. It should be recalled that the data utilized in the present study covers the academic year 1972-73 just prior to the instabilities generated by the Board of Education's response to the N.A.A.C.P. suit which was filed in the academic year 1973-74. Table 5 indicates that the "pushout" phenomenon as a response to court ordered desegregation as cited in the Southern Regional Council Study may very well begin before court ordered desegregation is implemented i.e. rather in anticipation of it. At least two factors indicate the possibility that an offensive was begun to push Blacks out of the school system in anticipation of an N.A.A.C.P. victory. First Table 5 reveals that the disparity between Black and White suspension rates increased almost geometrically in 1973-74 vs. 1972-73. Secondly, there was the implementation of a "school consolidation plan" which closed schools in primarily Black neighborhoods thus initiating an additional possible "pushout" factor but definitely and objectively insuring the "one way" busing of Blacks.

In short, the present study provides the basis for a preventive approach to the problem of school dropouts to replace those analyses, policies and programs which merely deal with the consequences of the "pushout" phenomenon.

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2. Children Out of School, is available from Children's Defense Fund, 1746 Cambridge St., Massachusetts, 1974.
3. Bell, G. Ross - "Of Dropouts and Pushouts," National Association of Secondary Schools Principals Bulletin, Volume 60, May, 1976, pp: 48-54.
4. McClung, Merle - "The Problem of the Due Process Exclusion," Journal of Law and Education, Vol. 3, Number 4, October, 1974, pp. 526-27.
5. Kubik, Stephen J. - "Constitutional Law-Fourteenth Amendment-Students Facing Suspension have Property and Liberty Interests That Qualify for Due Process Protection," Florida State University Law Review, Vol. 3, 1975, pp: 301-313.
6. Snyder, Michael - "Procedural Due Process and Short Suspensions from the Public Schools: Prologue to Goss V. Lopez," Notre Dame Lawyer, Volume 50, 1974-75, pp: 372-73.
7. Two significant reports on the urban Appalachian dropout problem are available from Urban Appalachian Council, 1015 Vine Street., Cincinnati, Ohio. They include; Maloney, Michael - The Social Areas of Cincinnati; Toward an Analysis of Social Needs, January 1974, pp: 134-138.
Wagner, Thomas - "Urban Appalachian School Children: The Least Understood of All" Working Paper Number 6, 1974.
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10. Hunt, Thomas C. and Clawson, Elmer U. - "Dropouts: Then and Now, High School Journal, Volume 58, March, 1975, pp: 237-51.
11. Musholt, Wayne--"Self Concept and the Middle School, National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, Volume 58, pp: 67-71, April 1974.
12. Yudin, Lee W. - "School Dropout or College Bound: Study in Contrast" Journal of Educational Research, Volume 67, Number 2, October, 1973, pp: 87-93.
13. Flygare, Thomas J. - "Short Term Student Suspensions and the Requirements of Due Process, Journal of Law and Education, Volume 3, Number 4, October, 1974, pp: 539.
14. op. cit. Yudin pp: 92-93.
15. op. cit. Busk et. al.
16. "The Educational Movement: Cuba, 1969-1970" was an official Cuban presentation, in English, to the International Conference on Public Education, convoked by the International Bureau on Education and Unesco. See School and Society, October, 1971, pp: 382-87.
17. The data was obtained from two major sources. Suspension data was obtained from the Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey, required under Title VI of Civil Rights Act of 1964 and under IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare, Office for Civil Rights, Washington, D.C. The remainder of the data was drawn from a data bank gathered by Randall Couch from the School Information Survey Reports (Cincinnati Public Schools) for an unpublished study done for the Urban Appalachian Council entitled - "Appalachian Children in the Cincinnati Public Schools."
18. Ibid, Civil Rights Reports.
19. op. cit. Busk.
20. op. cit. Southern Regional Council.

21. op. cit. Maloney and also Wagner
22. See literature reviews on the relationship between "intergration" and self concept including; St. John, Nancy H. - "Desegregation and Minority Group Performance, "Review of Educational Research, Volume 40, Number 1, 1970 pp: 111-133.
Zirkel, Perry A. - "Self Concept and the 'Disadvantage' of Ethnic Group Membership and Mixture, "Review of Educational Research, Volume 41, Number 1, 1971, pp: 221-225.

Table 1

Pearson Correlation Matrix of Factors Associated with Drop Out
Rates in Junior and Senior High Schools of Varying Social Composition

	Low Income	Medium Income	Higher Income	Integrated	Segregated Black	Segregated White	Appalachian
Mobility	.09	.45	.40	.23	.56	.14	.19
Absence	.40	.32	.72	.67	.79	.33	.66
Self Concept	.71	.64	.87	.37	.67	.57	.26
Reading Achievement	.02	*	*	*	.68	.66	.87
Math Achievement	.15	*	.24	*	.73	.57	.89
Total Suspension Days	.14	.78	.50	.72	.32	.60	.07
Black Suspension Days	.01	.34	.49	.67	.26	.07	.06
White Suspension Days	.13	.60	.22	.49	.03	.61	.05
Total Suspension Rate	.56	.51	.13	.34	.40	.22	.15
Black Suspension Rate	.24	.31	.51	.42	.42	.37	.16
White Suspension Rate	.64	.16	.24	.21	.46	.77	.49

* Insufficient data

Table 2

Factors Significantly** Associated with Drop Out rates in Jr. & Sr. High Schools
of Varying Social Composition

	Low Income	Medium Income	Higher Income	Integrated	Segregated Black	Segregated White	App
Mobility		X	X		X		
Absence	X		X	X	X		X
Self Concept	X	X	X		X	X	
Reading Achievement		*	*	*	X	X	X
Math Achievement		*		*	X	X	X
Total Suspension Days		X	X	X		X	
Black Suspension Days			X	X			
White Suspension Days		X		X		X	
Total Suspension Rate	X	X			X		
Black Suspension Rate			X	X			
White Suspension Rate	X				X	X	X

** A Pearson Correlation Coefficient of .40 or greater was considered "practically significant"
(see fuller explanations previously cited)

* Insufficient Data

Table 3.1

Social Composition of Schools as a Predictor of Dropout Rates

Correlation Coefficient

Socio Economic Composition

Low	3.53
Medium	N.S.
High	2.09

Racial Composition

Segregated Black	N.S.
Segregated White	N.S.
Integrated	N.S.

N.S. - Not significant

Table 4
Profile of Strata

Racial Composition	Mobility	Absence	Self Concept	Reading Achievement	Math Achievement	Suspension Rate in % 1972-73	Average Duration of Sus- pension in Days 1972-73	Suspension Rates in % 1973-74
Integrated Junior High	32	12.00	69.00	5.1	6.2	15.97	6.82	16.1
Integrated Senior High	19.75	16.50	75.25	---	---	6.44	3.82	17.85
Segregated Black Junior High	34.83	19.00	62.33	4.4	5.9	9.60	5.98	17.00
Segregated Black Senior High	32.5	33.00	68.5	---	---	8.47	5.21	7.00
Segregated White Junior High	22	13.00	66.5	6.7	7.5	6.60	6.50	11.04
Segregated White Senior High	17	13.00	82	---	---	11.84	3.0	1.04
Appalachian Junior High	34	21.67	61.67	5.0	6.0	13.70	4.96	20.52
Appalachian Senior High	19	15.00	77.5	---	---	7.50	3.80	3.61
<u>Socioeconomic Composition</u>								
Lower Junior High	35.57	20.29	60.14	4.5	5.8	11.03	3.48	19.15
Lower Senior High	32.5	33.00	68.50	---	---	8.47	5.22	7.05
Middle Junior High	29.00	16.33	69.00	5.2	6.3	12.42	7.62	15.92
Middle Senior High	19.33	10.67	75.67	---	---	6.64	3.64	20.75
Upper Junior High	22.29	12.57	65.00	6.5	7.3	15.29	5.24	10.42
Upper Senior High	19.00	14.50	78.00	---	---	6.72	3.54	5.15

Table 5

Suspension Rates and Duration of Suspension for All Schools
1972-1973 vs. 1973-1974

	Black Suspension Rates in %	White Suspension Rates in %	Average Duration of Suspension in Days for Blacks	Average Duration of Suspension in Days for Whites
Junior High Schools 1972-1973	12.77	11.13	6.4	4.9
Senior High Schools 1972-1973	8.0	6.58	4.4	3.2
Junior High Schools 1973-1974	18.60	11.43	5.7	5.6
Senior High Schools 1973-1974	13.34	7.86	4.0	4.1