

# Reaction to: “Educational Equality and the Dream That Never Was: The Confluence of Race Based Institutional Harm and Adverse Childhood Experiences (Aces) In Post-*Brown* America”

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In this article, Carr argues that although the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling outlawed legal school discrimination, state-sanctioned racism has been reconstituted into new forms of educational inequality. Carr begins by discussing how the effects of structural racism contribute to and exacerbate the prevalence and consequences of “adverse childhood experiences” (ACEs). Carr argues that impoverished children, and particularly minority children, are more often subjected to these ACEs than privileged non-minorities. Children who are subjected to ACEs experience more significant physical and mental health problems, an increased risk of unhealthy behaviors, violence and re-victimization, higher rates of substance abuse, and premature mortality. Carr last argues that ACEs, especially when cumulative, can result in low academic achievement, increased absenteeism, disruptive behavior, increased risk for substance misuse, emotional and conduct issues, and increased use of special education services.

Carr states that the advent of zero tolerance policies has transformed schools across the United States into pathways to the criminal justice system. Carr shows that minority students, who are more often afflicted by ACEs, are disproportionately victimized by zero-tolerance policies. This leads to an increased number of suspensions and expulsions for minority students. These “exclusionary educational policies” have led to a surge in the juvenile court system, of which minority children are also primarily the victims. Instead of exclusionary policies, Carr promotes the adoption of a new “trauma-informed, civil rights-based restorative paradigm.” This approach entails expanding the use of trauma-informed practices and restorative interventions, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS). Additionally, Carr proposes that an infusion of state and federal funding is needed to better support overextended teachers.

While Carr’s analysis provides a compelling look into the consequences of exclusionary educational policies, such as the zero-tolerance policy, Carr fails to identify and discuss many counterarguments that proponents of zero-tolerance policies may have regarding their effectiveness. Zero tolerance has been described by proponents as a means of providing clear guidelines to students of what is expected of them in

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the classroom and creating a safer and more disciplined learning environment overall.<sup>1</sup>

The American Psychological Association (APA) conducted a study in 2008 that evaluated the effectiveness of zero-tolerance policies in schools. The APA found that many of the presumptions about zero-tolerance policies were unfounded. Specifically, the APA found that there is no evidence that zero-tolerance policies increase the consistency of school discipline, that the removal of disruptive students does not result in a more satisfactory school climate, that school suspension does not deter future rates of misbehavior and suspension amongst students, and that communities surrounding schools regard school suspension and expulsion as unfair.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the evidence compiled by the APA supports Carr's theory regarding the ineffectiveness of exclusionary school policies. However, Carr's argument is hindered by her failure to even address these considerations.

Carr focuses her paper primarily on the discriminatory effects of exclusionary school policies and how these policies contribute to the mass incarceration of minorities after high school. While this is a very serious issue, Carr's article would have a sounder foundation if it directly addressed the proposed benefits of zero-tolerance policies and explained how a "restorative paradigm" would serve to help maintain a safe and productive school environment. However, despite this critique, Carr's article still effectively highlights an important, and often overlooked, societal issue and provides an intriguing alternative method.

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1. Nesa Sasser, *Positive Effects of the Zero Tolerance Policy Used In Schools*, CLASSROOM (Sept. 27, 2017), <https://www.theclassroom.com/positive-effects-zero-tolerance-policy-used-schools-17208.html>.

2. American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, *Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools*, 63 AM. PSYCHOL. 852, 852-62 (Dec. 2008).