

BLACK STUDENTS NEARLY TWO TIMES AS LIKELY TO BE SUSPENDED AS WHITE PEERS IN THE ICCSD

District reports find that although black students are 20 percent of the district's population, they account for 60 percent of suspensions. The Little Hawk investigates the disproportionalities in discipline throughout the district

By Nina Lavezzo-Stecopoulos

Malcom* was playing with a BB gun. He was with two friends, but they are white, and he is black. They shot at a shed, and then the cops came. Malcom served 17 months and his friends served no time. What Malcom never knew was that he had been on the track to incarceration since kindergarten.

"[I've been suspended] from kindergarten through freshman year," Malcom said. "It was all the little things. Hopping the fence to get the ball or [getting into] arguments with teachers. It got to the point where I had my own designated spot in the office because they suspended me so much for little things. And then, obviously, I'd start getting annoyed and start building my anger. And it progressively got worse."

Malcom hasn't felt trusted at school since he was a child. He still feels that way at City.

"[Feeling watched] made me feel like I couldn't be trusted at school," Malcom said.

"THE WAY [STAFF] TREAT BLACK MEN AT CITY IS RIDICULOUS. IT'S ABSOLUTELY RIDICULOUS."

ANONYMOUS
A BLACK STUDENT AT CITY

"I should feel like I can walk through the hallways and not have to look over my shoulder. The hall monitors pop up on me random times. They're looking for me."

The United States' criminal justice system is the largest in the world. Iowa is third worst in the nation for black vs. white racial disparities in prisons, according to a study on the U.S. Bureau of Statistics by the Sentencing Project in 2016. These disparities also affect City High. Black students across the district account for 20 percent of

the district's student population and 60 percent of both in- and out-of-school suspensions.

"The way [staff] treat black men at City High is ridiculous," a black student at City said. "It's absolutely ridiculous. And we always love to talk about how we're the school that leads, every student has an equal chance of success, all of that good stuff. But unless you're a student athlete, and even if you're a student athlete, your life [as a black man] is treated as if you're always on the verge of doing something wrong. People will literally walk down the hallways, and if they see a black boy walking down the hallway will stop them to ask where they're going, what they're supposed to be doing."

In an effort to address issues related to race, the district staff is currently undergoing a two-year implicit bias training.

"Being suspended a lot of times is up to the judgment of hall monitors and teachers," Franklin Hornbuckle '20 said. Hornbuckle has received one detention, and he was the only white person in the room. "If you have implicit biases toward African Americans or minorities, then tiny judgments [by hall monitors and teachers] make a huge difference on whether or not they decide the students are up to bad things."

The bias of individuals beyond school staff plays a role in a student's chances of being suspended or even incarcerated. The bias of school staff, police, lawyers, and judges affects whether or not minors make it into the prison system. When Karen*, a Caucasian student at City, was illegally smoking marijuana with friends, they were spoken to by a Caucasian policeman.

"I put my hands up," Karen said. "It was very clear that we were smoking weed because there was a pipe, a lighter and weed on the table. We looked very high. I repeated multiple times, 'Please don't tell my mom.'"

I felt very sure that I wasn't going to get arrested. The thought never crossed my mind. I felt safe."

K a r e n
h a s

also been high at school numerous times, and she did not fear consequences at school or in the presence of a policeman.

"I was never scared of being suspended, expelled, kicked out, or even [getting] detention," Karen said. "I was always thinking, 'This teacher is going to think poorly of me,' or, 'They're going to tell my mom during conferences.'"

Karen received a warning for being caught with marijuana and received no repercussions for being under the influence at school. A charge for possession of marijuana would not have incarcerated Karen, but it could have hindered her participation in school events like sports and clubs.

"IF A STUDENT BRINGS SOMETHING THAT THE ADMINISTRATION SEES AS VALUABLE TO THEM, THEN THEY WILL [ALLOW] STUDENTS TO DO THINGS THAT THEY WOULD OTHERWISE RECEIVE HARSHER CONSEQUENCES FOR."

KAREN
A WHITE STUDENT AT CITY

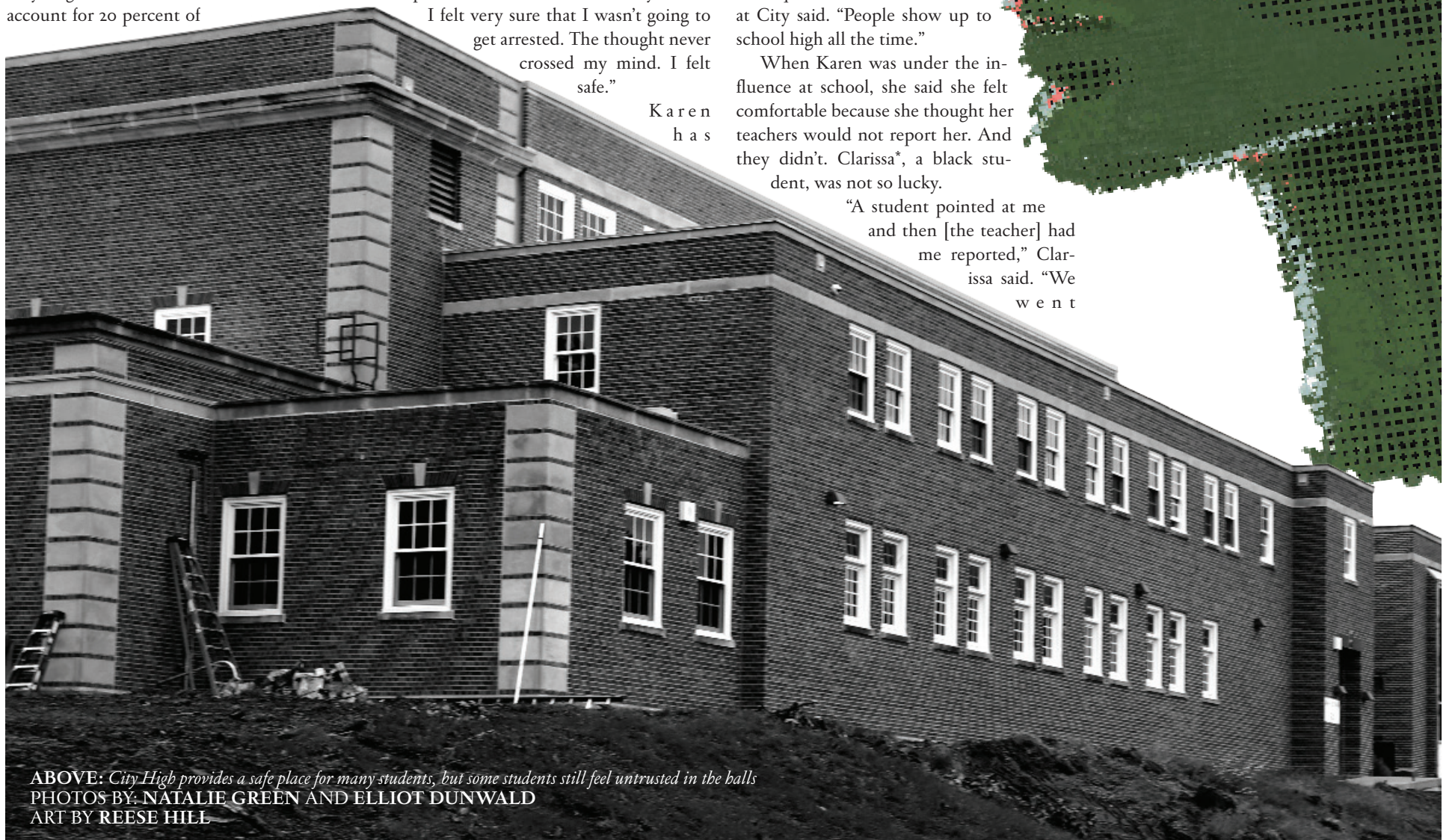
"I've had friends of color who were suspended for things that my white friends have done, gotten away with things, and never had to face the consequences," a black student at City said. "People show up to school high all the time."

When Karen was under the influence at school, she said she felt comfortable because she thought her teachers would not report her. And they didn't. Clarissa*, a black student, was not so lucky.

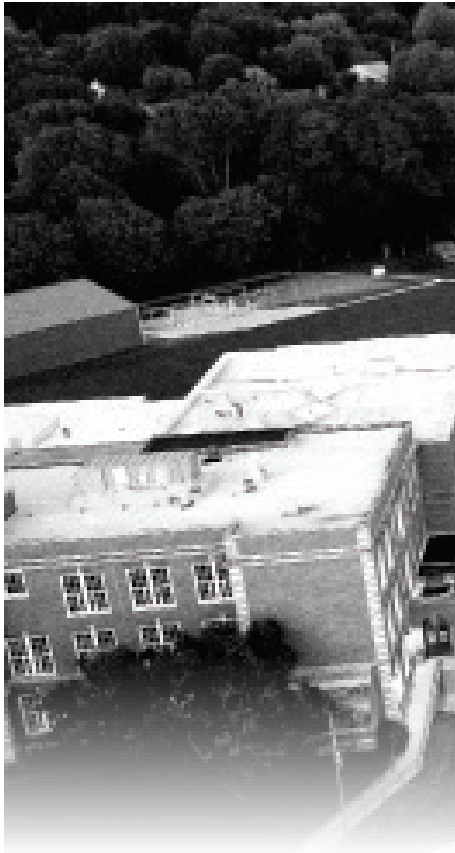
"A student pointed at me and then [the teacher] had me reported," Clarissa said. "We went

down to the office and they searched my backpack, but there wasn't anything in there. They were basically telling me how they could call the police on me. I didn't know what to say. I knew what I did, so I couldn't complain about any consequences."

Clarissa received four days of suspension total after the incident. Once she was back in school, staff members spoke with her about how she could still participate in her sport despite having been suspended. Staff discussed how she could start the season earlier in order to fully compete in the sport. The district's policy on events like this is in-



ABOVE: City High provides a safe place for many students, but some students still feel untrusted in the halls
PHOTOS BY: NATALIE GREEN AND ELLIOT DUNWALD
ART BY REESE HILL



"POSSESSION, USE, OR PURCHASE OF TOBACCO PRODUCTS...ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES...ILLEGAL DRUGS OR THE UNAUTHORIZED POSSESSION, USE, OR PURCHASE OF OTHERWISE LAWFUL DRUGS...ENGAGING IN ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY THAT WOULD BE GROUNDS FOR ARREST OR CITATION IN THE CRIMINAL OR JUVENILE COURT SYSTEM [WILL RESULT IN LOSS OF ELIGIBILITY FOR PARTICIPATION IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES]. FIRST OFFENSE...SUSPENSION FROM ONE-THIRD OF THE SEASON'S CONTEST. SECOND OFFENSE...SUSPENSION FROM ONE-HALF THE SEASON'S CONTESTS... THIRD OFFENSE...SUSPENSION FROM ATHLETIC COMPETITION FOR TWELVE (12) CALENDAR MONTHS."

CITY HIGH 2019-2020 PARENT/ATHLETE MANUAL



cluded in its good conduct policy.

"Black, brown, green, or whatever, we have a code of conduct here at City High that we follow for athletic suspensions. It is the same as when a student gets an F in a class. The rules [are] the same," Gerry Coleman, dean of students at City High, said.

If a student is suspended in or out of school, the administration decides which level of offense that suspension belongs in within the good conduct policy. Once the administration decides the level of the suspension, coaches must abide by the punishment that follows it.

"Once that decision is made the coach has to honor that," John Bacon, principal of City High said. "I couldn't more strongly defend our record on good conduct penalty's enforcement. If there is a documented, clear-cut case that meets the threshold of the good conduct penalty, it is enforced 100 percent of the time. People can say things and they're there. They just have a misunderstanding because the reality is that there are things that our athletes may do and get away with, unfortunately."

Despite the administration's belief that the good conduct policy is consistently enforced, some students still believe athletes can avoid serving full penalties for drug-related offenses.

"I think sports-wise, I don't know that everyone has the same consequences," Clarissa said. "I know [REDACTED, a student athlete at City] has definitely been caught multiple times doing stuff and they're still participating in their sport. I was at a party with [REDACTED] this summer that got busted. I left before it got busted, but they were still there and their mom talked to the police so he could do his full sports season."

Caucasian students are 56.6 percent of the district's student population and 32.3 percent of total suspensions.

"They can't drug-test [a certain City High sports team] because these [athletes] will continue to do drugs," Karen said. "The school has a good [sport] team, and we like that type of thing. I think that if a student brings something that the administration sees as valuable to them, then they will allow students to do things that they otherwise would receive harsher consequences."

There are many causes for disproportional-

ity in suspensions. In order to be suspended, students are first reported by their teacher, a hall monitor, or a fellow student, but not all teachers, hall monitors, and students report their suspicions. This is sometimes due to personal beliefs and sometimes due to lack of trust in the administration's response to reports. This means that student discipline is at the discretion of individuals.

"When it's tangible, when it's smoking weed, it's vaping, it's punching someone right in the nose; that is concrete, more than it is if you're bullying someone," Scott Jespersen, City High's assistant principal, said.

In addressing the multitude of potential causes of the discipline disparities between white and black students at City, the school turned to the work of Ruby Payne, a white woman who works in education leadership.

"[Payne's] theory was that sometimes with African American students and white teachers, there is a culture difference," Jespersen said. "Some of it is spatial, some of it's volume, different things. But I don't think you can take one thing and say, 'Oh, that's why [the disproportionality is there].'"

The issue of representation in City High's staff came up numerous times in a staff meeting in November 2019 where students spoke to staff members about bettering the school. Despite pressure from students and families, the district has yet to hire more teachers of color.

"Our staff doesn't look like 40 percent of our students," Jespersen said. "As somebody that helps hire all the teachers here, we're not seeing [African American] applicants for our positions."

Finding solutions to an issue like racial disparities is undeniably difficult. Latasha DeLoach, the vice chair of the Iowa Disproportionate Minority Contact Committee, a subcommittee of the Juvenile Justice Advisory Council, believes this topic becomes even more complex when white individuals run the institutions that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline.

"You have people who are running the school who've never had those experiences," DeLoach said. "[Administrators] only hear about [struggling students] and they feel bad for them. They have pain in their hearts for them. But they're looking through a looking glass. [Administrators] are looking in like,

'Man, that looks rough over there,' but they have no idea what it is like. They don't know what that hustle is like. Where [students are] trying to figure out what [their] next meal is coming from, or how [they're] gonna make sure [their] brothers and sisters are cool. If you don't know that life, if it's just something you've read about, then you don't understand why people make the choices that they make."

The real cause of the disproportional-ity could be many things. Whether the staff

doesn't look like the students and there's a 'cultural difference,' or teachers aren't consistent in reporting students bad behaviors, DeLoach believes the root of the issue is something no one wants to talk about.

"We ask why there are so many suspensions, but we're not looking at the core reason of what leads to these things: racism," DeLoach said. "We don't want to talk about that."

Continued on thelittlehawk.com
*Names changed for protection of minors.

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LATASHA DELOACH
VICE CHAIR OF THE IOWA DISPROPORTIONATE MINORITY CONTACT COMMITTEE

"I DON'T THINK YOU CAN TAKE ONE THING AND SAY, 'OH, THAT'S WHY [THE DISPROPORTIONALITY IS THERE].'"

SCOTT JESPERSEN

What is the SCHOOL PRISON PIPELINE

According to The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the school to prison pipeline is "a disturbing national trend wherein children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems." These children are often people of color and often have learning disabilities or pasts involving abuse, poverty, and neglect.

Policies that contribute to the school to prison pipeline are inadequate resources in public schools, zero-tolerance policies where students are punished regardless of circumstances, police presence in school hallways, and alternative disciplinary schools.

