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***Draft*** Please do not cite or quote without permission. Comments welcome.

Prepared for the Research in American and Comparative Workshop, Boston University, April 24, 2012.

Over the past several decades, scholars have tracked major changes in public policymaking related to, and public opinion about, important areas of social policymaking in the United States. From welfare to criminal justice to workplace relations, evidence suggests the emergence of new patterns of social policymaking that have been dubbed “neoliberal” (Harvey 2005; Mudge 2008), “neoliberal paternalist” (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011), or “neoliberal disciplinary” (Rhodes 2012) measures. On one hand, this regime features new marketizing reforms, calling for retrenchment of major social programs, privatization of government services, deregulation of the economy, massive tax cuts, and the replacement of traditional social supports for low-income citizens with new measures emphasizing individual responsibility and work (Campbell and Pedersen 2001; Harvey 2005). On the other, this system infuses social programs with new disciplinary features, which impose more stringent behavioral requirements on beneficiaries, employ testing and reporting to monitor recipient performance, and implement sanctions for non-compliance (Garland 2001; Simon 2007; Wacquant 2009). Scholars have noted that such reforms appear to place the heaviest burdens on persons of color, those living in poverty, and other disadvantaged groups (Hacker 2006). In the realm of public opinion, scholars have identified increasing racial and ideological polarization around social welfare policymaking (Hutchings 2009; Bobo and Charles 2009; Bafumi and Shapiro 2009; Levendusky 2009), as well
as the hardening of attitudes toward citizens (especially non-whites) at the bottom of the socioeconomic spectrum, such as recipients of welfare (Gilens 2000) and those accused of crimes (Zimring and Johnson 2006).

For the most part, these scholars have tended to neglect education policy, even though “skills and education are at the core of the welfare state” (Iversen and Stephens 2008:3). According to many prominent students of education policy, including Apple (2006), Hursh (2007), Lipman (2004), and others, however, recent developments in education policy, which (led by the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002) have heralded a dramatic expansion of sanctions-based accountability for performance in education, are wholly consistent with the marketizing and disciplining reforms associated with neoliberalism in other areas. In a discussion of the motives of the conservative groups he believes are spearheading neoliberal education policymaking, Apple (2006, emphasis added) contends that

“…the new alliance has integrated education into a wider set of ideological commitments. The objectives in education are the same as those that guide its economic and social welfare goals. They include the dramatic expansion of that eloquent fiction, the free market; the drastic reduction of government responsibility for social needs; the reinforcement of intensely competitive structures of mobility both inside and outside the school; the lowering of people’s expectations for economic security; the “disciplining” of culture and the body; and the popularization of what is clearly a form of social-Darwinist thinking.”

Like the changes documented in other areas of American social policy, NCLB-style reforms also raise complex racial considerations. NCLB, and many analogous state policies, require schools to demonstrate that students of color (as well as other disadvantaged groups) are making adequate yearly progress, and to intervene if these students fall behind academically. These reforms have been defended by their supporters as mechanisms for drawing attention to disadvantaged students and imposing pressure on schools to close achievement gaps (Rhodes 2012). However, critics of these policies have noted what they view as a disturbing tendency of
these reforms to impose most heavily on schools serving concentrations of students of color (Darling-Hammond 2007). According to Hursh (2007b), in fact, these reforms “exacerbate inequality” by pressuring schools serving students of color to abandon more efficacious educational practices in favor of standardized, and ineffective, approaches and by denying society’s broader responsibility to provide economic and social opportunities for disadvantaged groups.

Unfortunately, while there is considerable research on the origins and educational consequences of sanctions and other ostensibly neoliberal education reforms, there has been little study of individuals’ attitudes about these policies. In consequence we know very little about public opinion about sanctions-based education accountability policies; and we have limited understanding of whether and to what extent public opinion about these policies resembles attitudes about neoliberal disciplinary reforms in other areas of social policymaking. This represents a missed opportunity to answer questions about how attitudes about sanctions-based accountability policies resemble (or depart from) public opinion about neoliberal disciplinary policies in other areas. Do Americans support disciplinary reforms in the realm of public education, as they favor punitive neoliberal policies in the areas of welfare and criminal justice? Or, do individuals recoil from disciplinary reforms in education, just as they are skeptical of efforts to reform Social Security and Medicare on more neoliberal lines? Are Republicans and conservatives more likely to favor disciplinary reforms in public education, as they are in other areas?

Furthermore, while our understanding of the racialization of many policy areas is well-advanced, there are important unanswered questions about the role of race and racial animus in shaping public opinion about disciplinary education reforms. It is well-known that many
Americans, especially conservative adherents of individualism and those who hold racially resentful attitudes, are more skeptical of government efforts to redress racial inequalities. Additionally, research suggests that racially resentful individuals are more supportive of punitive measures when the recipient is a person of color. Sanctions-based accountability policies may impose sanctions against schools serving concentrations of non-white students; but the ostensible purpose of these policies is to provide greater opportunities for these students. Given these complex facts, what role do partisanship, ideology, and racial resentment play in shaping attitudes about sanctions-based accountability in schools serving students of color? Do Republicans, conservatives, and racially resentful individuals support these policies, or do they view them as inappropriate affirmative action-style policies that provide special benefits to students of color?

This paper begins to answer these questions, focusing on individual attitudes about an important and controversial education reform – sanctions against struggling schools – that resembles disciplinary policies in other areas of American social policy and has been described as a punitive neoliberal reform. Using experiments in the 2010 and 2011 Cooperative Congressional Elections Studies, this paper investigates whether and to what extent public opinion about school sanctions are similar to attitudes about neoliberal disciplinary policies in other areas; and assesses what role racial considerations play in shaping attitudes about school accountability policies in general, and about sanctions in particular. Experiment 1 investigated whether respondents’ perception of the efficacy and fairness of a school improvement measure in a struggling community school was influenced by the punitiveness of the described intervention, and by whether racial considerations were salient. In Experiment 2, I assessed whether considerations found in research in other policy areas to increase support for punitive measures –
such as the severity of the “offense” and the racial characteristics of the “offenders” – had a parallel effect on public opinion toward sanctions in struggling schools.

The results of my experiments suggested that there are similarities between attitudes about sanctions and school accountability policies, on one hand, and public opinion about other social policies and neoliberal disciplinary reforms, on the other, but that these comparisons have limits. Overall, respondents do not look favorably on sanctions as a form of school accountability. Additionally, while previous studies of punitive attitudes in other areas suggest that individuals are highly sensitive to exacerbating circumstances that reflect badly on the target of punishments, I did not find much evidence that individual attitudes about school sanctions are highly responsive to negative information about school performance. However, I did find some evidence of polarization of opinion with regard to sanctions: in some of my models, Republicans and conservatives were more supportive of sanctions than were Democrats and liberals. Thus, while many individuals may be skeptical of the introduction of neoliberal disciplinary reforms into education, just as they question neoliberal adjustments to popular programs such as Social Security or Medicare, a substantial fraction of more conservative individuals may be more enthusiastic about such measures in education as elsewhere.

Second, while racial considerations play an important role in shaping attitudes about school accountability measures, including sanctions, that role is more complicated than what is alleged by many critics of these policies. Liberal critics of school accountability policies, especially sanctions, have alleged that these policies have the effect (and perhaps the intention) of burdening schools serving concentrations of disadvantaged students. However, my results provide some evidence that Republicans, conservatives, and racially resentful individuals are more likely to oppose race conscious school accountability measures, including school sanctions.
triggered by the low achievement of students of color. Far from advocating race conscious school accountability policies, or celebrating disciplinary measures in school serving concentrations of non-white students, Republicans, conservatives, and racially resentful individuals may be more skeptical of them, just as they oppose affirmative action and other programs that disburse benefits on the basis of race.

**American Public Opinion about Neoliberal Disciplinary Politics**

*Public Opinion about Neoliberal Reforms*

The public opinion literatures that speak to neoliberal and disciplinary developments in public policymaking are very large and diffuse, and do not always use the terminology of neoliberalism employed here to describe attitudes about public policies. Even so, it is possible to identify theoretical and empirical findings that bear on our understanding of public opinion related to neoliberal and disciplinary policy developments. First, at the broadest level, a large and influential literature on “dynamic representation” strongly implies that overall trends in neoliberal policymaking developments should be consistent with trends in mass attitudes about social policy. The major finding of this literature, both at the federal and state levels, is that public opinion moves in coherent and predictable ways (in significant part in response to changing economic conditions), and that government policymaking in turn responds to reflect public preferences (Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Wlezien 1995, 2004; Norrander 2000; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 2003; Stimson 2004). Of particular interest for the present study, Nicholson-Crotty, Peterson, and Ramirez (2009:631, emphasis added) show that public policymaking in the area of criminal justice is responsive not just to the traditional left-right divide, but to attitudes about whether “government should punish more or less.”
Furthermore, when we turn to a consideration of more specific neoliberal disciplinary policies in areas such as welfare reform and criminal justice, scholarship suggests a close relationship between policies in these areas and public opinion at both the federal and state levels. Soss and Schram (2007) provide evidence that disciplinary changes in the area of federal welfare policymaking (the addition of time limits, work requirements, and sanctions for non-compliance) were expressive of popular views that welfare recipients violated widely-held norms about work and individual responsibility. Studies suggest that more conservative states have adopted more stringent welfare eligibility rules and more severe sanctions against noncompliant welfare beneficiaries (Soss, Schram, Vartanian, and O'Brien 2001). Additionally, in a study of welfare sanctions rates in Florida counties, Fording, Soss, and Schram (2007) demonstrate that conservative counties employ more frequent use of sanctions against program recipients than their liberal counterparts. In the realm of criminal justice, studies suggest that the increasingly punitive tenor of criminal justice policy reflected the hardening of criminal justice attitudes, especially among whites (Enns 2010). At the national level, the aforementioned Nicholson-Crotty, Peterson, and Rameriz (2009) study demonstrates that federal criminal justice budgets and stringency of enforcement are highly responsive to public opinion. Looking at state-level death penalty policymaking, Norrander (2000) draws a similar conclusion, finding that public opinion has an important effect on state policies in this area.

**Deservingness, Undeservingness, and Neoliberal Reforms**

If these considerations suggest that the expansion of marketizing and disciplining reforms enjoys considerable public support in many areas of social policymaking, we should not assume that the public favors them in all areas. Individuals make distinctions among different public policies, with attitudes most favorable toward policies that are universal and are perceived as
serving “deserving” populations, and opinions most unfavorable toward means-tested programs servicing “undeserving” and undesirable groups (Schneider and Ingram 1997; Appelbaum 2001). The level of public support for neoliberal disciplinary reforms may thus depend on how respondents view the program targeted for retrenchment. Notably, while public opinion (especially among whites) appears relatively favorable toward neoliberal disciplinary approaches to poverty governance and incarceration – both of which target “undeserving” groups with negative social constructions (such as laziness, unwillingness to work, and moral laxity) - it seems less enthusiastic about efforts to restructure Social Security, a universal program with a “deserving” target population constructed as hard-working, conscientious, and morally responsible (Cook, Barabas, and Page 2002; Shaw and Mysiewicz 2004; Barabas 2006). Conversely, the rise of Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) as a marketizing health policy reform has not dramatically shifted public opinion in favor of further neoliberal health care solutions; to the contrary, “HSA participants are less likely to prefer consumer-driven health coverage in which individuals are empowered to make choices (Barabas 2009: 181, emphasis added). In evaluating public opinion about neoliberal and disciplinary reforms, therefore, it is essential to keep in mind how individuals’ perceptions of the moral status of the program and its recipients may color their attitudes about the introduction such measures reforms within them.

**Ideology and Partisanship**

At the individual level, of course, attitudes about social policies in general – and about neoliberal disciplinary policies in particular – vary, albeit in predictable ways. In contemporary American society, partisan identification and political ideology have become tightly linked, and both are closely related to attitudes about social policies. Democrats and liberals increasingly express support for social welfare policies, economic regulation, progressive taxation, federal
involvement in promoting civil rights, and libertarian approaches on matters of sexuality and personal morality, while Republicans and conservatives prefer social policy retrenchment, economic deregulation, reduced taxation, limited federal involvement in addressing civil rights issues, and a more proscriptive stance on sexual and moral concerns (Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 2006; Bafumi and Shapiro 2007; Abramowitz 2010). Notably, Republicans and conservatives are especially hostile to policies they perceive as providing special government assistance or benefits to groups they perceive as undeserving or responsible for their own plight. Indeed, scholars have argued that a “principled conservatism”, reflecting beliefs in individualism, limited government, and opposition to group-centric programs, has led Republicans and conservatives to oppose affirmative action and other programs that provide benefits to specific groups (Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Feldman and Huddy 2005).

When it comes to disciplinary policies associated with neoliberalism, there is evidence of parallel partisan and ideological effects. Conservatives are more likely than liberals to view disadvantaged persons as violating norms of work and personal responsibility, and hence responsible for their own plight (e.g. Skitka and Tetlock 1993). Consequently, conservatives are more likely to support “get tough” disciplinary reforms under welfare reform, and to be more responsive to media frames advocating such reforms and/or celebrating the themes of economic independence and individual self-reliance (Shen and Edwards 2005). Similarly, in the realm of criminal justice, studies suggest that conservatives are more supportive of punitive approaches than are liberals (Payne et al 2004; Tetlock et al 2006), due to conservatives’ characteristic belief that offenders are morally responsible for their own behavior and thus are especially deserving of punishment (Carroll et al 1987; Skitka and Tetlock 1993).
Racial Considerations

Racial considerations also play a central role in shaping citizens’ views about social welfare policies and about neoliberal disciplinary reforms in social policymaking (Winter 2006). On one hand, individuals with more racially resentful attitudes are much more skeptical of policies that are perceived as giving special advantages to persons of color or are viewed as providing support to racial groups that decline to conform to individualist norms (Hutchings and Valentino 2004; Neblo 2008; Feldman and Huddy 2005; Huddy and Feldman 2009). On the other hand, racially resentful individuals are more likely to support punitive policies against persons of color. Notably, the adoption and application of “get tough” welfare policies, especially sanctions, appears to be highly sensitive to the racial identities of recipients (Gilens 2000; Soss et al 2001; Fellowes and Rowe 2004; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2008; Schram, Soss, Fording, and Houser 2009). Criminal justice policymaking is also intimately tied up with race. White public attitudes about crime and punishment are closely associated with racial considerations; when race is salient, and/or among citizens with racially resentful sentiments, punitive attitudes are more likely to be expressed (Hurwitz and Peffley 1997; Soss, Langbien, and Metelko 2003; Bobo and Johnson 2004). Whites are also especially likely to endorse punitive remedies for crimes when presented with a crime script featuring a black perpetrator (Gilliam and Iyengar 2000). Notably, research suggests that persons of color are less supportive of punitive carceral policies, undoubtedly in part because they perceive that individuals from their communities bear the brunt of these policies (Johnson 2008).

Sanctions in the Context of School Accountability: Neoliberalism in Education?

As the foregoing suggests, political scientists have provided substantial attention to the rise of neoliberal disciplinary policymaking in the United States, and to public attitudes related to
these developments. Notably, however, few political scientists have sought to integrate major transformations in education policymaking – especially the rise of sanctions-based school accountability – into the theoretical or empirical analysis of neoliberal disciplinary policymaking. To be sure, education policy scholars have sought to make such links. According to this scholarship, these education reforms fit comfortably into the marketizing/disciplining framework associated with broader neoliberal disciplinary reforms (Apple 2006; Hursh 2007).

As education policy scholar Pauline Lipman explained following enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, “These policies are just one aspect of the larger neoliberal project to privatize public institutions and commodify public and private life while increasing state regulation of individuals and institutions through new forms of accountability, testing, standards, and surveillance (Lipman 2004).” Of particular relevance for this research, education policy scholars have made explicit comparisons between disciplinary welfare and carceral policies, on one hand, and accountability reforms that sanction schools which perform poorly on standardized examinations, on the other (Lyons and Drew 2006; Simon 2007).

These scholars also point to what they view as the racialized nature of sanctions-based accountability reforms. Indeed, even though these reforms are defended by their supporters as providing greater educational opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups (Rhodes 2012), critics of these measures have intimated that these policies have the effect (and may even have had the intention) of exacerbating racial inequalities (Hursh 2007b). Indeed, according to Au (2009), such reforms promote inequality “by design” by propagating policies with little chance of promoting student achievement gains among disadvantaged populations. In drawing attention to these possible racial implications, education policy scholars articulate concerns similar to those made by critics of neoliberal reforms in other areas.
Unfortunately, despite the great interest in the origins and consequences of sanctions-based accountability policies in education, we know little about public opinion regarding these policy changes. Previous findings are limited in important respects. Most existing studies are descriptive analyses of poll trends, without rigorous statistical controls (Hess 2006; Loveless 2007). The one major exception (Lay and Stokes-Brown 2009) focused only on high-stakes testing, rather than sanctions, and relied on survey data from 2003, before most state and federal accountability systems really began to affect most schools (Rhodes 2012). In any case, the few existing studies of public opinion about standards, testing, and accountability reform are not informed by the theoretical literature on neoliberal disciplinary developments in education and social policymaking more generally. Consequently, to date it has been impossible to assess whether and to what extent the lessons of public opinion research on attitudes about social policies and neoliberal disciplinary reforms in areas such as welfare and criminal justice are applicable to ostensibly disciplinary reforms in education. This represents a missed opportunity to enhance our understanding of the politics of education policy and, more broadly, our comprehension of public opinion related to social policymaking and neoliberal disciplinary reforms.

In this study I seek to bridge these gaps in our understanding. I extend what is known about attitudes about an important and controversial education policy – sanctions against struggling schools – that shares features with disciplinary policies in other domains and which has been described as “neoliberal” and “disciplinary” by some analysts. While previous studies have described poll trends or analyzed responses to survey questions, my studies employ survey experimental designs, which provide greater control over research conditions, and thereby offer greater opportunities for testing hypotheses and assessing causal effects. Substantively, whereas
previous studies of attitudes about standards, testing, and accountability have considered
education attitudes in isolation, my research questions and design are geared to identifying public
opinion patterns that may parallel, or deviate from, research findings from studies of opinion
related to neoliberal disciplinary policymaking in other areas. Additionally, while scholars have
alleged that school accountability policies in schools servicing concentrations of nonwhite
students have a racialized dimension, my study is the first to empirically assess whether and in
what ways individual attitudes about these reforms are, in fact, racialized.

**Hypotheses: Overall Attitudes about Sanctions as a Form of Accountability**

The findings reviewed above suggest some conflicting expectations about citizens’
attitudes toward sanctions in the context of school accountability. Research on dynamic
representation, as well as studies documenting considerable public support for neoliberal
disciplinary policies in other areas, such as welfare reform and criminal justice, suggest that
individuals may respond favorably to the use of sanctions as an accountability mechanism in
education. In fact, some scholars, most notably McGuinn (2006), contend that public frustration
with poor school performance and enthusiasm about school accountability drove policymakers to
adopt the standards, testing, and sanctions embodied in policies such as NCLB. However, the
fact that individuals make distinctions among policies based on the social construction of the
policies and their beneficiaries, and appear less enthusiastic about neoliberal reforms to universal
policies servicing “deserving” populations, suggests caution in asserting this hypothesis
unreflectively. Because they are often viewed as America’s primary mechanism for promoting
social and economic opportunities (Hochschild and Scovronick 2003), and because they serve
children (an especially sympathetic group), schools may be viewed positively by the public.
Indeed, there is some evidence that citizens generally view the schools in their community
positively, though they have more negative attitudes about the nation’s schools in general (Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup 2011). If individuals view schools and students as more akin to valorized policies and populations such as Social Security and its beneficiaries, respectively, they may be less favorable toward the implementation of punitive policies in struggling schools. In this scenario, individuals may actually favor the provision of generous financial and technical assistance to struggling schools, just as they support generous assistance to populations constructed as especially sympathetic and deserving (Appelbaum 2001). In fact, some states do offer various forms of assistance (such as additional funds, curricular materials and support, and teacher training) to schools suffering from lower student achievement (Ladd and Lauen 2010).

However, even if individuals are generally inclined to view schools favorably – and thus predisposed to view punitive accountability policies with skepticism - it is still possible that they may be induced to favor sanctions as a form of accountability if presented with considerations known to stimulate punitive attitudes in other areas. Research on the psychology of punishment suggests that individuals weigh a variety of factors in making decisions about how to impose punishments against transgressors, including the severity of the offense (whether the offense is minor, resulting in limited harm, or severe, resulting in extensive harm); the intentions of the perpetrator (whether the perpetrator intended to cause harm or did so unintentionally or under duress); and the past history of the perpetrator (e.g. whether he/she was a first time offender with no history of misbehavior or a repeat offender who had committed similar crimes in the past) (e.g. Carlsmith and Darley 2008). Individuals generally agree on the rank-ordered severity of offenses and the moral reprehensibility of offenders, and punish more severely as severity and reprehensibility increase (Sunstein, Kahneman, and Schkade 1998; Darley et al 2000; Carlsmith et al 2002). Thus, even if they are less enthusiastic about sanctions all things being equal, it is
possible that individuals may become more supportive if presented with information that presents school problems as especially severe; as persisting uncorrected over a long period of time; or as the consequence of deliberate malfeasance.

*Race-Conscious Accountability Measures*

Previous research also offers ambiguous guidance about likely public attitudes about race-conscious school accountability measures. On one hand, there is considerable evidence from studies of welfare and criminal justice attitudes that many whites, especially those with racially resentful attitudes, exhibit more punitive attitudes when presented with scripts that feature non-white program targets. Some scholars have suggested that school accountability measures, especially those featuring sanctions, are racialized insofar as they have the effect of reproducing (and may be intended to reproduce) racial inequalities in educational opportunities, implying that racially resentful individuals should be most likely to support them. On the other hand, however, there is also considerable evidence that many individuals, especially Republicans, conservatives, and racially resentful persons, strongly oppose race conscious social policies that are perceived as providing benefits to individuals of color on the basis of race. If individuals view school accountability measures – including sanctions – brought about by the low achievement of students of color as a form of assistance or aid to these students, it is wholly possible that many individuals may actually become less favorable to these measures, whether due to principled conservatism, racial resentment, or some combination of the two.

I suspect that most individuals will become less supportive of school accountability measures – including sanctions – when these measures are spurred by the low achievement of students of color and intended to remediate this problem. While liberal critics of these measures imply that they have the effect of subordinating and disciplining students of color and the
schools that serve them, the simple fact is that these policies monitor the achievement of specific racial groups and intervene in schools when these groups are struggling, and are officially intended to raise the achievement of students of color and close racial achievement gaps. Whatever their long-term implications, the fact that these policies are race-conscious should be enough to erode the support of many individuals for these policies.

**Hypotheses: The Mediating Effects of Partisanship, Ideology, and Racial Resentment**

The foregoing discussion has suggested that conservatives and Republicans are generally more skeptical of traditional social welfare policies, more motivated to punish transgressors of public norms, and more supportive of the implementation of disciplinary policies in the areas of welfare and criminal justice. These attitudes flow from conservatives’ and Republicans’ stronger belief in individual economic and moral responsibility and consequent need to sanction individuals who violate individualist norms in order to uphold cherished values and maintain social order (Feldman 1988; Feldman and Zaller 1992). Though sanctions-based accountability policies target school institutions rather than individuals, I anticipate that conservatives and Republicans will generally be more sanguine about the implementation of sanctions against a struggling community school, and that they will be especially supportive if presented with information that presents school problems as severe, persistent, or the result of malice.

However – and contrary to the implication, made by liberal critics of school accountability, that these reforms reflect part of a conservative-led project to dominate persons of color - I anticipate that Republicans and conservatives will be less likely to support school accountability policies, including sanctions, if these policies are described as being triggered by the low performance of historically disadvantaged groups and intended to assist these students and close achievement gaps. Although Republicans and conservatives may generally support
government interventions (especially sanctions) in struggling schools, their principled belief in individualism should lead them to oppose race-targeted school interventions (including race-targeted sanctions), just as it induces opposition to other race-targeted measures such as affirmative action.

While it is unclear how racially resentful individuals will view sanctions in the abstract, I expect that more racially resentful individuals should be less likely to support school accountability measures if these measures are presented as race-targeted reforms. Whereas some liberal critics view these policies as efforts to make education more racially unequal, I suspect that racially resentful individuals may perceive them as illegitimately aiding students of color, just as they interpret affirmative action programs as inappropriately favoring persons of color.

**Data and Methods**

To test my hypotheses about public opinion about sanctions and race-targeted accountability policies – and thereby shed light on attitudes about ostensibly disciplinary reforms in education - I conducted a series of survey experiments. My experiments were embedded in survey modules within the 2010 (Experiment 1) and 2011 (Experiment 2) Cooperative Congressional Elections Studies (CCES) fielded by YouGov/Polimetrix (hereafter Polimetrix), a research firm that maintains national panels of survey respondents and hosts surveys on its internet-based survey platform. The CCES uses Polimetrix’s matched random sample methodology to select survey respondents. First, Polimetrix draws a random sample of consumers from a large database covering approximately 95 percent of the U.S. adult population. Then, Polimetrix uses a matching algorithm to match each individual selected from the consumer database with an individual in its pool of survey recruits across a wide range of demographic,
voter, and consumer characteristics. The matched cases are then weighted using propensity scores so that the matched sample is representative of all U.S. adults (Ansolabehare 2010).

Each experiment was designed to test some of my hypotheses about individuals’ attitudes about sanctions and race-targeted policymaking in the context of school accountability. In each experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to one of the various treatment groups, exposed to the treatments, and then asked a series of questions about their opinions. The treatments were hypothetical scenarios describing government interventions a struggling community school. While some experimental conditions featured sanctions, other experimental conditions mentioned an alternative form of government intervention in struggling schools – efforts to provide assistance such as additional resources and training for teachers and staff – in order to provide a baseline for measuring attitudes about sanctions. Likewise, while some experimental conditions contained language designed to make racial considerations salient, in others this language was deliberately excluded in order to facilitate a more rigorous assessment of respondents’ opinions. Information about respondents’ partisan affiliation, ideology, and racial resentment, as well as other social, political, and demographic characteristics, was also collected.

Experiment 1

Do individuals favor the implementation of sanctions in struggling schools, as they seem to approve of disciplinary policies in the areas of welfare reform and criminal justice? Or do they recoil from sanctions as an accountability measure? What role do racial considerations play in shaping attitudes about interventions in struggling schools? Are Republicans, conservatives, and the racially resentful more likely to support sanctions in struggling schools, and less likely to favor policies triggered by the poor performance of racial minorities, as we expect? Experiment 1 was designed to shed light on these questions. 1410 respondents participated in this analysis.
In this experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to one of four different conditions. The experimental treatments were inserted within a plausible hypothetical scenario about a struggling school in respondents’ community which respondents read while taking the survey. All respondents were presented with the same basic two-paragraph hypothetical scenario, in which a high school in their community was suffering from significant academic difficulties, leading “state and local officials” to intervene in the school to improve its performance. However, the scenarios were different in their details, in order to vary whether the struggling school received a sanction (in this experiment, mandatory change of school personnel), or was provided with assistance (resources for new texts, curricular reforms, and teacher retraining); and whether the described school accountability measure was race-conscious (motivated by the poor performance of racially identifiable groups) or race-neutral (motivated by the poor performance of students without reference to race).

For respondents in **Group 1** (sanction/race-neutral), the scenario explained that “On state-wide tests, many students in your local school were scoring well below the average student in your state. Additionally, a significant number of students failed to graduate from the high school each year.” This phrasing was race-neutral because it did not explicitly refer to the racial identities of struggling students. In response, the scenario explained, state and local officials implemented a stringent sanction against the school: “state and local officials fired the school’s principal and many of its teachers, in order to hold them accountable for their performance. The school would have to make annual progress in raising students’ achievement or face additional penalties.” Respondents in **Group 2** (assistance/race-neutral) were provided with a slightly different scenario. As in Group 1, the scenario did not mention the racial identities of struggling students within the school. In this condition, however, respondents were informed that state and
local officials agreed to “provide additional resources to the school” geared to improve the curriculum and reform teaching practices: “New resources would be used to purchase supplies and textbooks, and to provide more training to principals and teachers so that they know how to raise students’ achievement.”

Groups 3 and 4 reprised the sanctions and assistance treatments exactly as they appeared in Groups 1 and 2, respectively, but differed from these groups in the way they described both the events triggering intervention by “state and local officials” and the purposes of the described interventions. Whereas Groups 1 and 2 received race-neutral treatments, in Groups 3 and 4 the treatments were explicitly race-conscious. In Group 3 (sanction/race-conscious), respondents were informed that the choice of sanctions by state and local officials was brought about in significant part by the low achievement of African-American and Latino students. Respondents in this condition were also told that the sanctions were intended to induce the school to raise the achievement of African-American and Latino students and reduce racial achievement gaps. For respondents in Group 4 (assistance/race-conscious), the triggering event was the same as in Group 3 – i.e. the low performance of African-American and Latino students. While Group 4 described the same intervention – assistance – as Group 2, this time the rationale was race-conscious; respondents were informed that resources and training would be used to help reduce racial achievement gaps.

I created two dichotomous variables to assess the impact of my experimental treatments: Sanctions (assistance = 0, sanction =1) and Race-Conscious (race-neutral = 0, race-conscious = 1). Following exposure to the treatments, respondents answered a series of questions about their attitudes about the scenarios they read. Given that individuals’ beliefs about the effectiveness and fairness of policies plays a central role in shaping their overall attitudes about these policies (and
about government in general), my questions sought to tap respondents’ perceptions of the
efficacy and fairness of the scenarios (Mettler 2005). These items were the main dependent
variables analyzed in Experiment 1. The first item (Improve Achievement), sought to tap
respondents’ overall view of the expected effectiveness of the described school accountability
policy in raising academic achievement in the school. The text of the question was “How much
do you think this government action would help improve student achievement at the local high
school?” The item was measured on a 100 point scale, ranging from “Hardly at All” (0) to “A
Great Deal” (100).

The next four items asked respondents to offer their opinions on “which, if any, of the
following do you think would likely result from this government action in the local high
school?” All of these items were measured on a five-point scale, from “Very Unlikely” (1) to
“Very Likely” (5). Two statements sought to tap respondents’ perceptions about how the
scenarios would affect school behaviors plausibly related to student achievement. The first
statement about effectiveness was “The school would focus more on improving the achievement
of its students” (Focus on Improving Achievement), while the second statement was “Principals
and teachers would have strong incentives to work hard (Incentives to Work Hard).” The third
and forth statements gauged respondents’ perceptions of how fairly the scenarios would treat
students and school personnel. The third statement was “There would be too much focus on low-
achieving students at the expense of high-achieving students” (Unequal Treatment of Students);
the fourth was “Principals and teachers would not be treated fairly (Unfair Treatment of Staff).”
Note that for Focus on Improving Achieving and Incentives to Work Hard, higher values indicate
more positive assessments; while for Unequal Treatment of Students and Unfair Treatment of
Staff higher values indicate more negative assessments.
Experiment 2

In Experiment 1, respondents were only provided very limited information about the extent, duration, and causes of school problems leading to accountability interventions. However, previous research suggests that individuals’ support for punitive measures is very sensitive to exacerbating factors that reflect especially poorly on the proposed target of punishment. If public opinion about sanctions in the context of education accountability is similar to attitudes about punitive policies in other areas of social policymaking, then exacerbating factors known to increase support for punitive measures in other areas should have a similar effect when it comes to school accountability. Experiment 2 tests this proposition. In particular, the experimental conditions tested hypotheses that support for sanctions would increase when school problems were presented as especially severe; as persisting, uncorrected, over a long period of time; or as the result of the deliberate malfeasance of some actor. To test the hypothesis that individuals (especially Republicans, conservatives, and racially resentful individuals) would become less sympathetic toward sanctions when presented with the racial identities of poor-performing students, I also included a condition that mentioned the nonwhite racial identities of students in the school. This analysis included 784 respondents.

As in Experiment 1, the experimental treatments were inserted within a plausible hypothetical vignette about a struggling school in respondents’ community which respondents read while taking the survey. All respondents were presented with the same basic one-paragraph hypothetical scenario, in which a high school in their community was suffering from significant
academic difficulties. However, in each of the five conditions, the particulars differed, in order to test my hypotheses. For respondents in Group 1 (Control), the scenario was presented thusly:

Suppose that a high school in your community was faced with difficulties. On state-wide tests, a significant number of students in your local school were scoring below the average student in your state. Additionally, a significant number of students failed to graduate from the high school.

In Group 2 (Severe Problem), the scenario was altered to emphasize the severity of the problems facing the school:

Suppose that a high school in your community was faced with severe difficulties. On state-wide tests, the vast majority of students in your local school were scoring well below the average student in your state. Additionally, more than half of the students failed to graduate from the high school each year.

Likewise, in Group 3 (Persistent Problem) the scenario underscored the long duration of educational difficulties:

Suppose that a high school in your community had been faced with difficulties for a long time. On state-wide tests, significant numbers of students in your local school had been scoring below the average student in your state for several years in a row. Additionally, a significant number of students were failing to graduate from the high school year after year after year.

Meanwhile, for respondents in Group 4 (Teacher Malfeasance) the treatment included language that deliberately presented the school’s teachers in an unflattering light:

Suppose that a high school in your community was faced with difficulties. On state-wide tests, a significant number of students in your local school were scoring below the average student in your state. Additionally, a significant number of students failed to graduate from the high school. Many parents were unhappy with the quality of teaching in the school, and believed that teachers were making excessive demands for salaries and benefits.

Finally, for respondents in Group 5 (Racial Identities) the scenario was worded to make the non-white racial identities of students salient.

Suppose that a high school in your community was faced with difficulties. On state-wide tests, a significant number of students in your local school, especially African-
Americans and Latinos, were scoring below the average student in your state. Additionally, a significant number of African-American and Latino students failed to graduate from the high school each year. There was a significant “achievement gap” between the achievement of African-American and Latino students and those of white students.

Each of the experimental conditions was coded as a dummy variable (0=not in condition; 1=in condition). Following exposure to the treatment, respondents were asked the following question (Assistance or Sanctions?):

“Some people think that such a problem should be addressed by providing additional assistance, such as more funding, additional teachers and staff, or better textbooks, to help the school improve. Other people think that such a problem should be addressed by imposing a sanction, such as putting the school on probation, disciplining the principal or teachers, or changing the school’s governance, to hold it accountable for its performance. What about you?”

The item was measured on a five-point scale, from “I strongly believe that the school deserves to receive additional assistance” to “I strongly believe that the school deserves to be sanctioned.” I expected that respondents in the conditions emphasizing exacerbating factors (Severe Problem, Persistent Problem, and Teacher Malfeasance) would be more likely to support sanctions as a form of school accountability. I also expected that respondents in the Racial Identities condition would be less likely to support sanctions.

Interaction Terms (Used in Analyses of Both Experiments)

I controlled for the respondent’s Party Identification (on a 7 point scale, with higher values indicating increasing Republicanism) and Ideology (on a 5 point scale, with higher values representing increasing conservatism). I also controlled for Racial Resentment, using an item, available on the CCES, measuring respondents’ level of agreement with the statement “The Irish, Italians, Jews and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors” (agreement was measured on a 5 point scale, with higher values indicate greater racial resentment). To test hypotheses about the mediating
effects of partisanship, ideology, and racial conservatism, I created a series of terms that interacted the main experimental variables with these variables. Because there were two treatments and three variables representing auxiliary hypotheses in Experiment 1, there were six interaction terms; in Experiment 2, the four experimental treatments and three auxiliary variables yielded twelve interaction terms.

Additional Controls (Used in Analyses of Both Experiments)

The experimental designs employed in my studies provide a strong foundation from which to make inferences about the causal effects of my treatments on respondents’ opinions. However, in the models below I also included a number of control variables. I included a term indicating whether the respondent was White (white=1), to control for racial differences in attitudes about sanctions and race conscious measures. I also controlled for Gender (female=1); Age (in years); the respondent’s Family Income (on a 14-point ascending scale in 2010, with the top-code of $150,000 or more; on a 16-point ascending scale in 2011, with a top-code of $500,000 or more); and Education (on a 6 point ascending scale). These variables have been found to be correlated with individuals’ attitudes about social policies and racial policies in previous work (Feldman and Huddy 2005; Vertanen and Huddy 1998).

Modeling Strategies

In Experiment 1, Improve Achievement is a continuous variable, and OLS is used as the statistical model. The four other variables are ordinal, so the use of ordered logit was the appropriate modeling strategy. In Experiment 2, the ordinal variable Assistance or Sanctions? was modeled using ordered logit. In all models below, robust standard errors appear immediately beneath the coefficients.
I begin each analysis by assessing the overall effects of my main experimental variables. Next, I add the interaction terms to test auxiliary hypotheses. In both experiments, *Party Identification, Ideology, and Racial Resentment* were highly correlated. Because my interaction terms merely multiplied these variables by dummy variables indicating assignment to or exclusion from a treatment condition, the interaction terms were also very highly inter-correlated, as well as highly correlated with the party identification, ideology, and racial resentment variables. Inclusion of all interaction terms simultaneously introduced considerable multicollinearity into the models, leading to very imprecise estimates. As an alternative, I estimated a series of models in which I sequentially switched out sets of interaction terms. Additional information is contained in the text below.

**Results of Experiment 1**

Results of the models without interaction terms are contained in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 about Here]

Each experimental treatment is statistically (as well as substantively) significant in four of the five models, respectively. Considered together, the results seem to provide mixed support for the contention that attitudes about school accountability policies are consistent with public opinion about broader neoliberal disciplinary trends. While *Sanctions* appears to be unrelated to respondents’ attitudes about whether school accountability policies will improve student achievement, this variable has a statistically and substantively important effect on the four other dependent variables. Respondents in the sanctions conditions were significantly more likely to believe that school accountability policies would encourage greater *Focus on Improving Achievement* in schools (p<.05) and would give school principals and staff to *Incentives to Work*
Hard (p<.01). As Figure 2 shows, Sanctions had a substantively important effect on the predicted probability that respondents’ would select particular values for each dependent variable.

[Insert Figure 2 about Here]

These results provide some support for the view that disciplinary reforms in education enjoy some public favor, just as models of dynamic representation – and studies of public opinion about disciplinary reforms in areas such as welfare and criminal justice – would suggest.

However, respondents in the sanctions conditions were also significantly more likely to perceive that the implementation of school accountability policies would lead to the Unequal Treatment of Students (p<.05) and the Unfair Treatment of Staff (p<.01) than were respondents in the assistance conditions. As Figure 2 shows, these effects were substantively large. These findings suggest that respondents’ feelings about the sanctions described in this experiment are mixed: while they believe that these sanctions will induce greater focus on performance, they simultaneously fear that these policies could lead to unfair outcomes. This suggests the possibility that respondents may view schools as more akin to venerated institutions such as Social Security or Medicare, and thus feel ambivalent about the introduction of disciplinary reforms that could have adverse and unintended effects.

The results for Race Conscious suggest that attitudes about school accountability policies may indeed have a racial dimension, though perhaps not in the way liberal critics of the law have suspected. Among respondents overall, Race Conscious interventions erode, rather than stimulate, support for school accountability. Controlling for the type of school accountability measure (sanctions or assistance), respondents in the race conscious conditions were less confident that school accountability policies would Improve Student Achievement (p<.01); less likely to believe that accountability would induce schools to Focus on Improving Achievement
or provide principals and staff with *Incentives to Work Hard* (p<.05); and more likely to believe that accountability would result in the *Unequal Treatment of Students* (p<.05). Figure 2 shows that these effects are substantively important. A separate analysis of respondents in the sanctions conditions only (N=696, not shown) revealed that the addition of *Race Conscious* considerations definitely eroded respondents’ perceptions of the efficacy and fairness of the sanctions described in this experiment (statistically significant results (all at at least the p<.05 level) were found for *Improve Student Achievement, Focus on Improving Achievement, Work Hard, and Unequal Treatment of Students*, though not for *Unfair Treatment of Staff*). These results suggest that my respondents may view *Race Conscious* accountability policies—including *Race Conscious* sanctions—as more similar to unpopular race-targeted measures such as affirmative action than to disciplinary policies with racial overtones, such as recent welfare or carceral reforms. Far from inducing more favorable attitudes toward disciplinary policies, making the non-white racial identities of affected students salient undermines confidence in the efficacy and fairness of these measures, no doubt in part because respondents view them as redistributing resources toward non-white racial groups.

The introduction of the interaction terms adds considerable nuance to our interpretation of public opinion about sanctions as a disciplinary education reform, and sheds further light on the relationship between attitudes about school accountability policies and perceptions of neoliberal disciplinary reforms elsewhere. To save space, in Figure 3 I have presented only the coefficients for the main experimental variables and the associated interaction terms, though the additional control variables were also included in each of the statistical models (recall that three models, switching out different pairs of interaction terms, were estimated for each dependent variable to cope with the problem of multicollinearity). Together, the models suggest that overall
public opinion about the sanctions described in this experiment as an accountability measure is actually quite negative in comparison with opinions about the assistance measure described. However, there is some evidence (at least for some of the dependent variables) that Republicans, conservatives, and racially resentful individuals are more confident of the efficacy and fairness of the sanctions described in this experiment. Across the models in Figure 3, the coefficient for Sanctions indicates that respondents in the conditions featuring sanctions were significantly less confident in the effectiveness of school accountability and significantly more doubtful of its fairness. The effect of Sanctions on respondents’ attitudes about school accountability was substantively quite large: for example, estimates for the dependent variable Improve Achievement suggests that respondents in the conditions featuring sanctions were between 34 and 48 points less confident (on a 100 point scale) that school accountability would work to improve student achievement. While the models without interaction terms suggested that respondents were torn between their desire for accountability and their concerns that the sanctions described in this experiment would be unfair, the models with interaction terms indicate strong overall opposition to these sanctions. Far from embracing the sanctions in this experiment in the context of school accountability, as previous scholarship suggests that many individuals do in areas such as welfare reform and criminal justice, my respondents expressed skepticism akin to public doubts about the prospects of introducing neoliberal and disciplinary reforms into popular social policies such as Social Security and Medicare.

[Insert Figure 3 about Here]

The dramatic switch in the direction in the effects of Sanctions between the models without interaction terms (in Figure 2) and with interaction terms suggests that the simpler models were under-specified, masking important divisions in opinion between Democrats and
Republicans, liberals and conservatives, and more and less racially resentful individuals. Indeed, the interactions between Sanctions and Party Identification, Ideology, and Racial Resentment, respectively, are in 17 of 30 possible cases statistically significant, substantively important, and signed consistent with theoretical expectations, suggesting that Republicans, conservatives, and racially resentful citizens are more likely to believe that sanctions in this experiment will be effective, and less likely to believe that they will be unfair, than Democrats, liberals, and the less racially resentful, respectively. This finding suggests that attitudes about disciplinary reforms in education shares a common trait with attitudes about other areas of social policy and neoliberal disciplinary reform – namely, a sharp partisan, ideological, and racial division of opinion.

The models with interaction terms also provided important insights on how racial considerations affected respondents’ views about sanctions and school accountability policies, shedding further light on the racialization of school accountability reforms. Recall that the models without interaction terms showed that – controlling for the type of intervention (sanctions or assistance) – respondents in the race conscious conditions (Race Conscious=1) were less confident in the efficacy and fairness of school accountability policies. In the models with interaction terms, the direct effects of Race Conscious are weaker and less consistent. However, the models do provide some evidence for the contention that Republicans, conservatives, and racially resentful persons would be especially likely to perceive Race Conscious measures as ineffective and unfair. Although such results do not appear in all models and all specifications (significant results appear in 12 out of 30 possible interactions), the findings that do appear are consistent with my argument that Republicans, conservatives, and racially resentful persons may be likely to view race conscious measures in the context of school accountability policies as more akin to affirmative action programs that (in their view) illegitimately consider skin color in
making policy decisions. Contrary to the expectations of those who perceive school accountability measures as conservative-led plots to discipline unruly persons of color, I find that Republicans, conservatives, and racially resentful individuals may actually be most likely to be repelled by these measures.

Overall, the results of Experiment 1 suggest some affinities between attitudes about disciplinary reforms in the context of education and public opinion about social policies and disciplinary reforms in other areas of American politics. My results indicate that, rather than embracing sanctions as an accountability measure, many individuals may be repelled by them (at least in the stringent form described in Experiment 1). This suggests that many individuals may view schools as more akin to valorized institutions such as Social Security and Medicare than to derided institutions such as welfare, and thus are skeptical about the introduction of disciplinary reforms within them. However, just as scholars have identified partisan, ideological, and racial divisions over policymaking and disciplinary reforms in other areas of social policy, Experiment 1 found some evidence of similar divisions when it comes to school accountability sanctions: indeed, my results provide some evidence that Republicans, conservatives, and racially resentful persons are indeed most supportive of the sanctions described in this experiment. Finally, Experiment 1 showed that making school accountability policies race conscious induced less favorable attitudes; and provided some evidence that these effects might be greatest among Republicans, conservatives, and racially resentful individuals. Far from advocating such policies as a way to punish non-white students and/or the schools serving them, these groups likely perceive race conscious accountability measures as more similar to affirmative action-style programs that provide benefits to students of color on the basis of race.
Results of Experiment 2

Experiment 2 tested the proposition that factors known to stimulate punitive attitudes in other areas of social policymaking would have a similar effect in the realm of education. The main results of the basic model (without interaction terms) for the dependent variable *Assistance or Sanctions?* is presented in Figure 4.

[Insert Figure 4 about Here]

The model provided limited support for the hypothesis that factors known to enhance support for disciplinary policies in other areas would have analogous effects when it comes to school accountability. Two of my experimental conditions (*Severe* and *Persistent*) had no effect on the predicted probability that respondents would support sanctions. Only *Teacher Malfeasance* performed as expected: respondents in the condition describing bad teacher behavior were significantly more likely (p<.10) to support the implementation of sanctions against the school. Compared to respondents in the *Control* condition, respondents in the *Teacher Malfeasance* condition were 5 percent more likely to indicate that they “supported” sanctions, and 4 percent more likely to indicate that they “strongly supported” sanctions. These findings are notable, suggesting that (for the most part) individuals are not sensitive to exacerbating factors in expressing opinions about support sanctions in the context of school accountability.

Consistent with my expectations, the effect for *Race Salient* was statistically significant (p<.05) and negatively signed, indicating that respondents in the condition in which the non-white racial identities of students were salient were actually significantly less likely to support the implementation of sanctions against the school. Whereas previous research on the psychology of punishment suggests that for many individuals making non-white racial identities
salient increases punitive attitudes, I did not find such effects. This might be considered consistent with my argument that many individuals would be skeptical of race-targeted sanctions because they view race-conscious sanctions as akin to affirmative action policies that disburse benefits in part on racial grounds. Interestingly, however, respondents in the Race Salient condition were not only less likely to support sanctions than respondents in the Control condition; they were more likely to support assistance. In fact, respondents in the race salient condition (Race Salient=1) were 10 percent more likely to “strongly believe that the school deserved” assistance, and 4 percent more likely to “believe that the school deserved” assistance, than those in the Control condition. It is possible, therefore, that making race salient actually led respondents to become more liberal in their views about how to treat schools.

While the model provided limited evidence for the hypothesis that exacerbating factors would strengthen support for sanctions in the context of school accountability, it did provide evidence for the importance of partisanship and ideology in shaping attitudes about sanctions. Indeed, the coefficients for Partisan Identification and Ideology were both statistically significant (p<.01 in both cases), suggesting that Republicans and conservatives were significantly more likely to support sanctions than were Democrats and liberals, respectively (unlike in Experiment 1, in Experiment 2 Assistance or Sanctions? asked explicitly about respondents’ support for assistance or sanctions, so responses to this question are a direct measure of support for disciplinary school reforms). The effects of these variables was substantively large: moving across the entire scale of Partisan Identification resulted in a 12 point increase in the predicted probability of indicating “belief” that the school deserved sanctions and a 10 point increase in the predicted probability of choosing “strong belief”; while moving across the range of values for Ideology resulted in a 17 point increase in the probability
of respondent indicating “belief” that the school deserved sanctions and a 16 point increase in “strong belief” that the school deserved sanctions. Consistent with the results of Experiment 1, therefore, I found evidence of partisan and ideological divides over sanctions as a form of accountability, just as previous scholars have found polarized attitudes about policies and disciplinary reforms in other areas.

Unlike in Experiment 1, where the inclusion of interaction terms shed more nuanced light on attitudes about school sanctions and race conscious policies, in Experiment 2 the addition of the interaction terms (each of the treatments X Party Identification, Ideology, and Racial Resentment, respectively) added little new insight, while eroding the main effects of my treatment variables due to multicollinearity (for space considerations, the results are not shown). I did not find strong evidence that Republicans, conservatives, or racially resentful individuals were especially stimulated by my experimental treatments to support sanctions. However, Partisan Identification and Ideology were still important predictors of support for sanctions, suggesting that Republicans and conservatives remained more supportive of sanctions even taking the interaction effects into account.

On the whole, Experiment 2 provided limited evidence for the hypothesis that considerations known to enhance punitiveness would have an analogous effect in the context of school accountability. Only one treatment, Teacher Malfeasance, was statistically significant in the expected direction in the model of the dependent variable Assistance or Sanctions?, and this result did not hold up to the inclusion of interaction terms. Arguably, however, these “non-findings” are important insofar as they shed light on public opinion about sanctions and, more broadly, on the relationship between attitudes about sanctions in the context of school accountability and opinions about neoliberal disciplinary reforms in other areas of American
social policymaking. If Experiment 1 suggested that there are some similarities between attitudes about school accountability and opinions about disciplinary reforms in other areas of social policymaking, Experiment 2 showed that there are limits to the analogy. Unlike in other areas, where individuals’ punitive attitudes are highly sensitive to considerations such as the severity and persistence of the problem, the malfeasance of involved individuals, and the racial identities of involved persons, in the context of school accountability these factors have limited effect on support for sanctions. It is possible that individuals are more accustomed to assigning blame and doling out punishments in the realms of criminal justice and education than in education, and thus are more responsive to exacerbating circumstances in these areas.

Conclusion

Recent research on social policymaking in the United States has identified emergent patterns that can be described as neoliberal disciplinary reforms. Neoliberal disciplinary reforms combine a dedication to reduced government spending and taxation, a more limited welfare state, and less extensive economic and social regulation with a commitment to using the power of the state to strengthen markets, discipline government agencies, and regulate individuals’ moral and social behaviors so that they more closely conform to neoliberal principles. However, while political scientists and scholars from related disciplines have tracked policymaking developments, and public opinion about these changes, in many areas of social policymaking, they have largely neglected the realm of education despite changes that bear superficial resemblance to neoliberal disciplinary reforms elsewhere. This represents a missed opportunity to investigate public opinion about ostensibly neoliberal disciplinary reforms in education and assess whether attitudes in this realm parallel those observed elsewhere.
Using two experiments embedded in surveys conducted through the Cooperative Congressional Elections Studies, this paper has sought to investigate individuals’ attitudes about an important recent education reform – sanctions against struggling schools – that has surface similarities to neoliberal disciplinary reforms in areas such as welfare and criminal justice and has been compared by some scholars to these measures. My findings suggest some, albeit qualified, similarities between attitudes about sanctions in the context of school accountability and neoliberal disciplinary reforms in other areas of American social policymaking. On one hand, there are some resonances between attitudes about neoliberal disciplinary reforms in other areas and attitudes about school sanctions. Just as public opinion about neoliberal disciplinary reforms are polarized on the basis of partisan identification, ideology, and racial resentment, there appears to be evidence of polarization on the matters of the efficacy and fairness of sanctions as a mechanism of education accountability. My findings produced some evidence that Republicans, conservatives, and racially resentful citizens are more supportive of these reforms than are Democrats, liberals, and those with less racial resentment. Additionally, I found some evidence that many individuals, especially Republicans, conservatives, and racially resentful citizens, recoil from race conscious school accountability measures (including race conscious sanctions) just as they oppose race conscious measures such as affirmative action.

On the other hand, there are some areas of difference between attitudes about neoliberal disciplinary reforms in other areas of American social policymaking and attitudes about sanctions in the context of education. While individuals’ punitive sentiments are generally thought to be highly sensitive to exacerbating factors that reflect badly on the target of punishment, I found little evidence of such sensitivity in my experiments. This may well be because citizens view schools as more akin to relatively valorized programs such as Social
Security and Medicare, and thus are not enthusiastic about the introduction of punitive reforms within them. Indeed, a major result of Experiment 1 was that, after controlling for interactions with partisanship, ideology, and racial resentment, most individuals are highly skeptical of the efficacy and fairness of the sanctions described in the experiment as a form of accountability. Of course, it remains to be seen whether similar effects would be observed for less stringent sanctions.

Regrettably, the study of policymaking and public opinion related to the rise of standards, testing, and especially accountability in education has been largely isolated from broader theoretical and empirical research on neoliberal disciplinary policymaking in other areas of the American state. This study seeks to begin to bridge this gap. In finding both affinities and divergences between these literatures, this study hopes to spark conversations about how education maps on to the terrain of social policymaking admirably charted by previous research.
Figure 1: Results of Models without Interaction Terms, Experiment 1

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Improve Achievement (OLS)</th>
<th>Focus on Improving Achievement (Ordered Logit)</th>
<th>Work Hard (Ordered Logit)</th>
<th>Unequal Treatment of Students (Ordered Logit)</th>
<th>Unfair Staff (Ordered Logit)</th>
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<td>*** p&lt;0.01, ** p&lt;0.05, * p&lt;0.1</td>
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Figure 2: Effects of Treatments on Predicted Probability of Selecting Choices, by Dependent Variable, Experiment 1

Focus on Improving Achievement

![Graph showing predicted probability for different levels of achievement and sanctions.]

Work Hard

![Graph showing predicted probability for different levels of work effort and sanctions.]

Unequal Treatment of Students

![Graph showing predicted probability for different levels of treatment and sanctions.]

Unfair Staff

![Graph showing predicted probability for different levels of unfairness and sanctions.]

Focus on Improving Achievement

![Graph showing predicted probability for different levels of achievement and sanctions.]

Work Hard

![Graph showing predicted probability for different levels of work effort and sanctions.]

Unequal Treatment of Students

![Graph showing predicted probability for different levels of treatment and sanctions.]

Unfair Staff

![Graph showing predicted probability for different levels of unfairness and sanctions.]

Race

![Graph showing predicted probability for different levels of race and sanctions.]

Consciousness of Race

![Graph showing predicted probability for different levels of race consciousness and sanctions.]

S = 0

S = 1
Figure 2: Continued

Unequal Treatment of Students

Predicted Probability
Very Unlikely
Somewhat Unlikely
Neutral
Somewhat Likely
Very Likely
Race Conscious
s = 0
Race Conscious
s = 1

Unfair Staff

Predicted Probability
Very Unlikely
Somewhat Unlikely
Neutral
Somewhat Likely
Very Likely
Race Conscious = 0
Race Conscious = 1
Figure 3: Models with Interaction Effects
(Control variables were included in all models; results for controls not shown)

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Figure 3: Continued

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### Figure 4: Model of Assistance or Sanctions?, Experiment 2

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- Observations: 784
- Pseudo R2: 0.12

Robust standard errors below coefficients

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1


References


