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*A Theoretical Analysis of Disciplinary Policy and Behavioral Infractions in Schools*

**ABSTRACT:** Often empirical research statically estimates the causal effects of disciplinary policy and various mechanisms that govern student behavior in isolation. However, students experience these mechanisms jointly and dynamically. Applied theory helps us foresee the [potentially unintended, surprising] consequences of this fact. I present a theoretical model that is based on salient mechanisms in relevant empirical literatures. With this model I explore how the consequences of disciplinary policy for the dynamics of behavioral infractions depend on certain interrelationships between these mechanisms (punitive vs positive discipline, peer effects, deterrence, attitude transference, attitude towards authority and self concept, etc.) that are usually studied separately and statically in the literature. As we will see, in a dynamic setting, these mechanisms can lead to tradeoffs, tipping points, and phase transitions that could help explain the policy resistance and mixed results of school disciplinary practices. They can also illuminate conditions under which small policy changes can lead to sweeping, transformative change in the larger school disciplinary climate. An in-depth bifurcation analysis reveals that these counter-intuitive dynamics are more likely to be present in predominately African-American schools.