

LET'S GET

REAL OSHKOSH

RACIAL EQUITY ADVOCACY AND LEADERSHIP IN OSHKOSH

RACIAL DISCIPLINE DISPARITIES REPORT

Oshkosh Area School District

May 2023

About REAL Oshkosh

REAL (Racial Equity, Advocacy, and Leadership) Oshkosh is committed to racial justice in Oshkosh, with an initial focus on our students and our schools. We are a community of advocates and leaders pushing for substantive changes in Oshkosh to increase racial equity.

REAL Oshkosh grew out of dialogue among members of the Oshkosh Parents of Black/Brown Students and seeks to amplify these parents' calls for action in Oshkosh.

REAL Oshkosh is supported by SEPO Zambia.

REAL OSHKOSH
RACIAL EQUITY, ADVOCACY, AND LEADERSHIP IN OSHKOSH



About SEPO Zambia

SEPO Zambia is a non-profit organization dedicated to sustainability, education, and progress in western Zambia and northeastern Wisconsin. In conjunction with our local partners, SEPO Zambia identifies needs/strengths, develops global partnerships, and builds more sustainable futures.



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About the Data

All district and state level data presented in REAL Oshkosh's report come from publicly available data through Wisconsin's Information System for Education (WISEdash). The data can be found at: <https://wisedash.dpi.wi.gov/>

This report uses the "rate" data available on WISEdash. The rate is calculated by dividing the count of all out-of-school student/suspension removals throughout the school year by enrollment. In most of our charts/graphs, the rate is represented as a percentage that equals the number of out-of-school suspensions of a particular group divided by the total number of students in that group.

The qualitative data in the report was gathered from 2020 – 2023 through numerous community conversations with Oshkosh Parents of Black/Brown Students. The statements in this report represent the shared experiences of multiple students and families, not just isolated incidents (though isolated incidents also matter and build wider patterns).

Introduction

We believe that the data is important and tells a critical piece of the story.

We also believe that our lived experiences and those of our kids need to be heard.

We believe intent does not matter as much as impact

Intent is what you wanted to do – Impact is the reality of your actions (or inactions)

Even though the intention of the school district is positive and well-meaning, the educational outcomes are significantly worse for Black/Brown students in the school district, consistently every year.

Working toward educational equity means that we must pay extra attention to groups of students that have been most marginalized by schools to help shift these educational outcomes for the positive.

"Not everything
that is faced can be
changed, but
nothing can be
changed until it is
faced."

*James Baldwin, As Much
Truth As One Can Bear*

"Zero tolerance" discipline policies have been proven to impact Black/Brown students more negatively than White students. Research consistently shows that suspensions and expulsions cause a "school-to-prison pipeline" for Black/Brown youth.

Wisconsin has the largest Black-White discipline gap of all 50 states at the high school level. A [2015 report](#) from the Civil Rights Project at UCLA found that Wisconsin tops the nation in suspension rates, with a 34% suspension rate for Black high school students and only a 4% suspension rate for white students. Wisconsin's suspension rate for Black elementary students is the second-highest in the country at 12%.

"A social movement that only moves people is merely a revolt. A movement that changes both people and institutions is a revolution."

— *Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Why We Can't Wait*

Unfortunately, the Oshkosh Area School District fares worse than the state of Wisconsin overall. In 2021-22, OASD suspension rates for Black students were as follows:

	OASD	STATE
Elementary	32%	25%
Middle School	153%	95%
High School	53%	59%

Data from WisDash

As parents, we believe that every incident of suspension and expulsion for Black/Brown students represents a lost opportunity for education and increases students' disconnection from their school community.

When disparities between racial groups are **so consistent**, either those in authority believe that certain groups of students merit harsher discipline OR **they recognize that their educational system has built-in biases and inequities that raise substantive racial justice concerns.**

"Racial oppression should always be an emotional topic to discuss. It should always be anger inducing. As long as racism exists to ruin the lives of countless people of color, it should be something that upsets us. But it upsets us because it exists, not because we talk about it."
-Ijeoma Oluo, *So You Want to Talk About Race*

Executive Summary

The extreme disparity gap in discipline between White students and students identified as Black/Brown persists throughout each of the past six school years in the district.

The most recent data available, for the 2021-2022 school year, shows that:

- Elementary school students identified as Black/Hispanic/Two+ Races were suspended at a rate of **26%**, more than **4 times** the rate of White students (6%)
- Middle school students identified as Black/Hispanic/Two+ Races were suspended at a rate of **103%**, more than **4 times** the rate of White students (24%)
- High school students identified as Black/Hispanic/Two+ Races were suspended at a rate of **38%**, more than **3 times** the rate of White students (12%)
- High school students identified as Black/Hispanic/Two+ Races were expelled at a rate of **1.7%**, **9 times** the rate of White students (.19%)

Disparities for Oshkosh's Black students were especially extreme in the 2021-2022 school year:

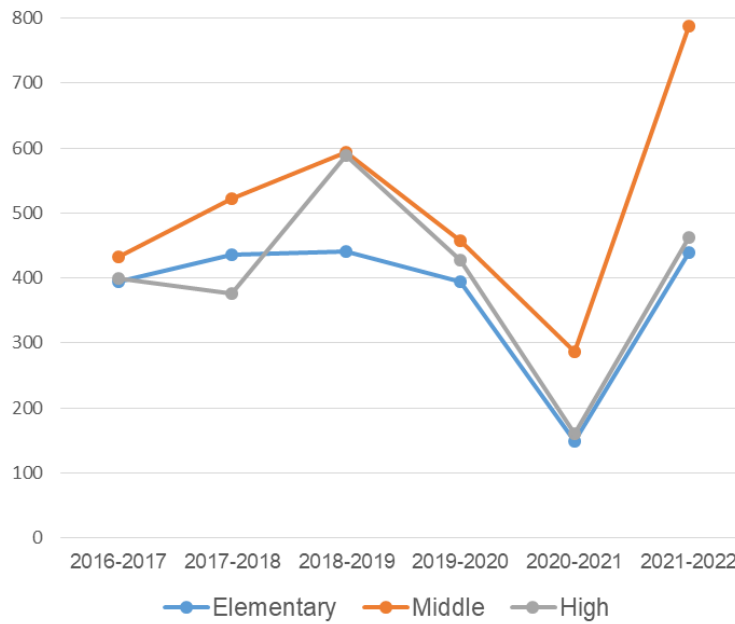
- The suspension rate for Black elementary school students in Oshkosh (**32%**) was **5.6 times** the rate in Appleton (5.6%) and in Fond du Lac (5.6%).
- Black elementary school students at two schools, Read and Merrill, were suspended at rates of **98%** and **81%** respectively, more than **16 and 13 times** the rate of White students in the district (6%)
- Black middle school students at one middle school, Webster Stanley, were suspended at a rate of **261%**, the equivalent of every Black student being suspended 2.6 times, and more than **10 times** the rate of White students in the district (24%)
- At Merrill Middle School, Black students were suspended at a rate of **158%** and students identified as Two or More Races were suspended at a rate of **159%**, both more than **6 times** the rate of White students in the district (24%)

- Black high school students in Oshkosh were suspended at a rate of **59%**, **5 times** the rate of White students (12%)
- Black high school students alone were expelled at a rate of **4.6%**, **24 times** the rate of White students (.19%)
- The suspension rate for Black middle school students in Oshkosh (**155%**) was **4.5 times** the rate in Appleton (34%) and **8.6 times** the rate in Fond du Lac (18%) – two neighboring and comparable districts

We believe that the Oshkosh Area School District's extreme disparities in discipline over the past six school years **clearly demonstrates discriminatory practices and treatment toward Black/Brown students.**

Total Suspensions by School Type

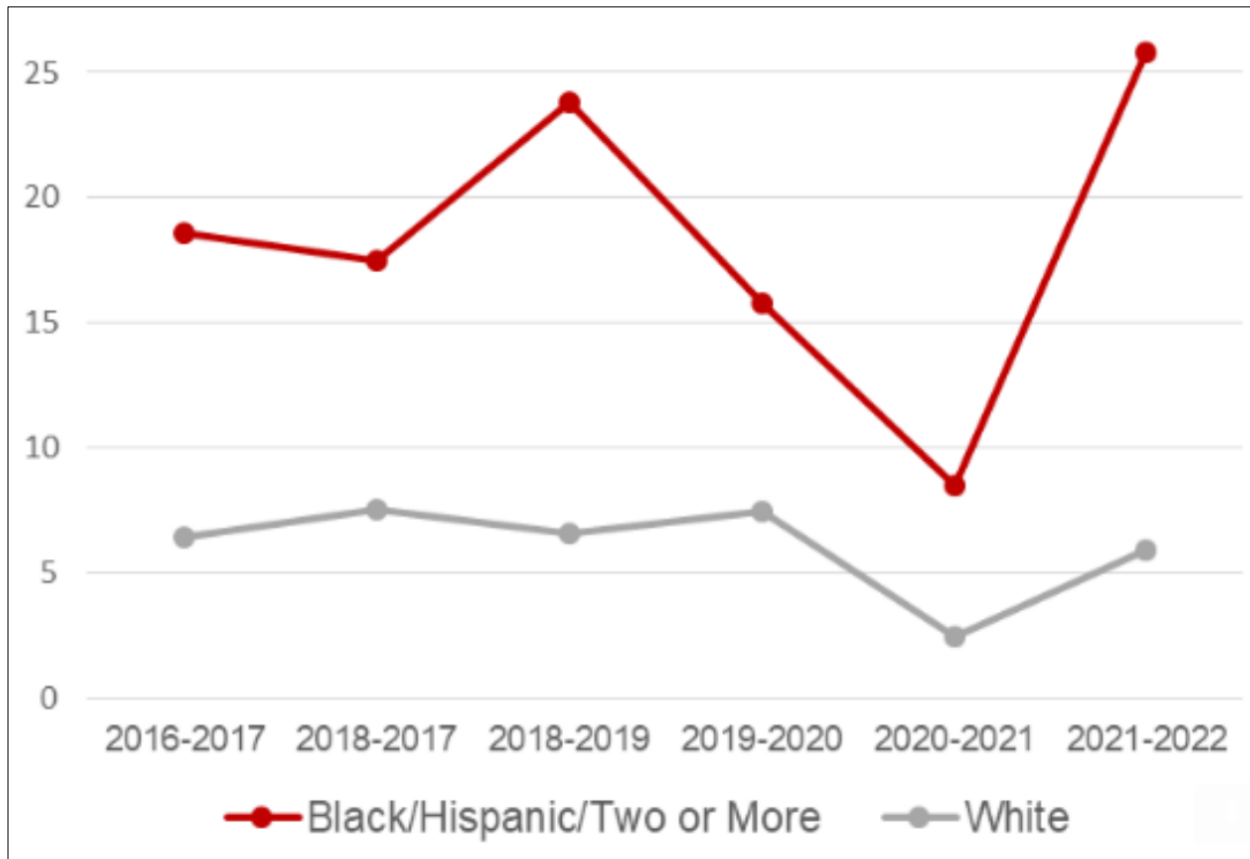
Total Number of Suspensions by School Type
Oshkosh Area School District



- In 2021-22, the rate of suspension in OASD was **18%** overall, with significantly higher rates in our middle schools (**40%**)
- REAL Oshkosh is deeply concerned about the over-disciplining that is occurring with our middle school students and its impact on their educational experience and mental health
- The dip in suspensions during the 2020-21 school year was due to the COVID-19 pandemic as students were not in their classrooms for the majority of the year (OASD still managed over 600 suspensions that year – 7 times the rates seen in Appleton and nearly 8 times the rates in Fond du Lac)
- The impacts of suspensions on students are considerable – negatively impacting learning outcomes, attendance, future behavior, school engagement, self-esteem, and mental health. For a full sense of how suspensions do much more harm than good, see the list of resources at the end of this report.

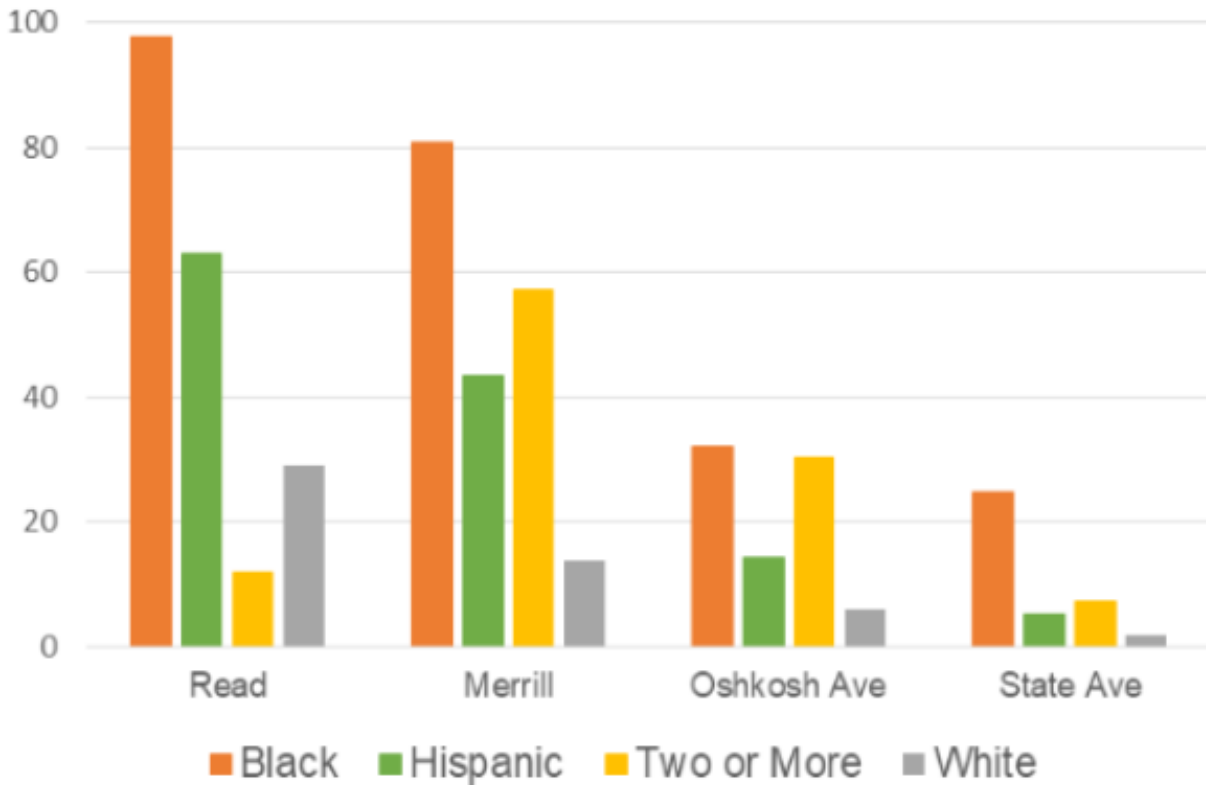
Elementary School Discipline Disparities

Rate of Elementary School Suspensions by Race/Ethnicity
Oshkosh Area School District



- In 2021-2022, elementary school students identified as Black/Hispanic/Two or More Races were suspended at a rate of **26%**, more than 4 times the rate of White students (6%)
- The major disparity gap in suspensions between White elementary students and elementary students identified as Black/Hispanic/ Two or More Races persists throughout each school year - **and is not getting better**

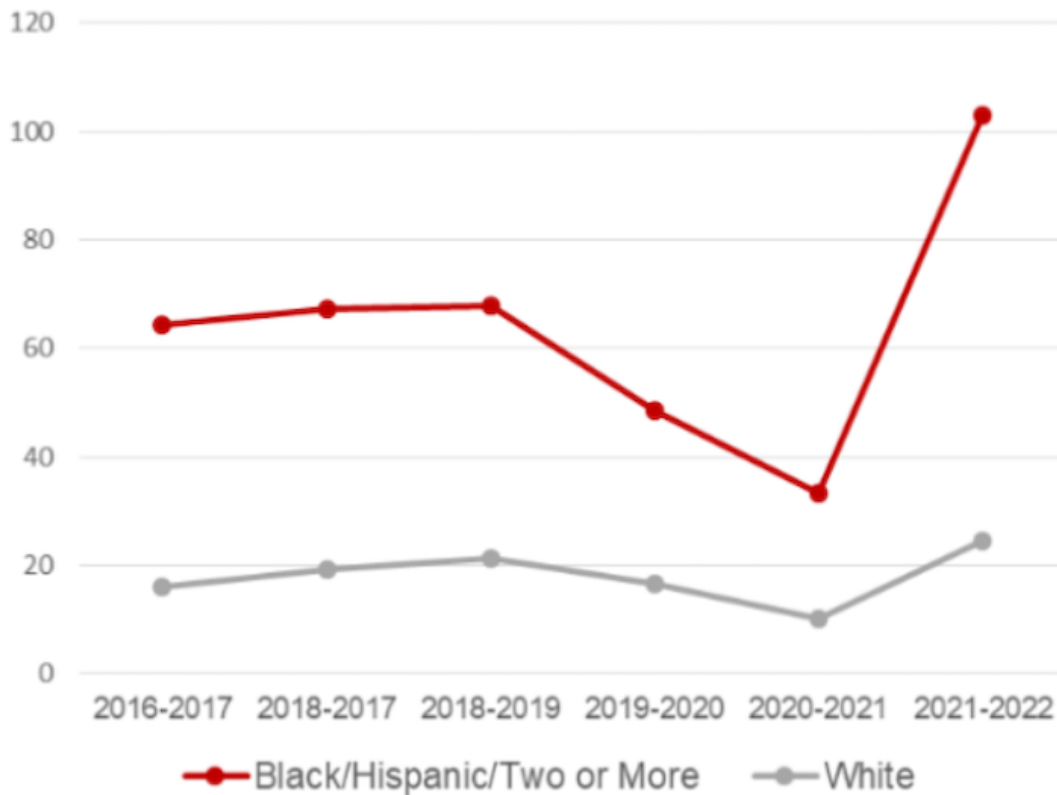
Rate of Elementary School Suspensions by Race/Ethnicity
Comparison between Schools, OASD, & State Rates
Oshkosh Area School District



- In 2021-2022, students at **Read and Merrill Elementary Schools** were suspended at extremely high and disproportionate rates
- Black elementary school students at Read and Merrill were suspended at rates of **98%** and **81%** respectively, more than **16 and 13 times** the rate of White students in the district (6%)

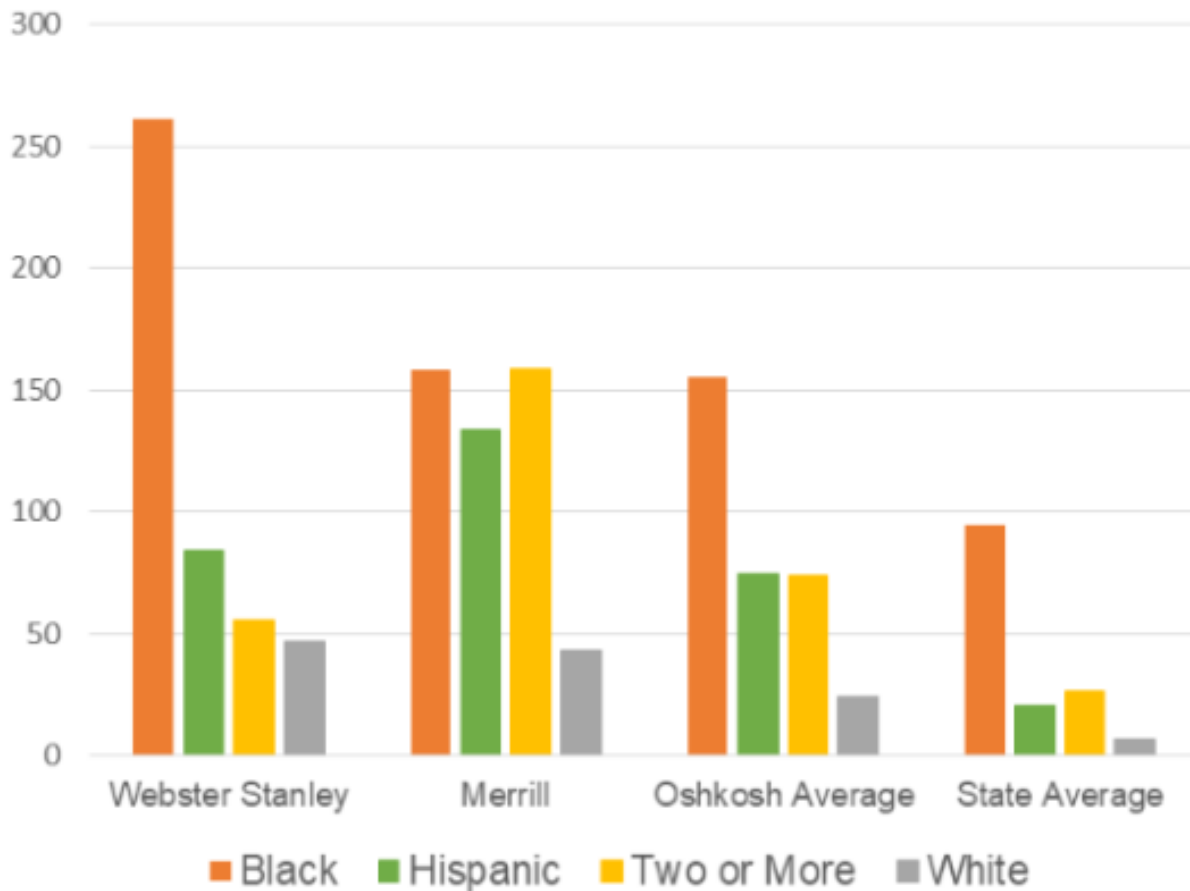
Middle School Discipline Disparities

Rate of Middle School Suspensions by Race/Ethnicity
Oshkosh Area School District



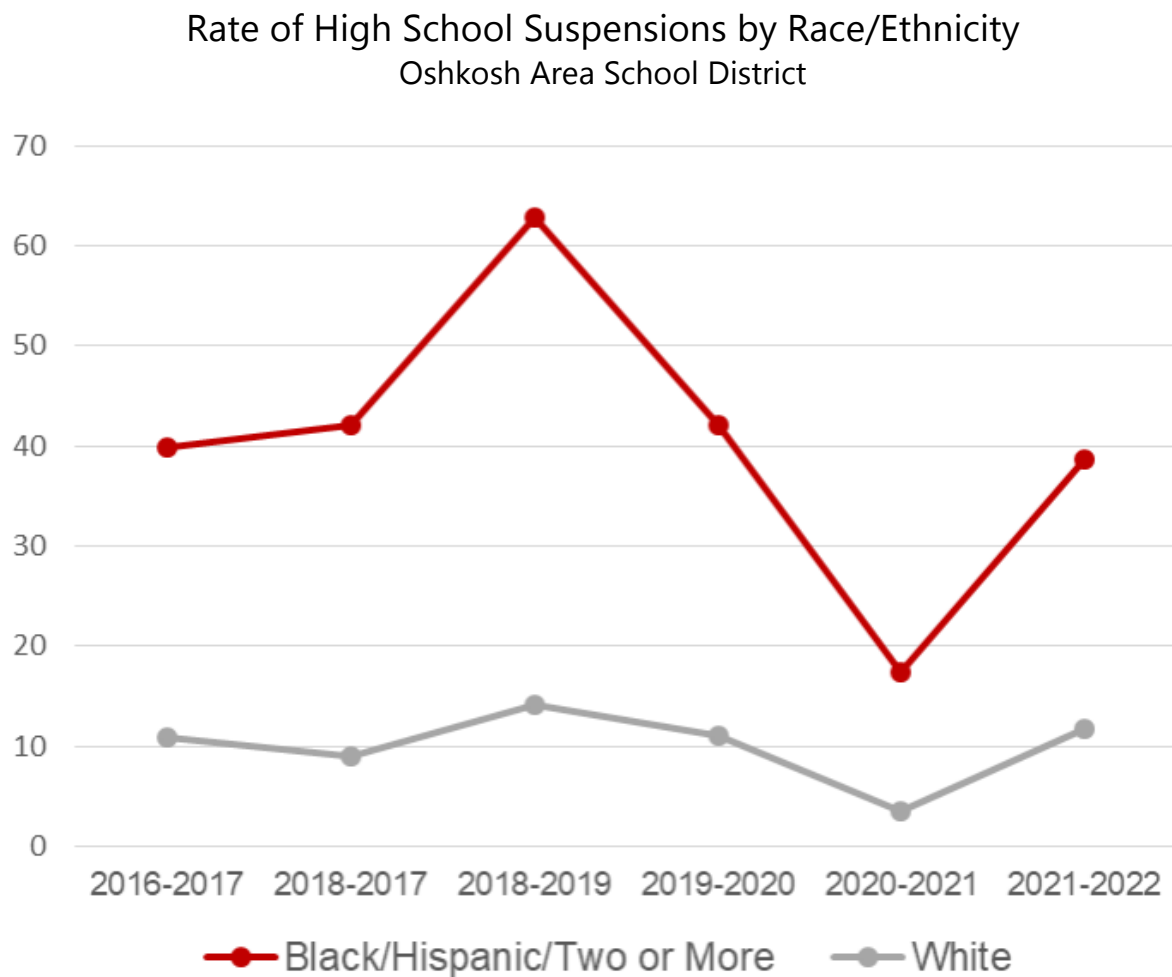
- In 2021-2022, middle school students identified as Black/Hispanic/Two or More Races were suspended at a rate of **103%**, more than **4 times** the rate of White students (24%)
- In 2021-2022, Black middle school students alone were suspended at a rate of **155%**, more than **6 times** the rate of White students (24%)
- The major disparity gap in suspensions between White middle school students and middle school students identified as Black/Hispanic/ Two or More Races persists throughout each school year - **and is getting much worse**

Rate of Middle School Suspensions by Race/Ethnicity
Comparison between Schools, OASD, & State Rates
Oshkosh Area School District



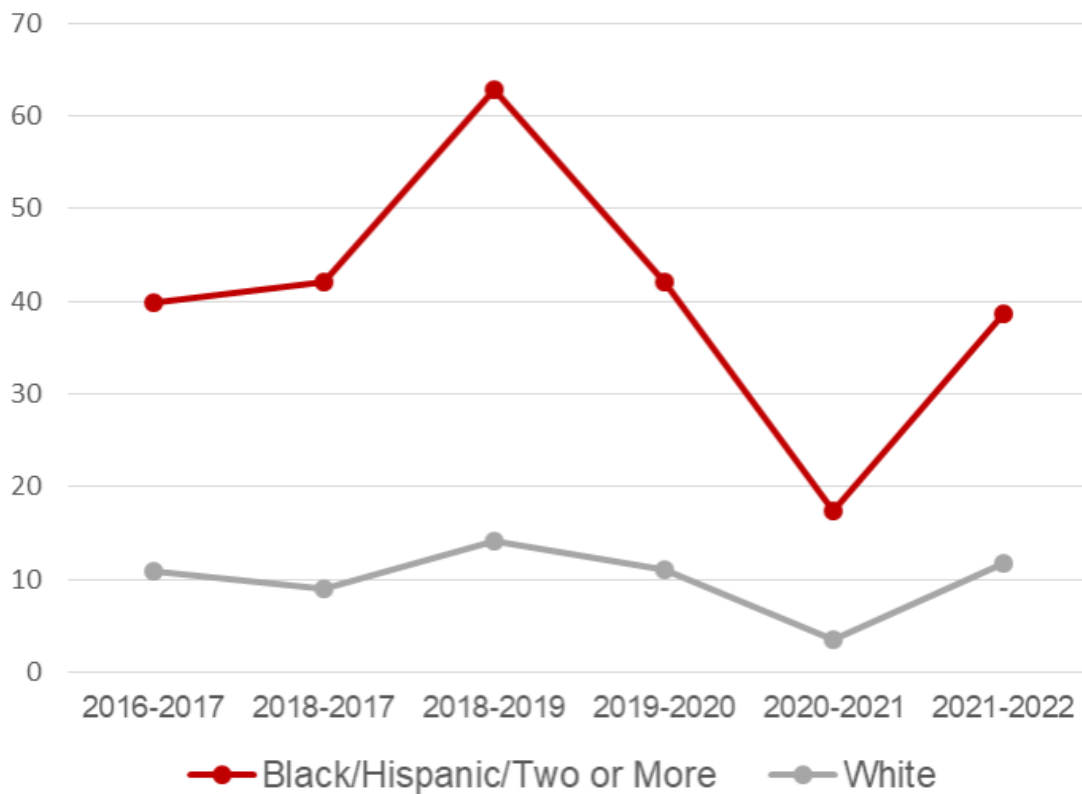
- In 2021-2022, students at **Webster Stanley and Merrill Middle Schools** were suspended at extremely high and disproportionate rates
- At Webster Stanley, Black middle school students were suspended at a rate of **261%** (equivalent to every Black student being suspended 2.6 times) and more than **10 times** the rate of White students in the district (24%)
- At Merrill Middle School, Black students were suspended at a rate of **158%** and students identified as Two or More Races were suspended at a rate of **159%**, both more than **6 times** the rate of White students in the district (24%)

High School Discipline Disparities



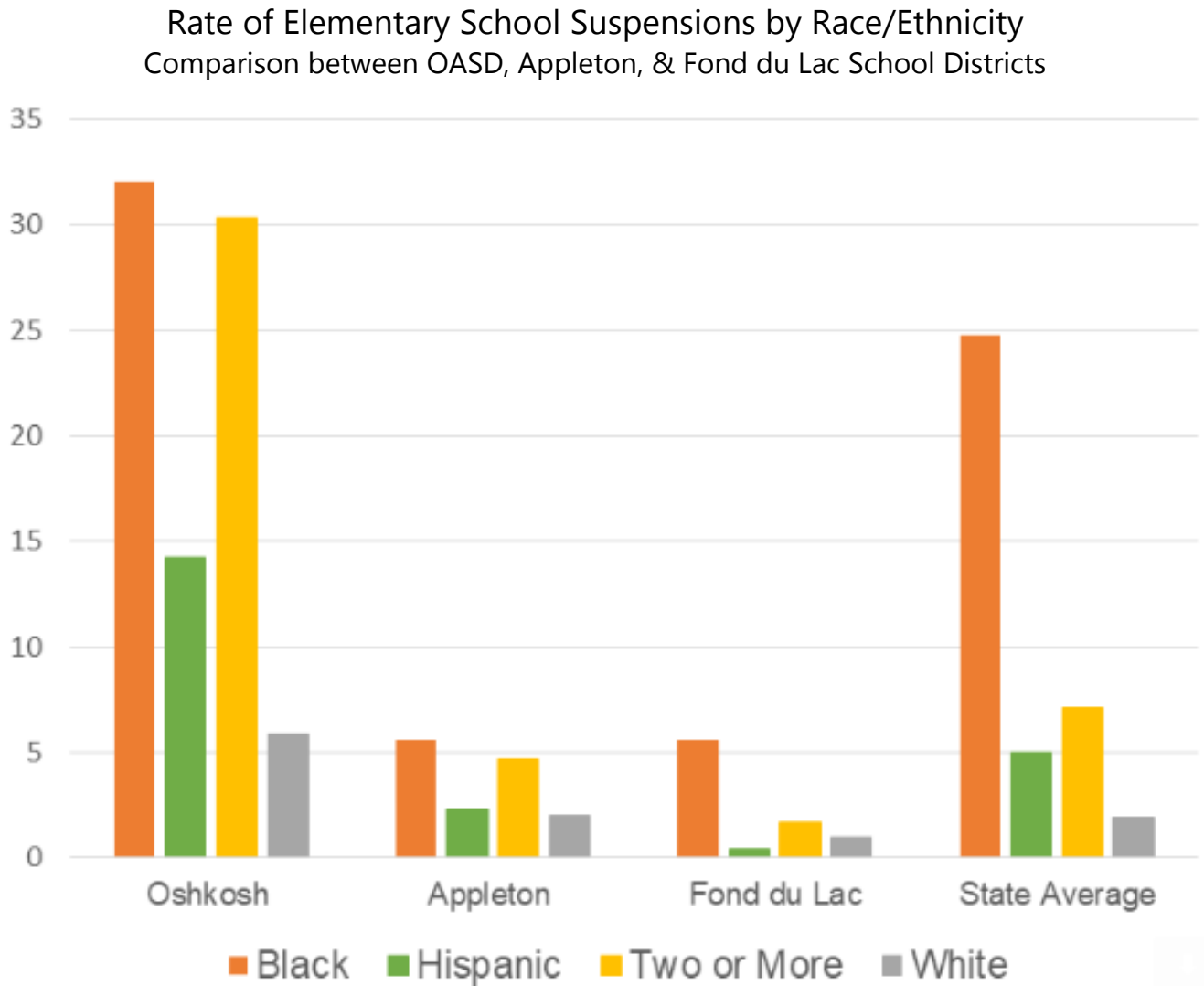
- In 2021-2022, high school students identified as Black/Hispanic/Two or More Races were suspended at a rate of **38%**, more than **3 times** the rate of White students (12%)
- In 2021-2022, Black high school students alone were suspended at a rate of **59%**, **5 times** the rate of White students (12%)

Rate of High School Expulsions by Race/Ethnicity
Oshkosh Area School District



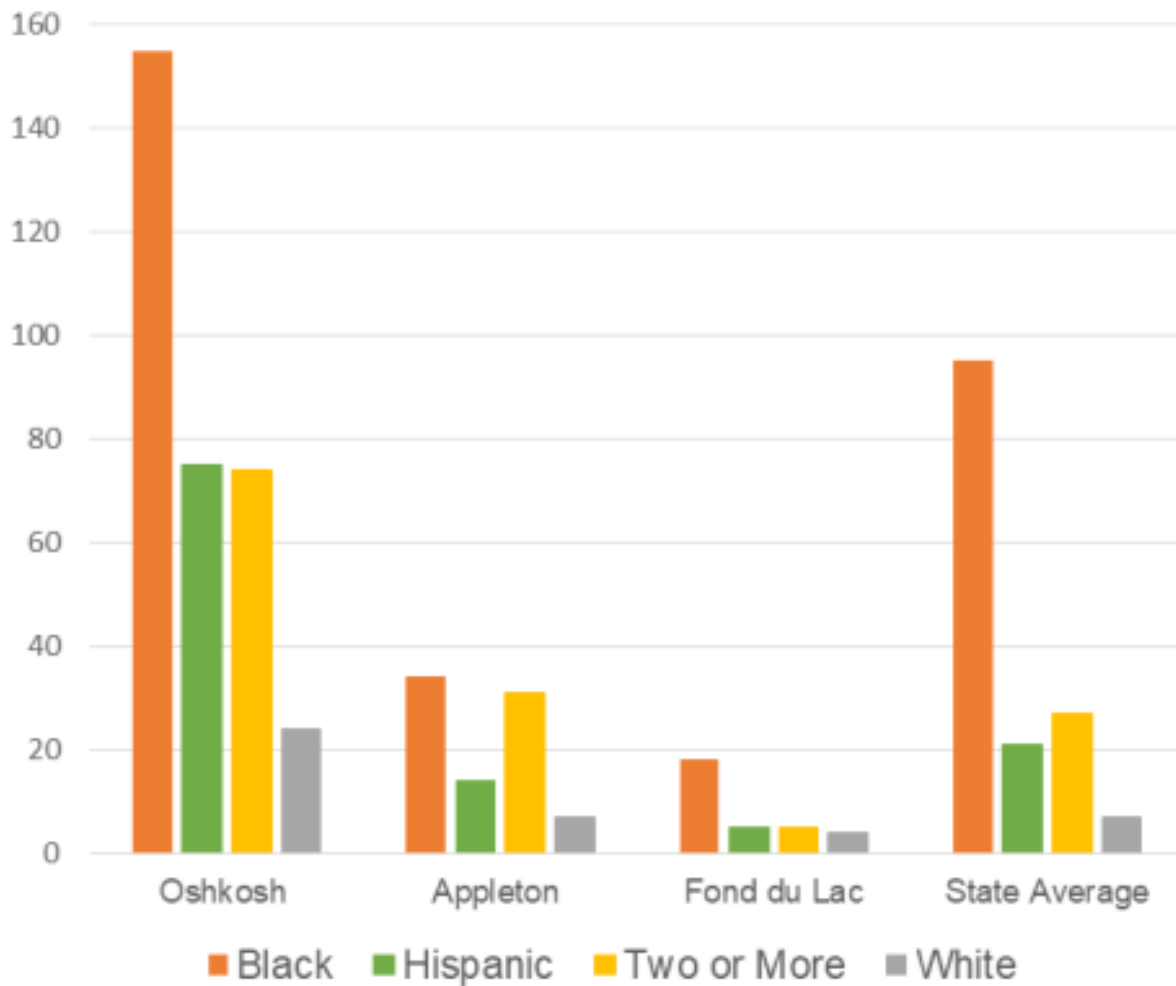
- In 2021-2022, high school students identified as Black/Hispanic/Two or More Races were expelled at a rate of **1.7%**, 9 times the rate of White students (.19%)
- In 2021-2022, Black high school students alone were expelled at a rate of **4.6%**, 24 times the rate of White students (.19%)

Disparities in Nearby Districts



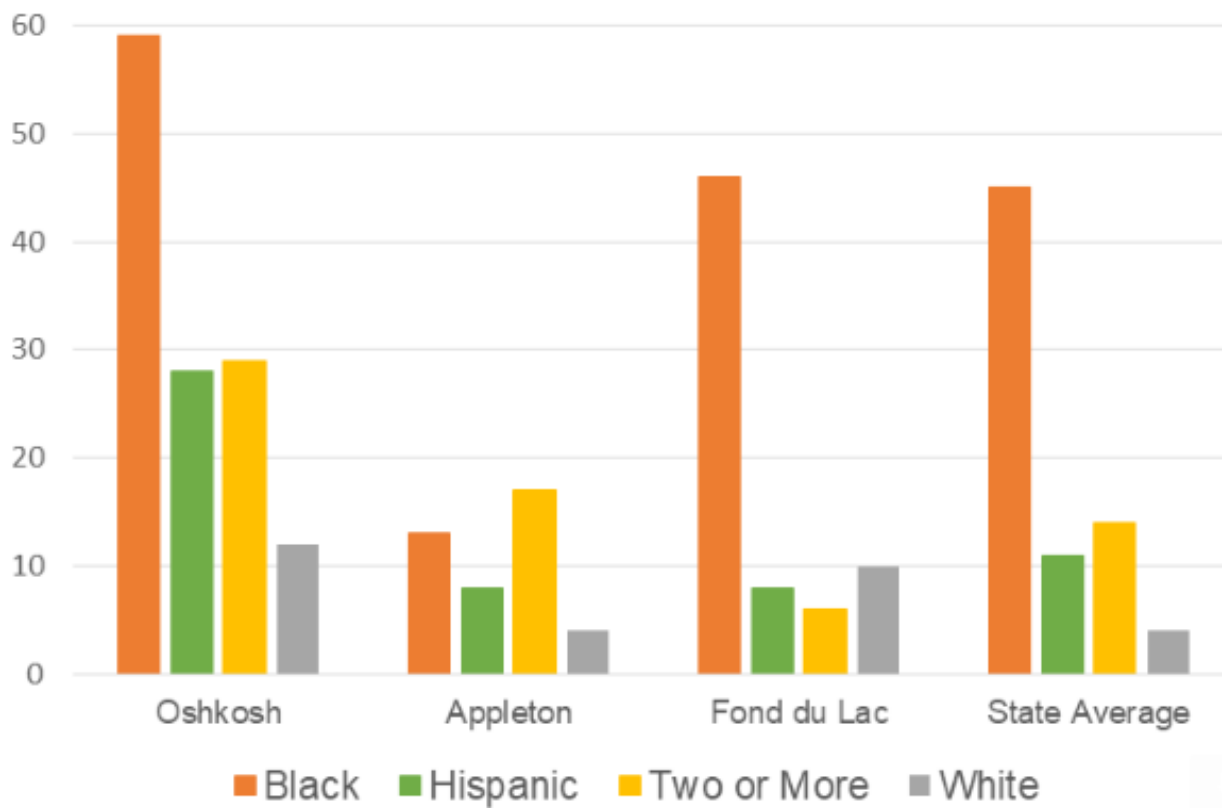
- Oshkosh's suspension rates of elementary school students are dramatically higher than all racial/ethnic groups in Appleton and Fond du Lac
- The suspension rate for Black elementary school students in Oshkosh (32%) was 5.3 times the rate in Appleton (6%) and the rate in Fond du Lac (6%)

Rate of Middle School Suspensions by Race/Ethnicity
Comparison between OASD, Appleton, & Fond du Lac School Districts



- Oshkosh's suspension rates of middle school students are dramatically higher than all racial/ethnic groups in Appleton and Fond du Lac
- The suspension rate for Black middle school students in Oshkosh (155%) was 4.5 times the rate in Appleton (34%) and 8.6 times the rate in Fond du Lac (18%)

Rate of High School Suspensions by Race/Ethnicity
Comparison between OASD, Appleton, & Fond du Lac School Districts



- Oshkosh's suspension rates of high school students are higher than all racial/ethnic groups in Appleton and Fond du Lac
- The suspension rate for Black high school students in Oshkosh (59.4%) was 4.7 times the rate in Appleton (13%) and 1.3 times the rate in Fond du Lac (46%)

Experiences of Black/Brown Families

The qualitative data in the report was gathered from 2020 – 2023 through numerous community conversations with Oshkosh Parents of Black/Brown Students. The statements in this report represent the shared experiences of multiple students and families, not just isolated incidents (though isolated incidents also matter and build wider patterns).

- Our kids are being excessively excluded from educational environments, whether through suspension, expulsion, or time spent in the principal's office, detention, or other isolated settings.
- School administrators & teachers use excessively strong language to describe the behavior of our kids. For instance, a group of black 6-year-olds described as a "rough crowd".
- Our kids are routinely singled out and mistreated by particular teachers or school staff & when the issue is brought to the school admin's attention nothing happens and/or no follow-up communication is shared with the parents.
- Our kids have been disciplined to an extent that is beyond what is reasonable for their age and their behavior for instance, a kindergartener getting suspended.
- School administrators use isolated video footage of our kids as "proof" that discipline was merited, without any context of what happened before or outside of the footage. District cameras do not pick up audio and many times our kids are responding to verbal, racist attacks.
- Our kids are expected to apologize and make amends when they have misbehaved, but no apologies or amends come from school officials when they have treated our children unfairly.

- When our kids express confidence, exuberance, and self-advocacy, it is seen as problematic and discouraged in school settings.
- School administrators frequently make excuses for adult behavior but do not give the same consideration to student behavior. For example, a black third grader was told a staff member was simply a 'grumpy, old man' after that staff member told that child he should be in chains.
- When our kids speak up to administrators about racist language or actions that they observe, they are often made to feel as though they have done something wrong and sometimes end up being punished.
- Our kids do not have access to teachers or curricula that reflect their lives & they also frequently experience bias from teachers, staff, and peers – **ALL** of which discourages engagement at school.
- School administrators & many teachers seem to be at a much too early stage of cultural & antiracist competence and development of inclusive educational settings. For instance, engaging in and/or not understanding microaggressions
- Our kids are frequently removed from class, which has a similarly negative impact as out-of-school-suspension (except these go unreported & we cannot measure the racial disparities)

Conclusions

Oshkosh's discipline rates of Black/Brown students are **indefensible and inexcusable**.

Either you believe that all the "good" Black/Brown kids are living in Appleton and Fond du Lac and all the "bad" Black/Brown kids are living in Oshkosh, **which is absurd**, or you realize that Oshkosh's discipline practices are extreme and discriminatory.

School administrators and school board members have said "our problems are no different than other school districts." While the challenges might be similar, the extreme and disturbing discipline practices happening in Oshkosh are our district's fault alone.

The district administration's Equity Report in May of 2022 claimed that the disciplinary data does not "suggest that staff have been discriminatory." This simply is not true. The data clearly proves without question that the discrimination is systemic and extreme within the district.

Black/Brown students are being harmed in Oshkosh's schools. Beyond the morale and mental health harm that is caused by the schools' disciplinary practices, **students are being deprived of a fair and quality education**. The disciplinary practices cause students to be removed from the classroom and miss educational instruction. More so, the over-disciplining of Black/Brown students discourages their engagement and ownership in their own educational experience, as well as marginalizes their families.

The Oshkosh Area School District's discipline practices of Black/Brown students far exceed a racial equity issue.

They are wholly a racial justice issue.

Black/Brown students deserve justice in our schools. They have the right to a quality education and to participate in school without discrimination.


Call to Action

If you are surprised, angered, and/or motivated by the data shared in this report, REAL Oshkosh asks you to join our community of advocates and leaders pushing for substantive changes in Oshkosh to increase racial equity.

**URGENT
CHANGE IS
NEEDED**

Start with these initial steps:

1. Follow our [Let's Get REAL Oshkosh campaign](#) on FB and shared widely
2. Join the [REAL Oshkosh Facebook group](#)
3. Attend future meetings and gatherings, starting with our Juneteenth Family Potluck on June 19th
4. If your child has been unfairly disciplined in Oshkosh's schools, please share your experience with us and let us know if you'd like support. You can email us at: realoshkosh@gmail.com or call us at: 414.522.7848

A poster for the REAL OSHKOSH Juneteenth Family Potluck. The poster has a black background with horizontal bands of red, orange, and green. The text is white and black. The top section is red with the text "REAL OSHKOSH" in large white letters and "RACIAL EQUITY, ADVOCACY, AND LEADERSHIP IN OSHKOSH" in smaller white letters below it. The middle section is orange with the text "JUNETEENTH FAMILY POTLUCK" in large black letters. The bottom section is green with the text "JUNE 19, 2023" in large white letters, "SOUTH PARK, SHELTER #1" in smaller white letters below it, and "5:30 - 7:30 PM" in smaller white letters below that. The bottom-most section is black with the text "BRING SOMETHING TO THROW ON THE GRILL AND SOME SIDES TO SHARE!" in large white letters and "REAL OSHKOSH WILL PROVIDE CHARCOAL, WATER, PLATES, NAPKINS, ETC" in smaller white letters below it.

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JUNETEENTH FAMILY POTLUCK

JUNE 19, 2023
SOUTH PARK, SHELTER #1
5:30 - 7:30 PM

BRING SOMETHING TO THROW ON THE GRILL AND SOME SIDES TO SHARE!
REAL OSHKOSH WILL PROVIDE CHARCOAL, WATER, PLATES, NAPKINS, ETC

Resources

Data

- All school district data presented by REAL Oshkosh was accessed through WISEdash: <https://wisedash.dpi.wi.gov/>

Research

- [The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at The Civil Rights Project, Are we closing the school discipline gap?](#)
- [Race in the Heartland: Wisconsin's Extreme Racial Disparity](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights Seeks Information on the Nondiscriminatory Administration of School Discipline](#)
- [Executive Order: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#)
- [National Institute of Justice, Student Suspensions have Negative Consequences](#)
- [School Discipline, Safety, and Climate: A Comprehensive Study in New York City](#)
- [NEA News, School Suspensions Do More Harm Than Good](#)
- [An Empirical Examination of the Effects of Suspension and Suspension Severity on Behavioral and Academic Outcomes](#)
- [EducationWeek, Why, Really, Are So Many Black Kids Suspended?](#)
- [The School Discipline Dilemma: A Comprehensive Review of Disparities and Alternative Approaches](#)
- [Talk of the Nation, Black Students More Likely To Be Disciplined](#)
- [The Roles of Suspensions for Minor Infractions and School Climate in Predicting Academic Performance Among Adolescents](#)
- [Race in School Discipline: Study Looks at Silence Among Educators](#)
- [4 Myths About Suspensions That Could Hurt Students Long Term](#)
- [Racial Disproportionality in School Discipline: Implicit Bias is Heavily Implicated](#)
- [Despite Reductions Since 2011-12, Black Students and Students with Disabilities Remain More Likely to Experience Suspension](#)
- [Black students and students with disabilities remain more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions, despite overall declines](#)
- [Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups](#)
- [Schools report fewer out-of-school suspensions, but gaps by race and disability persist](#)
- [Key Data Highlights on Equity and Opportunity Gaps in Our Nation's Public Schools](#)