Research Partnership with the Iowa City Community School District
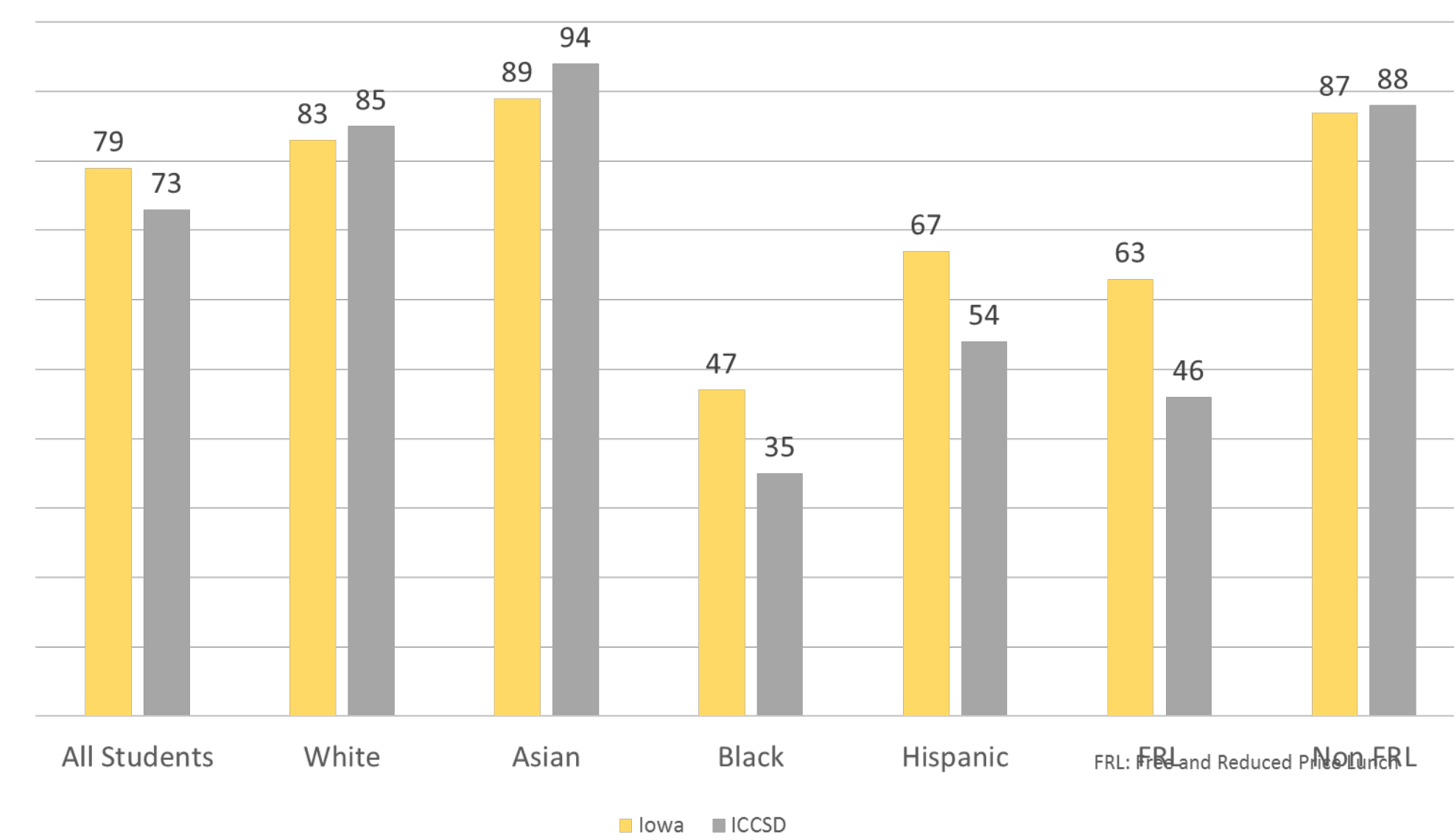
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Background

Disparities in academic achievement, disciplinary punishment, and school experience have been well-documented across the nation, in Iowa, and in the Iowa City Community School District (ICCSD).

The graph below shows that while the ICCSD is a high achieving district overall, achievement gaps by race and income are larger in the ICCSD than they are on average at the state level.

2015-16 Iowa Assessments Results: Percent Proficient in 8th Grade Reading

Iowa / ICCSD — All Students: 79/73; White: 83/85; Asian: 89/94; Black: 47/35; Hispanic: 67/54; FRL: 63/46; Non-FRL: 87/88

FRL: Free and Reduced Price Lunch

Goal

Use a research-practice partnership model to address disparities in the ICCSD and work toward achieving their goal *"that all students can achieve at high levels and that equitable classrooms are essential to their success."* The university-community partnership aims to equip the ICCSD with tools and information to tackle disparate outcomes with solutions grounded in evidence.

Process

This interdisciplinary project began in 2015 to leverage social science and education policy research and practitioner knowledge to effectively address problems of policy and practice and improve students' educational opportunities and outcomes.

The project follows a community partnership phased model, working collaboratively to identify and address systematic issues in educational settings in ways that are beneficial, impactful, and sustainable for the District.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Anonymous survey administered to all 6th, 8th, and 11th grade students in February 2016. The survey asked students about perceptions and experiences regarding nine dimensions of school climate, including:

- **Teacher Relationships**
- **Mentor Relationships**
- **Support Resources**
- **Negative Experiences at School**
- **Social Belonging**
- **Motivations for Attending School**
- **Perceptions of Discipline**
- **Salience of Race and Gender**

Developed School Profiles with school-specific data

FOCUS AREAS

Drawing on the findings from the needs assessment, three focus areas were identified for the District: **teacher and mentor relationships; inclusive community;** and **disciplinary environment.**

For each focus area, a policy brief with recommendations for evidence-based strategies for addressing disparities was developed to answer the following questions

1. Why is this particular aspect of student experience important?
2. What is the extent of the problem in regard to this aspect of student experience in the ICCSD?
3. What are the strategies for intervening that have been shown in the education research literature to be effective?
4. What are the evidence-based recommendations that can inform the ICCSD decision-making process?

Results
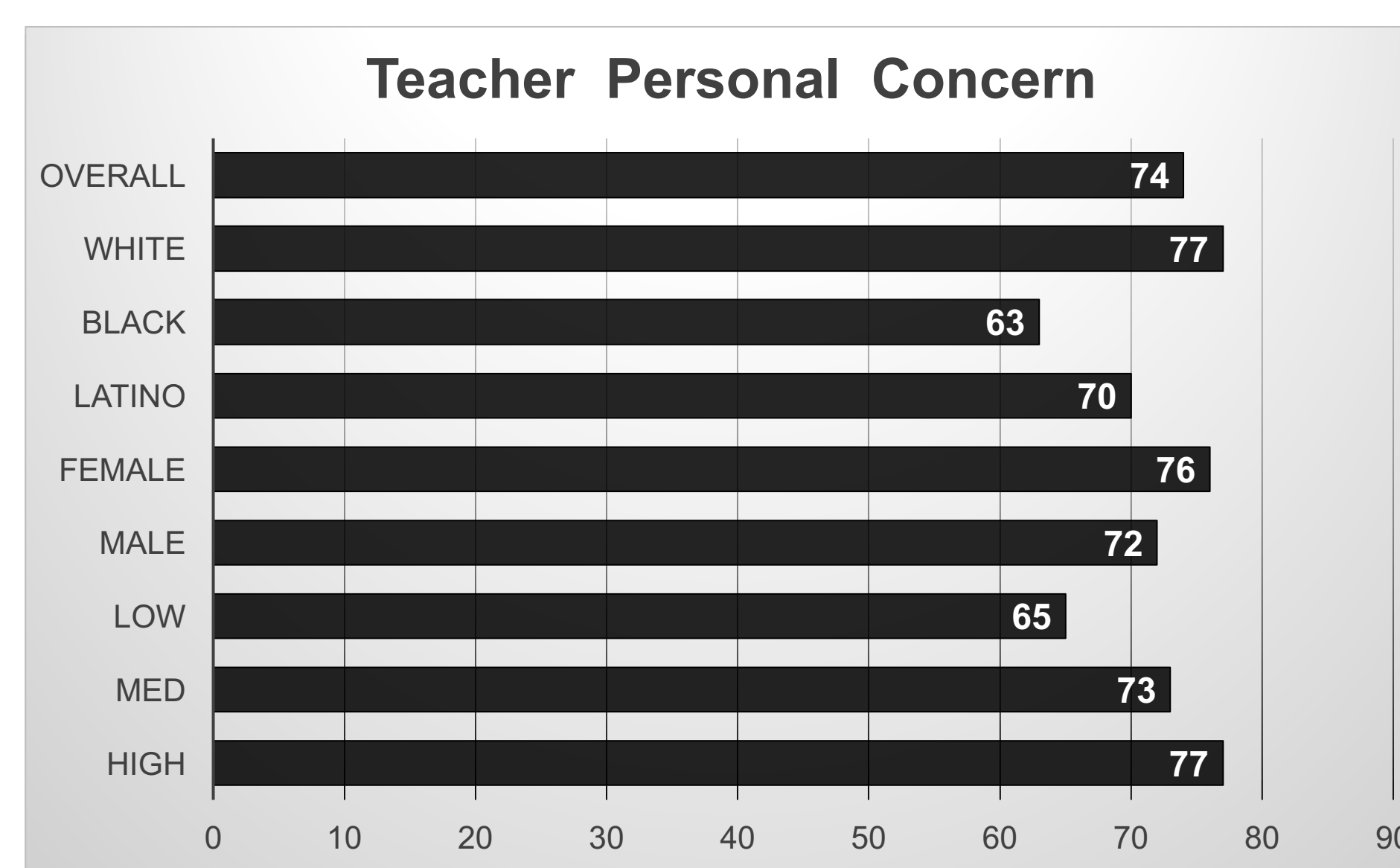
Demographics
2,388 total respondents

Race
60% White
8% Multiracial
7% Latino
6% Asian
5% Other Race

Socioeconomic Status (Parent Education)
46% Post College/Advanced Degree
18% High School or Less
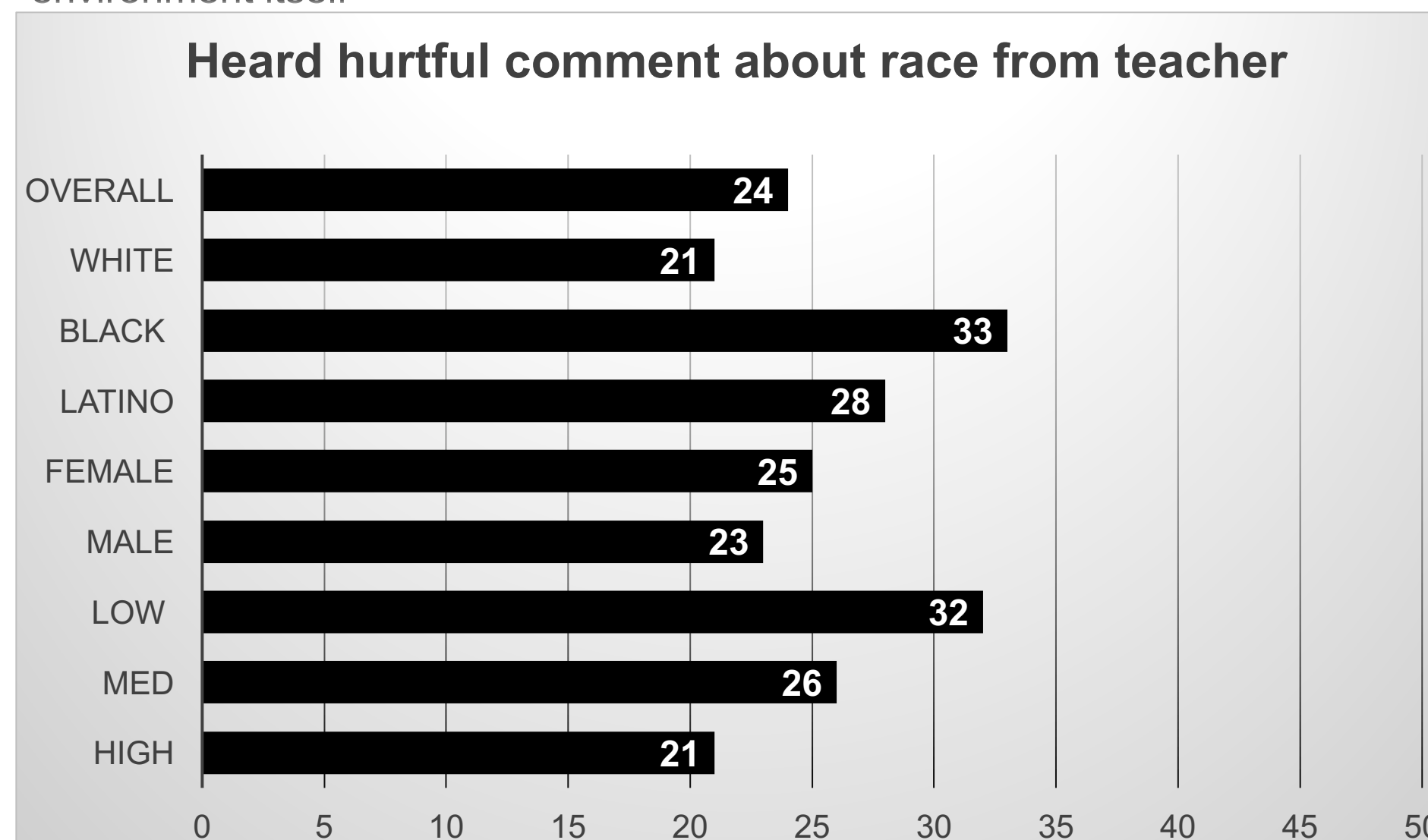37% Some College or BA

Teacher Relationships

One of the most important aspects of student experiences in schools and classrooms are positive, supportive relationships. Positive relationships between students and teachers, and non-academic mentors, have been found to be associated with higher levels of student achievement.

Teacher Personal Concern

OVERALL: 74; WHITE: 77; BLACK: 63; LATINO: 70; FEMALE: 76; MALE: 72; LOW: 65; MED: 73; HIGH: 77

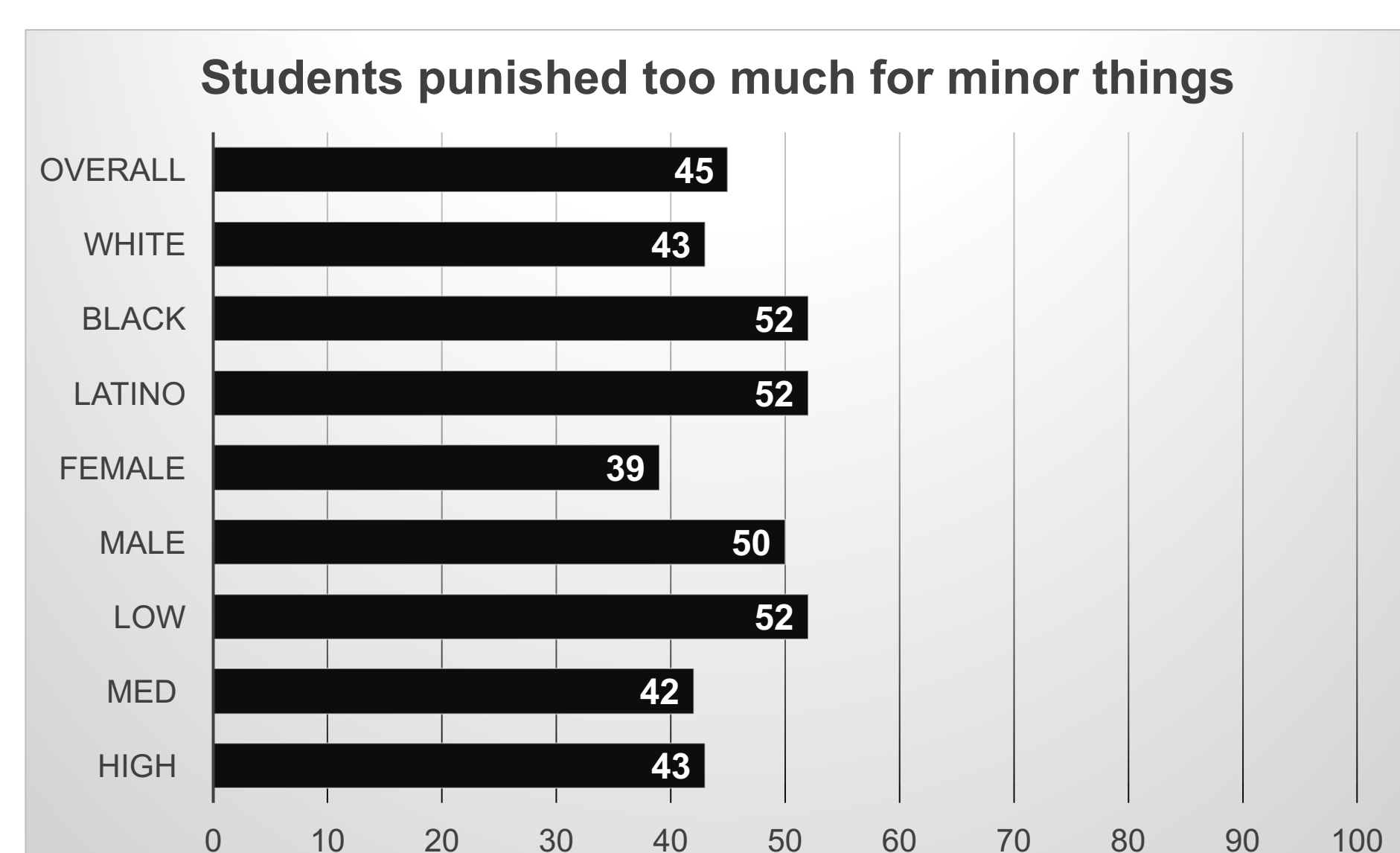| Survey Measure	Overall	Race Disparity	Gender Disparity	Socioeconomic Status Disparity
Teacher Encouragement	90%	White=91% **Black=87%** Latino=90%	Female=91% Male=89%	**Low=85%** Med=88% High=92%
Teacher Academic Relationship	84%	White=85% **Black=79%** Latino=82%	Female=84% Male=83%	**Low=81%** Med=82% High=86%
Teacher Personal Concern	74%	White=77% **Black=63%** Latino=70%	Female=76% Male=72%	**Low=65%** Med=73% High=77%
Teacher General Treatment	83%	White=85% **Black=77%** Latino=81%	Female=85% Male=81%	**Low=76%** Med=83% High=86%
Teacher Equitable Treatment	81%	White=84% **Black=75%** Latino=84%	**Female=80%** Male=83%	**Low=76%** Med=82% High=84%
Teacher Supportive Treatment	75%	White=76% **Black=71%** Latino=75%	**Female=74%** Male=76%	**Low=67%** Med=74% High=79%

Inclusive Community

School climate is "the cumulative reflection of staff and student experiences representing their respective goals, values, relationships, and the overall institutional environment of the school" Staff and student experiences of the school climate are shaped by safety of the school, teaching and learning practices, and relationships among individuals in the school and surrounding community, and the structural environment itself

Heard hurtful comment about race from teacher

OVERALL: 24; WHITE: 21; BLACK: 33; LATINO: 28; FEMALE: 25; MALE: 23; LOW: 32; MED: 26; HIGH: 21

Survey Measure	District Average	Race Disparity	Gender Disparity	Socioeconomic Disparity
Positive sense of Social Belonging in school	80%	White=83% **Black=71%** Latino=78%	Female=80% Male=80%	**Low=72%** Med=77% High=85%
Treated Unfairly	67%	**White=70%** Black=68% Latino=53%	Female=67% Male=67%	Low=68% **Med=70%** High=66%
Treated them as if they are not smart	64%	White=64% **Black=69%** Latino=64%	Female=63% **Male=65%**	**Low=70%** Med=68% High=59%
Treated them as if they are dishonest	53%	White=64% **Black=58%** Latino=50%	Female=46% **Male=60%**	**Low=57%** Med=55% High=51%
Acted afraid of them	53%	White=36% **Black=56%** Latino=35%	Female=46% **Male=43%**	**Low=47%** Med=43% High=35%
Acted better than them	39%	**White=84%** Black=56% Latino=33%	**Female=82%** Male=81%	Low=79% **Med=83%** High=82%
Criticized for the way they speak	82%	White=51% **Black=60%** Latino=56%	Female=50% **Male=56%**	**Low=64%** Med=53% High=50%

Disciplinary Environment

School discipline policies and practices are a crucial feature of the school climate for students. Effective disciplinary policies and practices constitute a fundamental component of school's ability to create a learning environment conducive to all students' emotional growth and academic progress.

Students punished too much for minor things

OVERALL: 45; WHITE: 43; BLACK: 52; LATINO: 52; FEMALE: 39; MALE: 50; LOW: 52; MED: 42; HIGH: 43

Survey Measure	District Average	Race Disparity	Gender Disparity	Socioeconomic Disparity
Equal punishment	69%	White=71% **Black=65%** Latino=73%	**Female=69%** Male=70%	**Low=69%** Med=70% High=70%
School rules are fair	71%	White=71% **Black=65%** Latino=71%	Female=72% **Male=70%**	**Low=69%** Med=71% High=72%
Equal punishment expectations	67%	White=67% **Black=65%** Latino=72%	Female=67% **Male=66%**	**Low=65%** Med=66% High=67%
All students are rewarded for doing a good job	36%	**White=35%** Black=41% Latino=38%	**Female=35%** Male=37%	Low=43% **Med=34%** **High=34%**

Dark Yellow: 10% difference or greater
Light Yellow: 5% to 9% difference

Recommendations

1 **Adopt a district-wide strategy for addressing disparities in student experiences and outcomes.**

The specific model that garnered widespread support was the restorative justice model. This model received support because task force members believe that it can be effective at addressing four issues of concern in the ICCSD:
- increasing school community overall
- improving teacher-student relationships
- decreasing the use of punitive disciplinary punishments
- decreasing the disparities in disciplinary action

2 **Provide training to all district staff, teachers, and administrators to improve the awareness, knowledge, and understanding of cultural competency and implicit bias.**
Task force members believe that trainings specifically related to issues of cultural competency and implicit bias are a foundational need of the District, and see this as a prerequisite for any of the other recommendations or programming targeting the improvement of student experiences and outcomes.

3 **Actively recruit and retain staff, teachers, and administrators of diverse backgrounds.**

EVALUATION

Using the annual student survey along with other data collection efforts, university researchers evaluate the equity-related programming initiatives and track changes in student experiences and outcomes. A second iteration of the student survey included items that reflect recommendations of the task force and items to evaluate equity programming implemented in the 2016-2017 school year

Next Steps

The ICCSD is well-positioned to take concrete action to work toward achieving their goal "that all students can achieve at high levels and that equitable classrooms are essential to their success." We recommend that the District conduct the student experience survey annually. From the existing survey and administrative data in the District, we have identified three key focus areas and provided evidence-based recommendations for strategies to make improvement in each of them. Receiving the feedback and recommendation of the task force now represent a clear imperative for the District to act. Using evidence-based strategies and evaluating their success in the ICCSD is crucial for achieving long-term success.

Acknowledgements

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IOWA CITY COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT