

# **Discipline, Achievement, and Race**

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**Is Zero Tolerance the Answer?**

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represented the population we were trying to reach, which was primarily teachers in mainstream public middle and high schools. The other four groups were comprised of teachers at the school where we held the focus groups, with the exception of one group where two of the seven teachers came from a nearby high school (see table 5.1).

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## Exclusion Is Not the Only Alternative: The Children Left Behind Project

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Current evidence strongly suggests that the philosophy and practice of zero tolerance school discipline has failed as an educational intervention to ensure student safety, improve school climates, advance student learning, or provide equitable results; yet, the approach remains popular among many educational administrators and political leaders. The popularity of zero tolerance, however, does not mean that all educational leaders ascribe to this paradigm. Absent from much of the research base to date are the voices of school principals actively promoting alternative philosophies and practices better suited to meet the paramount goals of student safety and learning. This chapter describes the findings of the Children Left Behind project, focusing on the perspectives and practices of school leaders in one midwestern state. The emerging results of this project suggest that (1) diversity exists among school principals in their endorsement of zero tolerance school discipline, (2) the disciplinary perspectives of school principals are related to the use of exclusionary student removal and use of preventive alternatives, and (3) the perspective of principals endorsing alternatives to student exclusion suggest that removing students from the learning environment is not the only method available for keeping students safe to learn.

Out-of-school suspension and expulsion are widely used in our schools, and their frequency is increasing. Our best evidence to date shows that suspension and expulsion are among the most widely used disciplinary techniques, perhaps the most frequently used disciplinary tools (Bowditch, 1993;