

27-09-16

Lee V. Gaines

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/evanston/news/ct-evr-eths-d202-discipline-tl-0929-20160927-story.html>

**Evanston high school sees progress narrowing racial gap for suspensions**

The number of students suspended at [Evanston](http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/evanston/) Township High School has steadily decreased over the last seven years, but black, Hispanic and Latino students are still suspended at higher rates than their white peers, according to a recent report.

The report, which was presented at a recent Evanston Township High School District 202 Board of Education meeting, was lauded by board members as generally good news. The number of days students spend outside of the classroom either in out-of-school suspension or at the district's Alternative Learning Center has decreased roughly 30 percent since the 2013-14 school year, according to the data presented.

Additionally, 277 students were suspended, including both in-school and out-of-school suspensions, last school year, compared to 470 during the 2009-10 school year. Last year, 91 percent of ETHS students served no suspensions compared to 84 percent six years prior.

A longstanding gap between the number of white ETHS students and the number of minority students suspended persists, though it has shrunk over the past seven years, according to the data presented. Last school year, 17 percent of black students at ETHS served some form of suspension compared to 10 percent of Hispanic and Latino students and three percent of white students. During the 2009-10 school year, nearly a third of the high school's black students were suspended compared to 17 percent of Hispanic and Latino students and six percent of white students.

Marcus Campbell, assistant superintendent and principal at ETHS, said high school staff are aware that a "disproportionate number of black students" are suspended and "we believe the school-to-prison pipeline is real."

"I have discussed this particular data phenomenon with our staff and have challenged all of us to think about what we can do in our roles to address these disparities," he said.

Campbell added that the district is working to "create a culture of belonging" in the high school and is focused on using alternatives to suspension to handle disciplinary issues and disputes on campus.

"Many of our black students are asking for support and we are doing all we can do to assist them and we're calling on support from the board and the community to help us address these challenges and model the kind of behavior we want from our students," he said.

Board president Pat Savage-Williams echoed Campbell's assertion that the "school-to-prison pipeline is real and it's in Evanston."

According to the U.S. Education Department's Civil Rights Data Collection survey results from 2013-2014, black students are 2.3 times more likely than their white peers to be referred to law enforcement or arrested as a result of an incident at school. The survey results also indicate that black preschoolers are 3.6 times more likely to be suspended than their white peers.

Board member Gretchen Livingston described Campbell's remarks as "spot on" but "at the same time, there is so much good news here and I don't want to lose sight of that." She said direct comparison between the 2009-10 year and last year does the district and its board a "disservice." Enrollment has increased by about 100 students over the last seven years, she said, meaning the decline in suspension rates are even more significant when a larger student population is taken into account.

The decline in the number of suspensions and also the decrease in the gap between the number of white and black students suspended can be attributed to a combination of pressure from board members and implementation of new strategies and greater consciousness around racial disparities from the district's administrators, said board member Jonathan Baum.

"Something important and positive is happening here and it's not happening fast enough," he said.

Savage-Williams said she appreciates the progress that's been made but "it still scares me because I see the patterns, it still makes me nervous and I'm not ready to quite celebrate yet."