An Alternative to out of School Expulsion AEC - Providing a Second Chance for Children

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This dissertation titled

An Alternative to Out of School Expulsion (AEC) - Providing a Second Chance for

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Abstract

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An Alternative to Out of School Expulsion (AEC) - Providing a Second Chance for Children

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This qualitative case study will examine the Harmon City Alternative Education Center (AEC) through the lens of alternative schools designed as discipline interventions for students who are expelled from school. This research provides a case study of the Alternative to Expulsion Program of the AEC which is located in a Midwestern state in the United States. The AEC is an alternative school designed to allow students to continue to receive educational services during a period of expulsion from school. Very often during the data collection phase of a case study other issues emerge that may change the course of the study. The emerging subject for this study is the plight of Black males who seem to be overrepresented as students of AEC and other such schools. This qualitative case study will describe alternative schools that exist as alternative discipline schools. This research will also investigate the reasons for the overrepresentation of Black males and their referrals regarding school discipline, look at how the AEC is perceived in the community, and determine whether or not attendance at this center affects student behavior once the student returns to their traditional school. This investigation will include a discussion of student discipline, the creation of the discipline

1 A pseudonym for the studied Midwestern city used for this research.
and achievement gaps between races, the effect of socioeconomic status and race
discipline referrals as well as negative teacher attitudes and their effect on discipline.
Critical Race Theory and Social Justice Theory are used as a backdrop for this study.

*Keywords:* alternative schools, Black males, discipline, middle and high school,
suspension and expulsion, teacher attitudes, Critical Race Theory, Social Justice Theory.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to my mother and father, Georgia and Frank Dimmy.

Mama, you always said that earning a doctoral degree would “drive you crazy.”

While I am certainly not crazy, this process has been quite tedious and by the grace of God...I am still of sound body and mind!
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Table of Contents

Abstract.................................................................................................................. 3
Dedication.................................................................................................................. 5
Acknowledgments..................................................................................................... 6
List of Tables ............................................................................................................ 12
Chapter One: Introduction ...................................................................................... 13
  Alternative Schools ............................................................................................... 16
  The Problem ......................................................................................................... 17
  Background on Alternative Schools ..................................................................... 18
  Background on Alternative Discipline Schools (ADS) .......................................... 20
  Theoretical Perspectives ...................................................................................... 20
  Purpose Statement ............................................................................................... 23
  Research Questions ............................................................................................. 24
  Limitations of the Study ...................................................................................... 25
  Definition of Terms .............................................................................................. 25
  Significance of the Study ..................................................................................... 28
  About the Researcher ............................................................................................ 29
  Summary ............................................................................................................... 33
  Organization of the Study .................................................................................... 33
Chapter Two: Literature Review ............................................................................. 35
  Introduction ........................................................................................................... 35
  Alternative Schools Defined ............................................................................... 35
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical Aspects</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposeful Sampling</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed Consent</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management and Analysis of Data: The Process</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility and Trustworthiness</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Bias</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Research Findings</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of the AEC</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-School Suspension Program</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Alternative Education Center</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First Year</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment to the AEC</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Alternative Education Center Staff</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Profile</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Discipline</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing New Students</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Day at the AEC</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Actions</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for Further Research</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A - Adult /Minor Permission Letter</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B - Minor Participant Assent Form</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C - School - Administrator Interview Protocol</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D - Teacher/ Educational Assistant Interview Protocol</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E - School Administrator Survey</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F - HCS Definitions of Student Behavior</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1 Ethnicity, Gender and Behavior Table HCS 2014-2015………………………………122
Table 2 Grade Level Behavior HCS 2014-2015.................................................................123
Chapter One: Introduction

If Dr. Martin Luther King could see what is happening in America today, he would probably be quite perplexed. Initially he might be happy seeing the first Black president, Barack Obama, as a sign that progress has been made in lessening the racial divide that exists in America, but confused to see people still demonstrating in the streets for racial equity and fairness just as they did in 1969 when he was assassinated.

America seems to be going backwards, back to the days of violence and turmoil before the legislation associated with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as well as the Voting Rights Act of 1965. There are at least three reasons for this new unrest according to Von Drehle (2015). Freddie Gray, a Black man who died while in the custody of the Baltimore, MD police force; Michael Brown, an unarmed Black 19-year old Black man who was killed in the streets of Missouri by a police officer; and Trevon Martin, a 17-year-old boy shot by a member of the local neighborhood watch, because his face was unfamiliar in that neighborhood (Von Drehle, 2015).

Almost daily, people in the United States are protesting in the streets because of the recent deaths of young unarmed Black males at the hands of local police officers whose job is to keep our communities safe. Chants of “Black Lives Matter” “Hands up, Don’t Shoot” and “I Can’t Breathe” have become universal symbols chanted or written on signs that are carried by protesters. These unfortunate events have created a crisis of confidence in police departments across the United States, consequently creating a new Civil Rights movement according to Von Drehle, (2015)
According to President Obama, Black men dying at the hands of the police has become a slow rolling crisis in America. He further stated, this is not new, it’s been going on for decades…in Baltimore and elsewhere you have impoverished communities that have been stripped away of opportunity…children are born into poverty…and often the parents, because of substance abuse…incarceration or lack of education themselves can’t do right by their kids (pp. 37-38).

This problem now seems to be a matter of human rights and social justice and because of social media these activities are being witnessed all over the world.

How do these activities relate to a research study on alternative schools designed for discipline interventions? This study was originally intended to discuss alternative schools designed as alternatives to expulsion and was specifically focused on a single case study of the Harmon City Schools Alternative to Expulsion Program (AEC). While this research does explore the organization of the AEC, this case study, in accordance with suggestions by Stake (2006), has been organized around an emerging issue - the study of the overrepresentation of Black males as students in the (AEC).

The information discussed in this study relates to the overrepresentation of Black males as recipients of punitive discipline measures while at school, whether paddling, suspension and expulsion. The research explores some of the roots or origins of ADS’s that may help to explain why when Black males reach middle school they begin to have multiple discipline problems (Browne-Dianis, 2011, Woods, 2010).

Black males generally enter kindergarten as happy little boys wanting to learn the same as other students but often by the time they reach fifth or sixth grade, they have
become sullen. Even though they are as intelligent as other students, they begin to earn low grades and have discipline problems.

The AEC to be studied is located in a large Midwestern school district and was selected because of its longevity of service to the researched school district and the positive perception that it has in the community. This study will trace the development of the AEC from its establishment in 1989 until the present and provide a history as well as descriptions of the policies, procedures, customs, and climate of the school from the perspective of the teachers, administrators and students.

Further this study will look at the “seeds” that are planted while the students and especially young Black males are in primary grades and during their formative years. This is the period when it is inferred they are bad boys, unable to learn, and is considered what separates them from other students. Some of these “seeds” are reflective of the adultification of Black boys, a concept to be discussed later in this document, as well as the suspension and expulsion of Black males as early as kindergarten (Brown-Dianis 2011; Woods, 2010).

Recently the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), James Comey, speaking on relationships between the police and Black communities stated that police officers tend to develop negative attitudes about Black people when they work in neighborhoods with high crime. This causes officers to see differences between Black and White males and thus leads to more arrests among Black males than White males. The FBI Director, suggested that these problems should be attended to because the
United States is not effectively working to solve this serious problem in law enforcement (Schmits, 2015).

**Alternative Schools**

One of the goals of public education includes maintaining acceptable scholastic standards for students in schools and sustaining suitable standards of behavior. In order to maintain reasonably peaceful learning cultures in school, school boards have prescribed written codes of conduct for parents and students that contain guidelines for what is considered appropriate student behavior as well as differentiated methods for student discipline interventions (Cook, 2003; Lamont et al’ 2013).

Among these interventions are the exclusionary practices of suspension and expulsion, which separate the students with perceived discipline problems from those students who are more compliant. These students are generally excluded from the traditional school setting entirely with no educational support or assignment to schools especially designed to solve their perceived problems (Welch & Payne, 2012).

These educational innovations were designed to decrease the amount of time a student spends out of school during periods of suspension and expulsion. They provide students with a second chance for educational success by allowing them to continue their course of study during a period of expulsion. Many districts throughout the United States have established alternative to expulsion schools and centers (Clark, 2008; Kim, 2006).
The Harmon City Schools Alternative to Expulsion Center (AEC) offers a second chance opportunity for expelled students to either catch up or to stay on task scholastically. The lower pupil/teacher ratio in the AEC allows greater opportunity for individualized instruction of each student. An emerging issue that has surfaced during this study is the over-representation of Black males as students who attend ADSs. This study will examine the AEC and attempt to discern what might be the reasons for the over-representation of Black males in these settings. This information will add to the literature base about ADSs, and may inform the organization or the establishment of other programs.

The Problem

The United States has over 20,000 functioning alternative schools but there are few guidelines or policies in place to guide effective operations (Kim, 2011; Rizzi, 2011). Of this number, 10,900 schools were focused on discipline during the 2000-2001 school year (Lehr & Lange, 2003). This information was gathered from the seminal study of alternative schools conducted by the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) during the 2000-2001 school year.

Many different theories account for the approaches currently used in educating at-risk students in search of finding out what really works in these schools (Lehr & Lange, 2003; Quinn & Poirier, 2007). Empirical studies are not generally available for ADSs but

2 A pseudonym for the studied mid-western city used for this research.
if efficient evaluations can be accessed school administrators could take this information into account in their decision-making and program improvement and to supply adequate student support services (Clark, 2008; Lehr & Lang, 2003).

**Background on Alternative Schools**

Before an examination of ADSs occurs the total concept of alternative schools must be explored. *Alternative* is the title generally given to all the schools that were created during the 1960s and 1970s by local school boards, in order to meet the individual needs of students, both configured and run differently than traditional schools. Schools designed for student discipline were the first considered to be alternative schools. During the 1960s, alternative schools served as models of innovative educational practices and restructured schools, just as charter schools do today (Raywid, 1994).

Alternative education programs (AEP) should be differentiated from alternative discipline schools (ADS). ADS are usually designed for students referred for discipline intervention. AEP offer specific directed learning environments for children can be referred to as magnet schools and are schools of choice that came into existence in the 1960s during the school reform movement (Conley, 2003). Raywid (1994) has classified alternative schools into three types. Type I schools are usually magnet schools with a special emphasis on a particular program or curriculum such as science or a language immersion school. Type II schools are most likely designed for discipline interventions and are represented by schools and centers similar to the Harmon City AEC. Type III schools are designed for students in need of emotional supports or who have an existing
Individual Education Program (IEP). Students must be assigned to these schools (Aron, 2003).

Alternative schools normally have some of the following characteristics: They give parents and students educational options, especially students who could possibly fail in school settings. Alternative schools are more responsive to the needs of the community. Their goals include not only developing basic skills but also enabling students to become exceptional and diverse citizens of the US. ADS’s are more receptive to changes occurring in their environment and more inclined to adapt the curriculum to those changes. The enrollment of these schools is smaller, and there are usually about 200 students or less (Conley, 2002).

Although these descriptions of alternative school characteristics are considered to be accurate, there is limited empirical supportive information about alternative schools that exist, their activities and daily operations (Lehr & Lange, 2003; Quinn & Poirier, 2007). Initially, the alternative schools created were considered to be places for at risk students whose behavior was incompatible with traditional school structures or students who were in danger of becoming school dropouts or for failing in school (Glassett, 2014).

Over time the definition of alternative schools has changed to include schools that offer an in-depth curriculum in a particular area or a specified or different focus. Many schools, including magnet schools and charter schools, are now considered to be alternative schools. The growth of AEP’s in the public schools in the United States (US) has mushroomed over the last few decades, with at least 20,000 programs in existence at this time (Conley, 2002; Kim, 2011).
Many of the “new” alternative schools were created in conjunction with the school reform movement in the 1980s with the publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Research* that was published by the United States Department of Education in 1983. This government publication provided sharp commentary on the state of education in America and prescribed remedies designed to enhance and improve student achievement. Alternative schools were thought to be a part of the solution toward greater student success (Conley, 2002).

**Background on Alternative Discipline Schools (ADS)**

Initially the first alternative schools were designed for those students who were unable to achieve in the traditional school setting. These schools began to emerge in the US in the latter part of the 1960s. Raywid (1994) categorizes them as Type II schools. They were generally designed for student discipline and allowed a student to continue their education during a period of suspension or expulsion. ADS’s are often considered dumping grounds or warehouses for students with discipline problems which separates them from those students perceived to be normal (Kim, 2001; Kim & Taylor, 2008). Further discussion of the ADS’s is continued in the review of the literature.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

The problems associated with the focus and organization of ADS’s will be examined against a backdrop of the perspectives of Quinn & Poirier’s (2007) views on effective alternative discipline schools; social justice theory (SJT), and critical race theory (CRT). SJT and CRT are selected because of the perspectives advanced by these theories regarding inequality and race. Additionally, the researcher encountered a wealth
of information regarding unequal treatment of select groups, such as Black males, when examining SJT and CRT and the unbalanced way they are assigned the discipline interventions of suspension and expulsion in the AEC. SJT also relates to school climate, policies and procedures, whereas CRT is about race. In order to assist the reader to better understand the phenomenon regarding the over assignment of discipline interventions to Black males, SJT and CRT will be applied as a filter to view and analyze this information.

Quinn & Poirier (2007) suggest three perspectives exist in which ADS’s deal with students assigned to their programs.

The first is based upon the idea that the educational system itself is “broken” and unable to meet the various and diverse needs of student learners. The second is based upon is the idea that the students are “broken” and un-teachable. The third suggests that the system or program needs to make a change. The school must offer programs, curriculum and instruction that differ from that of the system (p. 1).

These opposing philosophies have caused a problem because educators do not know what alternative discipline schools (ADS) should look like or exactly which students they should serve. Because of this lack of information, it is challenging to identify a research-based definition of how alternative schools, which include schools for student discipline, should be configured along with the kind of curriculum and/or programs that should be delivered to students. Amidst all of this controversy, a major
question remains whether or not students assigned to ADS’s receive adequate educational services (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Quinn & Poirier, 2007).

Secondly, SJT is aligned with race, gender, diversity, religion, marginalization, age, and sexual orientation issues and suggests some solutions for change that focus on the leadership practices of schools and other institutions that continue to allow inequitable policies in education as well as school discipline (Marshall & Olivia 2010). One of the problems that individuals express, after tragedies occur involving the demise of Black males such as those in Missouri and Baltimore, is the negative relationship between the police departments and Black males. There may not be inequities in the rules of the various police departments, but the interpretation of these rules varies greatly among law enforcement agencies in the US. These interpretations appear to offer different rules for different people. The current goal is equal treatment for all people (Von Drehle & Altman, 2014).

An example of inequitable treatment reported by Time Magazine (2015) shows police are frequently disrespectful to Black males, harassing and singling them out for no particular reason. Consequently, Black males feel unfairly treated. Some Black males state that the police do not approach them with a respectful attitude and do not explain the reason they are being detained (Von Drehle & Altman, 2014). All of these actions have the potential to cause problems. Good practices, a positive attitude, quality education, consistent rules for all along with SJT training would provide improvement to the negative situations that exist in many cities of the US.
Lastly, CRT views racism as so engrained in American culture that it is hardly recognizable. CRT is considered both a political and an intellectual movement (Delgado, 1995; Rollock & Gillborn, 2011) and provides ways of looking and thinking about some of the inequities in our culture by urging individuals to question the inequalities and advocate for change. One of the goals of CRT is to expose ways in which minorities are kept at an inferior status in America (Solorzano, 1998). CRT advocates for socially just educational environments hoping to eliminate the racism that is manifested in the inequitable treatment of those who are perceived to be different (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011).

Live reporting current injustices of Black males and police interactions, documents the racial imbalances that exist in America today. This situation is being watched and monitored by the larger world community outside the United States who are waiting to see how these problems will be solved. It will be interesting to see whose best interest is served when solutions are found for this issue. This problem relates to CRT’s Interest Convergence Theory discussed latter in this document which quotes Derrick Bell as saying “the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated when it converges with the interests of Whites” (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011, p. 2). In other words, this problem will not be solved until and unless the remedy is in the best interest of Caucasians.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this case study is to provide an overview of the AEC which presents an alternative to out of school expulsion for students. The program examined is
located in the Midwestern US, a part of the Harmon City School District. This qualitative study will discuss the vision behind the AEC and its history from establishment to present. A description of the center’s policies, procedures, customs, and climate will be provided from interviews with, teachers and administrators. Additionally, questions will be addressed regarding who attends the school, how they were assigned, and what the school stands for in the community.

An emerging issue in this study is the overpopulation of Black male students who are assigned to AEC. This study will seek to determine why Black males are assigned to discipline schools at as much as twice the rate of White males and other minorities. In addition, this research will attempt to discern the impact of the socio-economic status of these young men, federal legislative acts such as the Gun Free Schools Act, as well as race on ADS referrals (Monroe, 2005, Skiba, Michael & Nardo., 2000).

This study may offer alternative perspectives of the daily practices of the center including school climate, policies, procedures and other phenomenon that enhance school operations. The Harmon City AEC might serve as a model for the establishment of other such schools.

**Research Questions**

The questions that will guide this research study are the following:

1. What is the history and significance of the AEC program?

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3 Information is on file with the researcher.
a) How has the AEC evolved from 1989 to the present based upon administrative leadership?

b). Who are the students attending the AEC and what are the reasons for their assignment?

2. What is the student experience in the AEC?

3. What might be the reason for overrepresentation of Black males assigned to the AEC?

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study represent the conditions that the researcher cannot control however may impact the outcome of the research. (Roberts, 2010). In addition, this study does not include students who have been expelled from school without educational support. Furthermore, the researcher’s access to the AEC may be limited to objections from administration or by school programing because of city or statewide testing and evaluation. These events may interfere with scheduling requiring the researcher to take a longer time collecting information. Other arrangements, such as document and record searches, may be required to gather the needed information. An additional variable, the mobility of the administrators, who may no longer work at the AEC, might hinder the researcher’s ability to make personal contact.

Definition of Terms

Alternative Education Program (AEP) – “A public school set up by states or school districts to serve populations of students who are not succeeding in the traditional public school environment” (Conley, 2002, p. 245).
Alternative Discipline School (ADS) – An alternative school that offers suspended students the opportunity to continue their education during their expulsion.

Alternative to Expulsion Center (AEC) – An educational program located in a school or other structure that enables students, who are expelled from school, to continue their education during the period of suspension and expulsion (Beckham, 2009). In this study, the Harmon City Schools Alternative to Expulsion Center will be the setting.

Alternative to Out of School Suspension Program (AOSSP) – Alternative to Out of School Suspension is an in-school suspension program that allows students to continue their education during a period of school suspension (Harmon City Schools, 2013).

Critical Race Theory – “The work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination” (Solórzano, 1998, p. 122).

De Facto Segregation – De facto segregation is not enacted by law but occurs due to socioeconomic circumstances and location (Conley, 2002).

Expulsion – The exclusion of a child from school over a period of time for failure to follow the school district rules and regulations. During expulsion students cannot receive educational support from the school district (HCS, 2013).

Expulsion Hearing Officer (EHO) – A school administrator responsible for assigning discipline interventions to students who have been referred for discipline intervention by their middle or high school administrator.
**Gun Free Schools Act of 1994, 20 United States (Public Law No. 103-882, 14601)**

School districts that receive federal funds are mandated by The Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 to enact state laws that require the expulsion of students who are in possession of a firearm at an educational facility. The duration of this expulsion must be one school year unless otherwise designated by the chief administering officer of the school district (Beckham, 2009).

**Racism** – “A belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (Solórzano, 1998, p. 124).

**Racial Microaggressions** – “The subtle, stunning, and often automatic and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’ of Blacks by offenders. The offensive mechanisms used against Blacks are often innocuous” (Solórzano, 1998, p. 124).

**Social Justice** – “The exercise of altering any educational institutions and institutional practices that work against full participation of members of the community in a democratic process by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing the inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational and personal dimensions among other forms of relationships” (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p. 22).

**Suspension** – The removal of a student from school for failure to follow the school district’s rules and regulations. During the period of suspension, the student may complete homework (Beckham, 2009).

**Zero Tolerance** - A term used in place of or as a reference to the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 (Beckham, 2009).
Significance of the Study

At a time when our culture is changing drastically and parental guidance is at a record low, the need for ADS’s continues to increase. There is a disparity in information on how these schools must operate to be effective. Questions exist as whether the curriculum for these schools should be changed to better adapt to the child or whether programs should be formulated to be more supportive of student success (Quinn & Poirier, 2007).

This study is significant because it will provide the history about the establishment of the AEC and look at how it has adapted to societal changes throughout the 25 years of its existence. It will discuss who is assigned to attend the AEC and why they are assigned. In addition, this research may determine how assignment to the AEC affected student discipline once they return to their home school. Further, this inquiry will determine how leadership changes the atmosphere of the school. These aspects are important to study to assure that students assigned the ADS continue to receive quality educational services.

A portion of this research is devoted to Black males and their overrepresentation as AEC recipients of discipline interventions. A significant aspect of this research observes the discipline gap, the scholastic achievement gap and teacher attitude and their effect on the quality of the school life of Black males. This inquiry is to help understand the reasons Black males are referred to ADSs more than other students. Either all or portions of the information provided by this research study will add to the literature base about ADCs and may be used in consideration to establish other centers.
About the Researcher

I am the youngest of four children born and raised in a large metropolitan city. After I started school, my mother joined my father working at the major aircraft manufacturer in the area. To earn extra money, my father painted signs for the neighborhood businesses in the evenings after he came home from his day job. Although we did not have a perfect or ideal home, living with some dysfunction, we managed to be content. Even though both parents eventually worked, we were still poor though we lived in our own home in a decent neighborhood close to a school. I grew up in the era of segregation so the elementary and middle schools I attended were communities of primarily Black children and Black teachers.

When I started school, I attended kindergarten for half a year and then was placed into first grade for the other half of the year because I knew how to read. I always loved education and the teachers who taught me. By the time I was in fourth grade I had decided that I wanted to be a teacher.

My parents valued education and wanted me to be able to have a “better life,” they sacrificed and acquired loans so that I could attend college. I realized my dream when I graduated from Central State University (Ohio) and began to teach in the local school district immediately upon graduation. That first year of teaching was a revelation for me because I had my first real adult encounter with racism. I was assigned to work in a predominantly White school and to my surprise; several parents complained they did not want their children in my class because of my Blackness. They thought because I was not White, I was an inferior teacher.
After my first year in teaching I married and moved to Germany for the next 18 months. I travelled throughout Europe, teaching in the American school in Germany, but most importantly, I delivered a bouncing baby boy. Prejudice seemed not to exist there. When I returned to the US I was assigned to teach in a school with a predominant Black population. Again I saw prejudice of White staff and the way they regarded the Black children and staff. I encountered a White teacher calling the Black children ‘jungle bunnies’ on one occasion. When the White staff had social gatherings, they selectively invited Black staff. I was always the one who tried to discuss the merits of inviting everyone and allowing Black staff members to make their decision to attend. That did not help the situation and the culture of the school remained one of distrust. During my term at the school I attended the local university, earning my Master of Education Degree and applying to become an elementary school principal.

That principalship was my real introduction to the problems that exist with racism and sexism within the school structure. Those experiences helped me see and understand some of the problems discussed in this research study. My first assignment as a principal was in a school in which discipline problems did not exist. The biggest student problem in that school was head lice. However, I did experience racial prejudice as teachers stated that they were ‘afraid’ of me. However, there were no grounds for this except for the fact that I was the first Black woman principal to work at the school and I stood up for children.

That staff often called the teacher’s union to report me for offences they thought I had committed, often making up offenses. They were never able to file a grievance
against me. Eventually the teacher’s union began ignoring their calls since I had a reputation of working fairly with the teachers.

My next assignment as principal was at an inner city school located in an area of low socioeconomic status that was overrun with gangs and drug dealers. About 98% of the students attending the school received free and reduced lunches and the student population was predominantly Black. The previous principal worked hard, mostly suspending students, so there was literally no student discipline. During my first year at this school, several teachers left with one teacher simply leaving a note on my desk saying “I am retiring. I have already told the union.” It took two teachers to maintain her classroom and I also discovered that she had not been teaching the children to read. That was the general mode of the school—academic education was not happening for the students.

There were many incidents happening at the school with Black male students. Some of the boys displayed serious behavior problems and were evaluated and placed in special education and some boys were suspended and expelled for discipline infractions. Many of the Black male students did well both scholastically and socially while others were disrespected and picked on by teachers. I distinctly remember the day when a first grade Black male student was brought to me for a minor discipline infraction. In an attempt to teach him the correct behavior, I simply talked to him so that he would know what to do the next time, and sent him back to his classroom. Later as I made my rounds through the building I discovered that the teacher had decided to keep the boy in for recess after I had already disciplined him. For this minor infraction, this was an unfair
double jeopardy situation. I sent the young man out to recess and discussed the incident with the teacher. Many such incidents occurred during my principalship at this school.

I currently work as a part-time administrator in a city school district, and I am responsible for determining the discipline interventions for the students who are sent to my office. Though I now deal mostly with middle and high school students, I feel that I have gone ‘full circle’ in the school district since I have worked with school administrators, teachers, parents and students at every grade level. Daily, in ‘living color’, I see the subjects of this research study, young Black males who are expelled from school for perceived serious discipline problems.

The students I see are predominantly Black male middle school students, many who come from single parent families, with the mother as the head of household. A number of these students live in high poverty communities. Often the young parents have been unsuccessful in school and developed a level of distrust of the school system. It worries me that more elementary students are being referred to the expulsion hearing office. It seems that the younger the students are on their first visit and the more times they are sent to the hearing center for discipline, their discipline problems worsen. Often students who return regularly (repeaters) end up in the penal system, ending up among those that are shot and killed in the streets.

I have mixed emotions as I serve these students. On one hand I see the exhibited bad behavior at school which produced the severe discipline assigned them. On the other hand, their school records show boys who were successful in school, often making honor roll. When reaching middle and high school, these students began to get failing grades
along with excessive behavior problems. What has happened to these Black males? How can we help them and break this cycle? This is one of the reasons I selected the Harmon City Schools for this study.

**Summary**

ADS were established in the 1960s and 1970s in an effort to educate students whose needs were different from those who attended conventional schools. This included children unable to function in the traditional setting because of excessive discipline problems. Several problems existed with alternative schools because there were no guidelines to help to ensure effectiveness in delivery of a program to provide a second chance for troubled students (Kim, 2006). An additional obstacle existed with ADS with the overrepresentation of Black males typically assigned to these schools. Several issues stemming from either a cause for or a result of the overrepresentation of Black males assigned to ADS must include: a discussion of the creation of the discipline gap, the effect of socioeconomic status, and the impact of race on discipline. Teacher attitudes toward Black males and the effect of the Gun Free Schools Act will be discussed in this study (Beckham, 2009; Kim, 2006) as well.

**Organization of the Study**

This study is divided into five chapters, including references and appendices. Chapter Two contains the literature review designed to inform the reader about the trends in alternative discipline schools. Chapter Three describes the methodology the researcher has selected to gather information for this study. Chapter Four represents study findings, a narrative description of the AEC and its history collected by the researcher. Chapter
Five summarizes recommendations and conclusions from this study, both intended and unintended, as well as offers suggestions for additional research.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The review of the literature presents a descriptive narrative of the history of alternative schools in America, the reasons they were developed and organized along with definitions of who is served by them, program offerings, and the problems associated with their organization and delivery of instruction. An emerging issue of this study is the controversy surrounding the over-representation of Black males at ADSs and information that speculates why this problem continues to exist and how it might be solved. The effect of teacher attitude and its impact on the discipline gap, the scholastic gap and the economic status of students is reviewed in this study as it relates to the quality education provided by ADSs. Also included are conversations about SJT and CRT that relate to school climate, race and the Gun Free Schools Act which represents legislation of school rules by the federal government.

Alternative Schools Defined

Alternative education programs and schools are defined and designed along a variety of dimensions that answer the questions of who, what, where and how: who is being served, where it is located, what does the program offer and how is the program structured (Aron, 2003). Brenda Conley, in her book *Alternative schools: A reference handbook* (2002), describes the many options and common characteristics presented to students by alternative schools. AEP’s offer options to students and parents and make student attendance voluntary as opposed to mandatory and students are provided the opportunity to select a school rather than being assigned to one (Kochhar-Bryant &
Lacey, 2003). These alternative schools are geared towards what the community or students, who select to attend the school, want in their educational program (Conley, 2002).

AEP’s have goals and objectives that relate to their specialized program in contrast to conventional schools and are generally smaller in population than conventional schools. AEP’s are divided into eras according to ADS the innovations they represent: 1960s described as the period of innovation, 1970s as the age of accountability and improvement, 1980s as the excellence movement that led to the restructuring of the 1990s, which is considered the era of competition, school choice and privatization (Conley, 2002).

The definitions and descriptions of alternative schools are often determined by the ways in which they are different from traditional schools. ADSs generally offer students a different learning environment in which they have an opportunity to be successful. There is no standard definition of ADS programs as they tend to vary in location, size, and school district connection, and there is a lack of theoretical information about them (Kochhar-Bryant & Lacey, 2003). What follows are some descriptions of ADSs and the students who have been assigned to them.

Alternative discipline schools are public schools designed for those students who are unsuccessful in their neighborhood traditional school, and have learning problems, psychological disabilities or exhibit behavior issues (Conley, 2002; Kim, 2006). The Arizona Department of Education mentions students served in these schools may be
identified as individuals who may be: dropouts, behind at least one year scholastically, in contact with the juvenile authorities, currently parenting children (Kim, 2006).

An official definition provided by the US Department of Education defines alternative as:

A public elementary/secondary school that addresses the needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school program. . . The school provides nontraditional education; serves as an adjunct to a regular school and falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education. (Mills-Walker, 2011, p. 25)

**Alternative School Typologies**

With so many alternative schools being created, a definition of these schools according to their intent or goals and their scholastic or discipline offerings is imperative. Aron (2003) is concerned there is no concrete definition of what constitutes alternative education and considers this lack of a definition the primary problem regarding alternative schools and their effective, efficient operation and function. Dr. Mary Anne Raywid (1994) created classifications used to describe what alternative education programs offer to students who may be at risk or in need of different educational challenges:

*Type I* – These schools are usually magnet or alternative schools with a special emphasis on a particular program or curriculum. They are full time multi - year programs, which provide individualized instruction and a rigorous curriculum which affords the students an opportunity to earn a high school diploma. This is a program of choice because students and parents must select to attend the program.
It differs from the traditional program because it is very flexible and both the teacher and instruction is individualized and the staff shows the student that they care about them (Aron, 2003; Lehr & Lang, 2003; Mills-Walker, 2011).

Type II - These schools are generally for student discipline interventions during a period of suspension or expulsion and are concerned with student discipline and have a goal of separating and controlling the students’ while helping them to attain better self-discipline. Students are assigned to these schools for a particular amount of time which can be from several days to one or more years. The curriculum may be supplied by the school the student was transferred from or provided at the alternative school. Models of these schools include last chance schools as well as in-school suspension programs (Aron, 2003; Lehr & Lang, 2003; Mills-Walker, 2011).

Type III - These schools are generally designed to accommodate students who have social or emotional challenges who need counseling or students who have special needs. Models of this program are school dropouts who are unable to pass the mandated state education tests. Students assigned to these programs usually have an Individual Education Program (IEP). Students have to be evaluated before being transferred to another school (Aron, 2003; Lehr & Lang, 2003; Mills-Walker, 2011).

Additional school classifications have been created, one of which is strictly for student discipline and another that provides restorative and counseling services for students. A typology has been created for those students who have gotten off track and
need only a short time away from the home school to re-adjust as well as a program for adolescent parents, students recently released from the juvenile court system, or students with severe discipline problems (Aron, 2003).

**Alternative Discipline Schools Defined**

The difference between AEP’s and ADSs is very minute. They are both alternative schools that provide particular programs for a targeted group of students. ADS are often operated and organized differently than traditional schools and are sometimes funded and operated by private companies not affiliated with school districts (Clark, 2008). The National Dropout Prevention Center (2013) provides the following descriptions of some of the different designs used for alternative schools:

- **Schools Within** - a school that may be located within the student’s neighborhood school but in a different wing of the building and staffed with different teachers. This school is designed to improve the social behavior of students.

- **Schools Without Walls** – a school designed to meet the needs of students both scholastically as well as with training programs. These programs are located in various places within the community.

- **Residential Schools** – a school that students are referred to through the court system, family counseling or various scholastic programs.

- **Separate Alternative Learning Centers** – a school designed for students to provide parenting skills or job skills, which may be located in shopping malls, churches or other locations, away from the traditional school setting.
• Second Chance Schools - serving primarily as an organization for discipline intervention for students who have difficulty adjusting to the traditional school setting.

ADS populations often represent the socio-economic and racial configuration of their home community and many regard these centers as being naturally de facto segregated. These ADSs are generally located in communities of low socio-economic status with a large number of minority families (Conley, 2002; Kim & Taylor, 2008). Although ADSs were designed as a last stop for the achievement of success for troubled students, a problem still exists surrounding their definition. This problem refers to the ways in which they should function because adequate research has not been conducted to determine in which ways they are effective (Clark, 2008; Quinn & Poirier, 2007).

Positive and Negative Perceptions of ADS

Repeatedly parents raise questions when their children are assigned to ADS’s since they believe that these schools generally harbor unruly children (Kim, 2006). These parents have to be assured of the positive aspects of the ADS and that other students assigned to the discipline center are similar to their child.

According to Kim and Taylor, (2008), parents and other community members have several assumptions about the plight of students assigned to alternative schools. They believe these students come from poverty-stricken areas with race issues, have uneducated parents, or live in single parent homes, etc. The authors also state that this mindset represents “deficit thinking . . . which blames the student’s low socio-economic status for their failure in school . . . and ignores the systematic factors” (p. 3).
No one seems to consider the systematic failures which include the delivery of instruction, the equality of school funding, or the worthiness of the curriculum in the traditional school. Mixing all of these issues together, the school does not become accountable for the failure of its students to make adequate progress in scholastic achievement. This dilemma puts students in the impossible situation of being blamed for their lack of educational achievement (Kim & Taylor, 2008).

Positive Perceptions of Alternative Discipline Schools

The positive aspects of ADS’s relate to the fact that the classrooms are very structured with many classroom management practices in place to help manage students with self-discipline issues by teaching them the appropriate social skills and behaviors. In an alternative school setting, adult role models work with students, parent involvement is encouraged and the students receive acceptable academic instruction. Often a change in location away from the home school leads to stronger outcomes for the students (Kochhar-Bryant & Lacey, 2005; Saunders & Saunders, 2002; thefreelibrary.com, 2012).

Clark (2008) points out that generally the pupil/teacher ratio is smaller than that of the traditional classroom, allowing students to receive more individual attention. These classrooms provide a less busy environment for disruptive students who often do not function well in larger groups of students. Students who attend ADSs usually receive more individual attention from and have better personal interactions with the teachers. Most of all, ADSs are looked upon as places that give students a second chance to achieve their educational goals.
Negative Perceptions of Alternative Discipline Schools

There seem to be more negative perceptions about ADSs than positive. ADSs are considered places for students at-risk for failure and who have excessive discipline problems or have had interaction with the legal system. ADSs are often located in areas of low socio-economic status with high populations of Black and minority students. This location exposes the school to social inequalities that exist in the community in which it is located and often this logistics cause them to be considered de facto segregated organizations (Conley, 2002; Kim & Taylor, 2008).

ADSs are seen as pipelines to prison or soft jails since they directly connect students with the penal system by arresting them in school for discipline infractions such as fighting and threats (Kim & Gonzales, 2010). It is also suggested that ADSs exist to keep the good children safe by removing the troublemakers from the school and keep them from committing crime in the local community (Heitzeg, 2009; Kim, 2006; Lamont et al., 2013).

According to Clark (2008) another negative perception of ADS’s is that little care is given to scholastic achievement because the behavior modification of students is seen to be more important. Therefore, students are likely to fall behind scholastically by at least one year. Additionally, ADS’s are seen as places where the students are not thought to be as important as students attending traditional schools (Clark, 2008).

Theoretical Frameworks

This research study is anchored in Quinn and Poirier’s (2007) perspectives on ADS’s, SJT, and CRT. Quinn and Poirier provide viewpoints on existing ADS’s and
how they should be organized to better impact student outcomes, provide highly innovative programs or change the total educational system. Their three ideas about ADS’s are listed below:

- In order to change the student, the school environment should be highly structured and therapeutic.
- In order to change the student, it is necessary to provide innovative programs with emphasis on curriculum and instruction that differ from that of traditional schools.
- In order to change the student, it is necessary to make systemic changes which might include small schools or a school within-a-school concept (Quinn & Poirier, 2007).

There is no definitive information about the effectiveness of these proposed innovations perceived to make ADS’s more effective and efficient. Many of the alternative school programs designed to change the student are often too structured and too punitive and do not effect permanent student change. In programs proposing that the school be changed, the students are successful while they are at the ADS but they resume having problems when they return to their home school. The most effective ADS program is perceived to be the total change of the educational system (Quinn & Poirier, 2007).

Even though there is definitive information about what an ADC should look like there are different ideas about what their philosophies should be. It is estimated that more than 20,000 ADCs now thrive in the United States (Losen, 2011, Quinn et.al, 2006). What is interesting is the report from Raywid et al. (2006) in the 2000-2001 academic
year almost half of school districts in the US, or 39% of those districts with a high
majority of students at-risk and of high poverty, established at least one ADS within their
school district.

**Social Justice Theory**

The second theory to be used as a lens through which to view this study is SJT. The SJT relates to leadership and capacity building and the ways in which effective
educational leadership can embrace equality and democracy in schools. As Dantley and
Tillman (2010) state, “Leadership for social justice interrogates the policies and
procedures that shape schools and at the same time perpetuate social inequalities and
marginalization due to race, class, gender, and other markers of difference” (p. 31).

Dantley and Tillman (2010) also suggest that SJT is concerned with the ways the
culture and climate in schools allow political, educational and social inadequacies to
exist, with its goal being to eradicate these inadequacies. They posit that educators
should redirect school culture toward social justice and that teachers and principals need
to do a more effective job of socializing students, especially those of minority
populations (Dantley & Tillman, 2010). This means that educators should take the time
to formulate rules and regulations that are equitable for all, and programs that teach
students to have respect for themselves and others while respecting individual
differences.

Educational leadership from individuals committed to social justice issues can
impact the academic and social lives of students by focusing on positive change. Social
justice advocates for educational professionals to lead schools toward student equity by
teaching students through inclusive and multicultural classrooms, setting the goals of raising the academic achievement of all students, and preparing them to live as worthwhile members of society (Dantley & Tillman, 2010).

Bordeaux (2004) suggests that in order to implement social justice into the school curriculum, leaders should allow and enable teachers to present culturally relevant subject matter to students. This will ensure that students become familiar with their cultures as well others. Social justice leaders teach and encourage their staff to show students that they care about them, support them, and expect them to be successful scholastically. Also, high expectations have a positive effect on students. Most importantly leaders for social justice must ensure that teachers are familiar with the varying learning styles among cultures of the students in a classroom and are able to effectively deliver instruction to all students (Bordeaux, 2004).

Leadership for social justice presents a challenge because SJT leaders have to be consistent in decision-making and must be willing to publicly stand up for under-represented students. Interactions with the greater community are extremely important since the school is a small part of that community and should work in conjunction with the community for common solutions, creating action plans that can be carried out by both the school and the community. The school, working congruently with the community, is better able to shape equitable solutions that are culturally, socially, and ethically suitable to provide a good education to a diverse population (Oliva, Anderson, & Byng, 2010).
Marshall and Oliva (2010) note that SJT is aligned with race, gender, diversity, religion, marginalization, age and sexual orientation issues. Further they contend that SJT suggests solutions for change that focus on the leadership practices of schools and other institutions which continue to allow in-equitable policies in education as well as school discipline.

This study will inform the reader about how the administrative leadership functions in the Harmon City AEC. It will assist their understanding about whether or not current or past school administrators’ exhibit social justice leadership.

**Critical Race Theory**

The last philosophical issue used as a filter for this study is CRT. Issues related to the excessive assignment of Black males and the discipline interventions of suspension and expulsion make it necessary to enhance the understanding of CRT. CRT is the brainchild of the late Derrick Bell who conceived this theoretical framework while a law student at Harvard University. Derrick Bell, a professor at Harvard Law School and the Dean of University of Oregon School of Law, ultimately became a civil rights activist. He wrote several books which include *Brown v Board of Education, The Interest Convergence Dilemma*, and *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (Derrick Bell Official Site, 2014).

CRT is considered a movement whose followers have interest in making changes in the range of power between the races and the subtle racism that is present in America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). There are several themes that are associated with CRT as supported by Derrick Bell.
The first theme advanced by Bell is the *Centrality of Racism* which maintains that racism is an undying part of the beliefs and values of the citizens of America. According to Bell race and racism crisscross other forms of discrimination such as socio-economic status and class and is the center of critical race analysis. Racism, so subtle in today’s society, is almost unrecognizable and is often not reacted to. Since subtle racism is not reacted to, it becomes difficult to correct (Creswell, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano, 1998).

The second theme advanced by Bell is *White Supremacy* which reasons that it had a role in creating and reinforcing the subordination of the Black race. This includes systems that are dominated and taken for granted by Caucasians such as political, socio-economic and cultural systems which exist in the United States. One important aspect of this concept is the idea of “White skin as a property” or commodity, making Caucasians superior to others no matter what their financial or socioeconomic status (Delgado & Stefancic, 1995; Roithmayr, 1999; Rollick & Gillborn, 2011).

The third theme put forth by Bell is referred to as *Voices of People of Color* and its premise relies on stories told by Black people. These stories provide understandings and insights about racism experienced during the lifetime of Black people. These expressions are often in the form of a story, which may be autobiographical in nature. These stories test the existing beliefs that racism has become extinct and are no longer a hidden factor in school policies and procedures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Parker et al., 1999; Rollock & Gillborn, 2011).
Bell’s fourth theme is *Interest Convergence*, based upon the idea that racism both reinforces and advances White supremacy while leaving Blacks at status quo thus keeping the White race in power (Parker et al., 1999; Rollock & Gillborn, 2011). “The interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated when it converges with the interests of Whites” (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011, p. 2).

Additionally, Bell continues to illustrate this concept by citing the US predicament during the Cold War in 1954 and its impact on the speedy acceptance of the desegregation of schools by the Supreme Court in Brown v. Board of Education. During this time the United States was highly criticized by countries throughout the world for its stance on desegregation and the numerous stories of racism, lynching and other negative occurrences in the US. Because of the negative criticism coming from people who themselves were brown, Black and Asian, it made sense that the US Supreme Court ruled against school segregation to improve their world image. In the best interest of both the United States government and the Black race, desegregation of America’s schools was accomplished (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

It is vital that critical race theories be applied to this study as a filter or framework through which to view the problems that Black males currently experience with discipline in classrooms across America. CRT requires school staff to take a serious look at school policies and practices related to race and assure they are fair and equitable. New school policies should be developed that challenge racial discrimination and a concerted effort to make curriculum and delivery of instruction more inclusive of Black history (Roithmayer, 1999). Additionally, framing CRT around this study allows an inspection
of the problem that exists behind the walls of educational institutions with hopes of figuring out what happens to Black boys as they progress through schools (Welch & Payne, 2010).

**Assessing School Atmosphere and Educational Leadership**

Fullan (2003) states that school or other educational setting is shaped and molded by its leadership. He also suggests that “school leadership is the single most important contributor to school performance” (p. 58). In other words, the leader sets the tone of the building and determines the success or failure of the school. He further states that all principals must have a moral imperative “which involves leading deep cultural change that mobilizes the passion and commitment of teachers, parents, and others to improve the learning of all students, including closing the achievement gap” (p. 41).

Burke (2011) states that leadership is “persuasion, influence, serving followers, and acting as a role model…leadership is about vision; change; using one’s intuition, influence, persuasive and presentation skills; and rewarding people with personal praise” (p. 220). Ideally ADSs have leaders for social justice, working toward achievement of best possible solutions for all students no matter of their race, creed, color or sexual orientation (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011).

The character of a building can be assessed by the feelings of the people who work in the same environment and in the school system and these individuals would be the staff (Burke, 2011). School climate can be described the “heart” of an educational organization since it identifies the organization, its values, boundaries, and provides the school’s identity (Hoy & Miskel, 2009). School climate for this research study refers to
the atmosphere or personality displayed by the organization. A school’s climate entails the ways in which teachers and students treat each other, their feelings about the workplace and the interactions between both the formal and informal organization within the school (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). School climate can often be assessed as soon as one enters a building by observing the interaction between the people who work in the organization.

The atmosphere of a school is influenced by the leadership style of the principal. The leadership of the principal both guides and controls the process that supports teachers working together for total school improvement. The culture of an institution refers to the way things are done, how rules and values are communicated. School culture is built through the trusting relationships the principal forges with teachers, parents, school staff and community members (Fullan, 2003). Yukl (2008) posits that school leaders enhance culture and climate by ensuring everyone knows the vision of the organization and that they understand how to achieve organizational goals and objectives. Additionally, it is expected that staff in the organization have follow through with those activities to assure goal attainment (Yukl, 2008).

Though there are many categories of leadership, the most prominent and basic are the forms of transformational leadership and transactional leadership. The transformational leader improves the organization by inspiring the staff to work together toward changing the organization. Transformational leaders never leave a situation the way they found it and change becomes immediate (Burke, 2011). Transactional leadership is measured with changes occurring one transaction at a time and based upon
positive or negative reinforcements that may influence the staff to work more effectively (Burke, 2011; Transactional Leadership, 2010). The transactional leader provides evolving change, slow yet substantial, very likely enduring change.

Burke (2011) and Yukl (2010) suggest that both transformational and transactional leadership empowers others to change, one very quickly and one slow and focused. Transformational leadership requires the leader to become immersed in the situation and personally identify with the changes to be made in the school environment. Transactional leadership requires the leader to work toward continuous improvement in the quality of services that are provided for students (Burke, 2011; Yukl, 2010).

Either a transformational or a transactional leader can be a leader for social justice as social justice leaders look for inequities in school rules and regulations and seek to change those that make differences with the race or class of students (Dantley & Tillman, 2010). This study will examine the evolution of the AEC to determine how the leadership styles of the three administrators affected the climate and culture of the Center through the filters of CRT and SJT.

**Suspension and Expulsion**

Welsh and Payne (2012) liken the exclusionary practices of suspension and expulsion to the incarceration of criminals who are removed from the larger society and conclude that suspension and expulsion often result in negative student behaviors such as use of drugs and alcohol, getting arrested, and not graduating from high school. Nevertheless, suspension is deemed to be far more destructive to children than expulsion because it is assigned more frequently (Welsh & Payne, 2010). Even a suspension of only
one day makes it more likely that students will become dropouts. Welsh and Payne (2010) stress the urgency for educators to know and understand what leads to the frequent use of exclusionary discipline and evaluate the impact that school level influences have on this problem.

Legislation requires that school districts provide a written code of conduct for parents to describe and explain the school district discipline policies and procedures. Usually there are two types of suspension including In School Suspension (ISS) and Out of School Suspension (OSS). The ISS process involves the reassignment of students from the classroom to another location in the building and allows the student to complete classwork for credit. The OSS process removes the student from school for a number of days but allows the student to complete class work for school credit (HCS, 2013; Rizzi, 2011). During the period of an OSS, students are prohibited from being on school property or being involved in any school activities.

An expulsion is usually longer than a suspension and during that time the student is withdrawn from the home school and not allowed to complete any course work, to take part in school activities, or to physically be on school property. Students may be expelled from school for several days, a semester, a school year or indefinitely (HCC, 2013). Many school districts have alternatives to expulsion programs that are mandated by state law (Rizzi, 2011).

State law does not require school districts to provide suspension and expulsion alternatives for students and the AEC in the Harmon City School District is one of a kind in their district. The AEC has a maximum capacity for 40 students with a pupil teacher
ratio of one teacher and one educational assistant to twelve students (1 teacher to 6 students). Certified teachers offer a continuation of the students’ core classes, making the transition to and from the AEC easier for the student. Students may be assigned to the AEC with the written permission of parents for several days or one semester of school. They may be assigned to the center only once in middle school and once in high school. There are no provisions for students in kindergarten through fifth grade at the AEC Center (HCS, 2013).

Most suspensions and expulsions are not assigned for hard discipline infractions but rather for disruptive behavior or behavior described as “other non-descriptive behavior”. Currently there is no proof that exclusionary practice of “putting students out of school” is effective. The general reason given for the use of suspension and expulsion is to improve student behavior and to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to learn (Losen & Martinez, 2013; Scaggs, 2009).

It is important to understand the documented gap between the number of Black and White males referred for discipline interventions in middle and high school. These Black males find themselves expelled from school without any scholastic support or assigned to a discipline center such as the Harmon City AEC (Monroe, 2005, Skiba, Michael & Nardo, 2000). Why are Black males primarily perceived to be the ones causing problems in the classroom? As we explore the discipline gap, some answers to this question will be articulated.

According to Skiba et al. (2000), race is one of the biggest predictors of discipline outcomes for students. Although this study is primarily a case study about an AEC,
during the research process a great deal of information about the discipline interventions assigned to Black males in public school systems has come to the surface and has become a key component of the study. The excessive suspension and expulsion of Black males from school, school discipline policies, the scholastic gap that exists between Black and White males and racial bias in general are all examined in the next few pages of this research study.

**Local and National News**

Recently school discipline issues in the U.S. have come to the forefront of local and national news, appearing in newspaper articles, editorials and news commentary. A review of these articles indicates the seriousness of the school discipline dilemma currently facing Black males.

One Editorial, “If this treatment isn’t race-influenced, then what is?” (Pitts, 2004 April 20, pp, A09-A16) discussed whether or not the harsh treatment of President Barack Obama, America’s first Black President, should be considered racism by pointing out that no other president has been treated as he has. The president has been called “boy” uppity,” and “sub-human”. His image has been depicted as that of a bone-in-nose witch doctor and an ape. President Obama’s birthplace has been questioned with demands made that he provides proof of his American citizenship. The question posed in this editorial is whether or not any other president has been treated in this manner.

Responding to the controversy, United States Attorney General, Eric Holder is cited in newspaper article, ‘Holder asks schools to ease policies on discipline,” (Hefling, 2014, p. E8) asking the schools in the US to tone down discipline policies that send
children directly to jail rather than to the principal’s office after a school rule infraction. Holder says that this school to jail continuum may be a result of racism as his office has discovered that African American students receive harsher discipline than White students. Racial bias in school discipline has become a real problem. Holder encouraged all schools to prepare educators about student discipline, classroom management, conflict resolution, and other approaches to discipline.

D’Aurora (2015), in “Expelling Children isn’t the Answer”, thinks House Bill 334 presents another debatable aspect of the suspension and expulsion puzzle, and the legislation of student discipline interventions. House Bill 334 is designed to expel students who are perceived to be a danger to the health and security of school employees and students for 180 days. Reacting to this news, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) suggests that White House Bill 334 is not a good idea. The bill is not proactive and the idea of excluding children from school for an extended time is not a remedy for inappropriate behavior. The AAP recommends several remedies: early intervention for preschoolers, early detection and treatment of children who are at-risk, providing behavior modification and counseling. In addition, the AAP proposes that suspension and expulsion is a major catalyst for the school dropout problem.

In another by Pitts (2014, March 26, p A17, “Even as Early as Preschool, Black Children Harmed by Bias”, teacher bias is noted to be harmful to African American children, especially in the school setting. This editorial implies that because of racial bias African-American students in preschool are at risk of suspension or expulsion. This article cites that Black students comprise about 18 percent of preschoolers. Further,
about 42 percent of them are suspended from school. Of those students, about half of them have been suspended from preschool more than once. The identification of a preschooler as “bad” may have great influence on the self-image of the student and affect the child’s behavior and socialization throughout his school life in primary, middle and high school.

Microaggression is described as the new racism in a commentary published in Time Magazine (2014, April 14, p. 22). Microaggression originated from the work of Dr. Charles Pierce. Dr. Pierce, while a student at Harvard, was well-rounded being, the first Black to play on his college football team as well as an accomplished musician. However, he never felt comfortable living in a predominantly White environment, and coined the word microaggressions in 1970 (Winkfield, 2015). Microaggression refers to “subtle nonverbal exchanges or putdowns of Blacks by offenders and suggests that these putdowns may play a role in the unfairness in the legal system because microaggressions can influence the decisions of juries” (Winkfield, 2015, p. 3). Dr. Pierce spent 41 years as a member of the faculty at Harvard University.

In the past, the word microaggression has been reserved to be used in scholarly writings by college professors. Another definition by McWhorter (2014) is “an unintended slight, either racist or sexist, that makes a person feel underestimated on the basis of color or gender” (p. 21). McWhorter (2014) acknowledges that the use of this word, microaggression, denotes some change in racism in the United States but also represents a counterproductive belief which points to every White person as a racist who cannot say anything correctly in regards to Black people. He suggests that a clearer
description of microaggression should be created to describe the belittling of a person based on stereotypes rather than such a large array of variables and perceptions.

In support of the articles described above and the difficulties currently being experienced by Black males and men of color with school discipline and other issues in the United States, President Obama initiated a proposal called “My Brother’s Keeper” to expand levels of opportunity for males of color (Presidential Memorandum, 2014, February 27). My Brother’s Keeper is designed to enhance the lives of these young men by augmenting their ability to get a quality education, have careers working together with community and other federal agencies both private and public and to bring about change.

To accomplish this goal, the President has established the My Brother’s Keeper Task Force, to ensure that opportunities as well as challenges existing for males of color in the US are fully examined, with recommendations for programs made to the President (Presidential Memorandum, 2014, February 27). The articles cited previously demonstrate the reality of the situation of Black males in the United States

**The Effect of Teacher Attitude on Black Males**

People often wonder what happened to Black males in school once they cross over from primary school to intermediate and middle school as they become hostile, unresponsive scholastically and are either suspended or expelled from school. Some of these students had a love for learning and were not behavior problems when they entered kindergarten. One of the questions for this study looks at the students that populate the HCS AEC and the reasons for their assignment. A look at teacher attitudes may help to answer those questions.
According to Monroe (2005) in “Why are ‘Bad Boys’ Always Black?”, there is a definite connection between the number of times Black males are referred for discipline interventions while in school and their subsequent overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. Little is known about the way that teachers actually perceive the behavior of Black males in the classroom and how their perceptions and attitudes mold their discipline policies and practices.

Unfortunately, many young Black males by the time they reach middle school at about 6th grade have decided that being “bad” and being unsuccessful scholastically is “good.” This bad behavior often causes teachers to overreact and treat the Black male more harshly than they would react to other students who may have perpetuated the same negative attitude (Monroe, 2005). Previous research suggests that teacher attitude has a great deal to do with personal perceptions of their students coupled with many stereotypes currently perpetuated in our culture regarding Black males (Monroe, 2005).

Woods (2010) constructed a case study designed to determine how the feelings and attitudes of White female teachers are connected in regards to teaching Black males. This study determined that negative views of Black males can start in kindergarten where all innocence is taken away from their behavior, being judged as if they are adult males. Woods’ (2010) theory is that White female educators often perceive the behavior of young Black boys as hostile and disrespectful because they equate this behavior to that of Black adult males. This leads to what is called the “adultification” of the behavior of children, making these young children recipients of discipline referrals that may not have occurred if they were not Black males (Woods, 2010).
White females are the largest group of teachers in the US (Gregory et al., 2010; Tolson, 2013; Woods, 2010). Woods contends that many White teachers have attitudes that are influenced by negative stereotypes that continue to thrive in regards to Black males, inferring they are aggressive, violent, loud, overtly sexual and angry. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), often teachers’ perceptions of children can interfere with their ability to instruct and interact effectively with Black male students. This inability of teachers to connect with students whose culture is different from their own occurs when teachers do not practice culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant teaching enables academic success by allowing students to learn those things that are most important to them. Additionally, culturally relevant teaching guides the teacher to recognize and become familiar with the child’s culture, to use that culture as a teaching tool. Culturally relevant teaching enables the student to become the primary focus of study (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

According to Woods (2010), “a child’s race has an impact on how teachers respond to their behavior, “teachers perceive Black students as more difficult to teach, which contributes to a more conflictual teacher child relationship (p.11).” This divergent relationship contributes to the negative attitude that some White female teachers have toward Black males which continues to be a source of discipline issues in the classroom. Other factors that are generally cited in studies about race and gender cite the variables of low SES, lack of proper role models and poor parents when accessing student achievement and behavior. Woods (2010) and McKay, (2001) believe the negative attitudes perpetuated by some of the White teachers in public school systems take away
from the delivery of sound instruction to Black males and therefore public school systems do not provide quality education to Black males.

Brown (2011) examined a similar concept regarding teacher attitude. This study asserts that the adultification (equating the behavior of young Black males to that of adult Black males) of Black boys does not occur until the student’s reach middle school. However, Brown (2011) observed that the Black males are already disenfranchised and seen as problematic before the get to middle school which agrees more with Wood’s (2010) theory. The background of Brown’s (2011) study includes information about the negative image of Black males that began with slavery, was perpetuated with separate but equal schooling, and lives on through the school finance problems making education unequal between city, suburban, and rural areas. His research seeks to provide information on the conflict between young Black males with an increasing number of White female teachers in America’s schools and how these conflicts can be resolved.

As highlighted there are research studies that allege the existence of teachers who deliberately put down Black boys in school thus causing them to be unsuccessful. These studies may shed light and have implications for the HCS AEC organization and its operations.

**Racial Differences**

This section of the study reports how racial threat and social control influence the ways school discipline policies are enforced according to how many minority students are assigned to a building. As reported in the research of Welsh and Payne (2012) racial differences are cited as a strong predictor why Black males receive the brunt of school
discipline referrals and interventions according to Welsh and Payne (2012). These researchers assert that it is not simply the race of a student that predicts the frequency of the perception of student discipline infractions but an effect called racial threat (Welsh & Payne). The racial threat concept comes from the theory that the number of minority members in a community correlates to the amount of social control or punitive measures within that community (Welsh & Payne).

Social control advocates say society has a role in controlling criminal behavior within a community. When this behavior is controlled, it lessens an individual’s tendency to break the rules. Conversely, the theory asserts people lose control of themselves when there is lack of control from family and local authorities (Borade, 2009). These two theories can be incorporated and used in educational environments the as follows: the number or percentage of minority members in attendance in a school district or school community relates directly to the volume of school rules and discipline interventions within that school community used in an effort to deter negative student behavior.

Social control is a technique used in response to the number of minorities in a community who are viewed as a threat by the majority population. Social control is perceived to be needed as a control technique because of the following theories (Broade, 2009, Welsh & Payne 2010). The first theory states that if the minorities become successful, they will be competitive both economically and politically. The second theory relates to the idea that the majority population, because of the many stereotypes
that abound about Black males, sees them as a threat because of their presumed criminal activity (Welch & Payne, 2010).

Since crime and punishment are closely aligned to each other, the racial threat theory is highly associated with the criminal justice system. Racial threat is manifested when towns and cities exist with a majority minority population as well as high arrest rates among that minority population (E. et al., 2002). This effect spills over into public schools when we see the racial composition of a school influencing the discipline policies and types of discipline interventions assigned to Black male students in greater proportions than to White males (Welch & Payne, 2012).

Welsh and Payne (2012) liken the exclusionary practices of suspension and expulsion to the incarceration of criminals who are removed from the larger society. They conclude that suspensions and expulsions often lead to negative student outcomes such as use of drugs and alcohol, becoming part of the juvenile court system and not earning a high school diploma. Additionally, particular traits of students which include race have more weight on the discipline intervention assigned than the actual rule infraction. The intervention of suspension and expulsion are more regularly assigned to Black youth than other minorities and White youth (Monroe, 2005).

The problem regarding the overrepresentation of Black males as the recipients of suspension and expulsion from school has been verified by 25 years of research and documentation though little or no research has been conducted to examine the cause of this problem (Skiba et al., 2000). The HCS statistics on student enrollment gleaned from
this study may show prevalence through the assignment of Black males as students and the reason for their referrals.

Many minority parents, in an attempt to provide better educational services for their children and to escape racism perceived to be present in urban schools, enroll their children in suburban or private schools. Current research validates that these minority students who are of higher SES and come from more prominent families than their urban counterparts, receive the same treatment as in an urban school.

Though these students are not usually assigned to ADS, they still commonly receive excessive discipline office referrals and are subject to very subtle forms of racism termed as microaggression (Allen, 2010). This form of racism is identified in Derrick Bells’ CRT, which will be used as an analytical lens through which the information gleaned from this study will be viewed.

Gregory et al. (2010) determined that the suspension and expulsion risk for Black males is just as great in suburban schools as it is in urban settings. Not only are Black males subjected to treatment that is derogatory in city school districts, they also receive the brunt of discipline interventions in suburban schools (Skiba et al., 2000). According to Allen (2010), this is happening to Black males despite their higher SES because of issues with microaggressions.

Solórzano (1998) describes microaggressions as “the subtle, stunning and often automatic and non-verbal exchanges which are put downs of Blacks by offenders” (p. 124). An example of microaggressions is the reaction of some White women have when they see when one or more Black males coming their way, they automatically hold on
tighter to their purse. Microaggression occurs when a Black person, especially a male, receives slow service at a restaurant or is entirely overlooked. Verbal microaggression occurs when African Americans are referred to as “you people.” All these activities are executed with little thought and no real intent to harm (Allen, 2010; Henfield, 2011). Microaggressions are subtle and often go unnoticed so therefore no action is taken in defense of them (Solórzano, 1998).

Other problems that are prominent in suburban schools are negative teacher attitudes toward Black students and the effect on teacher discipline and student-teacher relationships. Allen (2010) interviewed several Black students enrolled in suburban and predominately White schools who spoke of feeling invisible at school and being subjected to “pejorative” judgmental teacher attitudes based on the teacher’s personal feelings and/or negative Black male stereotypes.

The success of Black males in school can be augmented in numerous ways. Allen (2010) suggests that parents invest in social capital and indulge in social networking by visiting their child’s school to acquire information about upcoming events, homework help and school discipline policies. Parents with students in suburban schools were able to positively influence their child’s learning environment by acquiring both social and cultural capital which gave them the tools to overcome the impact of inequitable treatment by staff.

Other ways parents can obtain cultural capital for their children is by taking them to visit museums, art galleries, local festivals and other enrichment activities that are not readily available to students who live in the inner city. In city school districts where
students and their parents do not have access to art galleries, museums and such, it is the school must make provisions to accommodate these needs (Loreau & Horvat, 1999; Noguera, 2013).

These activities help create a means for the Black male students and others to become more successful in school. The benchmarks used to identify Black middle-class students where “household income in relation to poverty line, education level and occupation of parents, residential location and ownership and the social groups in which the families are involved” (Allen, 2010, p. 29).

It is not necessary for parents to attempt to earn social capital for their students to be successful at the Harmon City AEC; however, there are guidelines for activities they must attend as well as activities for the students (HCS, 2014). These parent and student activities will be discussed extensively in chapters 4 and 5.

The Discipline Gap

The discipline gap manifests itself in the statistics that report the numbers of suspensions and expulsions for students, which reflect the race and gender of the excluded student. The gap is expressed in the difference between the rates of suspension of Black and White males. Several variables that lead to the unbalanced number of Black males receiving discipline interventions are gender, race and SES. According to Skiba et al. (2000), race is a bigger predictor of discipline outcomes for students than SES.

Statistics confirm that this inequitable distribution of discipline interventions exists for Black males. National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2013), states that a larger percentage of Black students (20 percent) were suspended from school in
2013 than White students (9 percent). There are no concrete reasons given for the overrepresentation of Black males as expressed in these statistics; but it is important to determine whether or not racial bias played a part in this predicament (Kinsler, 2010).

The dilemma of the overrepresentation of Black males who receive discipline interventions has been confirmed by several studies. In 2000, Kinsler (2010) found that while only 17 percent of the student population of a school district were Black, a total of 35%, or double the total school enrollment of Black students, were suspended from school at for least one day. The number of Black students who received a minimum of at least one day of suspension increased from 1972 by 120%. The suspension rate for White students, at that time, increased by only 64%.

Negative student behaviors in the classroom relate directly to the teacher’s level of discipline expertise so that discipline problems may increase in the classrooms of less-skilled teachers. In order to lessen this problem, a unified effort should be made to teach teachers the skill of student discipline to pre-empt teacher reliance on suspension and expulsion as means to improve discipline (Kim & Taylor, 2008; Scaggs, 2011).

Suspension is deemed to be far more destructive to children than expulsion because it is assigned far more frequently. Some critics say that even a one-day suspension increases the likelihood of students who do not complete their education, and those students who are excluded from school are least likely to have adequate adult supervision at home (Lamont et al., 2013).

As the discipline gap is real, some administrators have created activities that change the situation for all students, especially Black males. Losen & Martinez (2013)
shared the success of a program in which an assistant school superintendent used to promote self-discipline, in a school district. This program demonstrated that a good discipline program improves student behavior. Losen & Martinez (2013) state that when a new superintendent was hired in a school district, he put forth new rules and regulations designed to produce better student discipline. With this program, he was able to cut the dropout rate in his school district by 505 students and lowered the suspension numbers to below 10,000 students. He cut the suspension rate to less than half of what it had been in the past. The assistant superintendent accomplished this by making sure all administrators secured the signature of an assistant superintendent before authorizing suspension of students as well as having all schools implementing a student discipline program.

As advanced by Losen and Martinez (2013) part of the success of this school’s discipline program came from the use of other positive techniques such as “mediation, counseling, parent-teacher conferences, and providing student incentives like sports and clubs” (Losen & Martinez, 2013, p. 14). The new superintendents’ philosophy consisted of the realization that children are who they are and it is the school district’s job to work to positively change their behavior. This philosophy seemed to be working (Losen & Martinez, 2013).

As stated before, Black male students receive a higher allocation of discipline interventions of suspension and expulsion than White males and because of this, the perception is that Black males misbehave more than other children. However, there is no credibility in this theory (Browne, Losen & Wald, 2001; Losen & Martinez 2013).
Another study conducted in 21 Baltimore, MD schools It was reported by a study conducted in 21 school of the Baltimore, MD school district that Black students are more frequently sent to the office for discipline than White students and for different reasons. White students are given office referrals more frequently for objective infractions which are easily documented while Black students are given office referrals more often for subjective infractions, which are concerned more about how the teacher felt about the child rather than what the child did (Browne et al., 2001; Losen & Martinez, 2013).

Suspensions and expulsions are not appropriate remedies for improving inappropriate student behavior as they manifest many unintended consequences (Losen & Martinez, 2013). These remedies reward rather than punish inappropriate student behavior by giving students “holidays from school” (Lachman-Fitzgerald, 1999, p. 2). The use of school suspensions and expulsions keep students out of school and enlarge the already huge gap in achievement between Black and White males (Beckham, 2009).

The Harmon City AEC is considered effective and has been a part of the school system for over 25 years. This research study will call attention to whether Harmon City AEC’s operation is typical or similar to those centers described in the research and determine whether a discipline gap exists in the Harmon City Schools.

**Poverty and Social Economic Status**

The socioeconomic status (SES) of students is an important aspect of any study in alternative schooling, especially those alternative schools designed for student discipline. The socioeconomic status of a student is often an indicator of whether or not the student receives a behavioral intervention. Students of low socioeconomic status (SES) may be
targeted more for discipline infractions than those perceived to live at a higher status (Skiba et al., 2000; Harris, 2001).

A person’s SES defines their social status in American society and a person who is considered to be of low SES characteristically lives in areas of high poverty, is not well educated, does not have access to quality healthcare, and have little or no influence on the social inequities that define their status (education.com, 2011). An individual’s SES can be high, medium or low with some indicators of SES being income, occupation, education, political power, and the neighborhood in which one lives (Political Power, 2013). Students of low SES are often termed or labeled as at-risk students and the features that define these students and their quality of life are very similar and are often interchanged. At-risk students are more likely to fail scholastically, have most likely interacted with the juvenile court system, are minorities and males, and live in areas of low SES (At Risk Students, 2013; Hixon, 1993; Townsend, 2000).

SES is often linked with alternative discipline schools because perceptions are that they are usually located in communities of insufficient resources that have a high concentration of minority students who are at risk, and many who are classified as language deficient, or live in single parent homes. These conditions have caused ADS’s be considered “dumping grounds” for both students and for ineffective teachers who do not deliver quality education to their students (Kim, 2011; Kim & Taylor, 2008). This researcher will be interested in determining the effect of socioeconomic status on the assignment of students to the Harmon City AEC.
Even though socioeconomic status is a factor that influences the amount of office referrals that a student receives, the main predictor of who receives the most discipline infractions remains race (Harris, 2001; Kinsler, 2010; Skiba et al., 2000).

**The Gun Free Schools Act**

The Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 (Public Law No. 103-882, 14601) is an example of quick fix federal legislation designed to decrease school violence. The Gun Free Schools Act, often referred to as Zero Tolerance, mandates that any school district that receives funds provided by the Gun Free School Act are required deliver discipline policies according to this law, as well as formulate Gun Free School Laws for their school districts (Browne-Dianis, 2011). Zero Tolerance mandates that certain punishments be given students for particular infractions with little or no personal reflection or interaction from the school administrator, who is responsible for assigning discipline interventions (Beckham, 2009).

Regrettably policymakers seem to think that the answer to combating school discipline and violence are easy fixes, enacting legislation such as Zero Tolerance that punishes students excessively for what administrators perceive to be inappropriate behavior. This law mandates that any student found with a handgun in their possession while on school property must be expelled for one school year without educational support and be reported to the proper local authorities. According to this law all school districts are required to create their own Zero Tolerance discipline policies which have unfortunately expanded the reason for mandatory student expulsion (Rizzi, 2011).
Gun Free Schools Act has caused an increase in the amount of students being exclude from school districts across the United States (Beckham, 2009).

As Zero Tolerance laws become stricter, people begin to question whether the laws are a help or a hindrance to the solution of school discipline problems since they have accelerated the number of student suspensions and expulsions. Students have the same rights as other American citizens regarding any discrimination based on color, freedom of speech and other rights protected by the First Amendment. Because of the extravagance of discipline interventions assigned to their children, many parents are taking school personnel and boards to court to fight for the rights, fair treatment and access to education for their children (Browne, 2001).

According to Browne et al. (2001) “zero tolerance has become a one size fits all solution to all problems that schools confront and… has redefined students as criminals with unfortunate results” (p. 78). The following observation serves as an example of how Zero Tolerance is interpreted by some school administrators. Kajs’s (2006) in a case study, describes an incident that caused a student to be expelled from school because school authorities found a 10-inch bread knife in the trunk of his truck. There was no intent by the student to bring harm to anyone; the knife was not inside the school building. The district officials felt compelled to expel the student because of the “one size fits all” Zero Tolerance policies regarding the possession of weapons. These policies leave administrators no decision-making power or opportunity to use their own professional judgments for the discipline assigned to these school infractions.
The heavy dependence of school administrators on the Gun Free Schools Act adds to the already excessive numbers of students receiving discipline referrals rather the evaluation and counseling services they may require. This problem leads to ADS being referred to as “pipelines to prison” because of the addition of police officers and surveillance mechanisms placed in middle and high schools with funds provided by the Gun Free legislation. The criminalization of student behavior occurs frequently in the school setting because police officers are currently stationed in many high school students are arrested and taken to jail directly from school because educational personnel have judged the sometime childish behavior as criminal (Rizzi, 2011).

Recently a Harmon City school administrator stated that the incidents of school discipline increased at the onset of the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 resulting in the assignment of more suspensions and expulsions. This statement corroborates what the research says about the effect of Zero Tolerance. The AEC study may also validate the current research about Gun Free Schools.

**Summary**

Alternative schools are complex organizations. Those designed for discipline often receive negative reactions from the general public because of their location and the students they serve (Kim, 2011). The Harmon City School ADC has a positive reputation in the community. This literature review allows comparison between negative and positive aspect of AEC and educates the readers’ knowledge of these schools and how they operate. Examined are the ways in which alternative discipline schools are
categorized and defined, their negative and positive attributes, the ways in which they operate, and the characteristics of who should attend them.

Currently there appears to be some confusion among ADS advocates about their definition and function and the most effective way to deliver positive instruction to students in regards to make them successful and lifelong learners. The research on alternative schools is scant and no concrete definition or recommendations exist about ways to ensure that their operation is efficient and effective in education for those students who are at-risk.

The complex and varied details on why Black males receive the brunt of discipline interventions in America’s schools are examined in this chapter. The major reason for excessive discipline of Black males at school by teachers and administrators is found to be attributed to race rather than socioeconomic status by various authors (Skiba 2001, Kinsler, 2010, Skiba et al., 2000). These perspectives continue to enlarge the discipline and scholastic gap between Black and White males. The adultification, viewing of young Black boys as if they were adult males, with the lack of understanding Black culture by White female teachers, contributes to the problems of inequity of the assignment of discipline interventions to Black males.

Created in an attempt to improve school discipline, The Gun Free Schools Act (Public Law No. 103-882, 14601) is responsible for the implementation of mandated, harsher, and more frequent discipline interventions for students. This law mandates a “grocery list” of interventions which leaves no room for school administrators to use their
professional judgment for assigning discipline interventions, therefore increasing the total amount of children who are excluded from school due to suspension and expulsions.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This project uses case study approaches and multiple methods interview, direct observation, document searches or analysis, and questionnaires for this research. The concept of case study research and the selection of the AEC as the single subject of interest for this study will be discussed in this chapter. In addition, this chapter will elaborate on how and why multiple methods or approaches are used for data collection and analysis for this study. For this AEC research, case study as defined as an approach in which a variety of methods can be used for the collection of data which include the use of the interview process, participant observations and the examination and analysis of records. Information regarding the sample population to be used for the study, obtaining informed consent from participants and, the credibility and trustworthiness of the researcher, is included in this chapter (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2001).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study is to provide a depiction of the AEC in order to garner a better understanding of its day-to-day operations. It will provide the center’s history with descriptions of the policies and procedures, customs and climate from the point of view of staff and students. This research will serve as a model for the establishment of other such schools.

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this study are:

1. What is the history and significance of the AEC program?
a) How has the AEC evolved from 1989 to the present based upon administrative leadership?

b) Who are the students who attend the AEC and what are the reasons for their assignment?

2. What is the student experience in the AEC?

3. What might be the reason for the overrepresentation of Black males in the AEC?

Qualitative Research

Many questions have to be answered before one begins a research study. The first thing to consider is how the research will be conducted; what methodology will be used. The methodology answers the question of how the data will be collected and analyzed. This case study will involve a multiple data collection process. These methods will include the interview process, use of a questionnaire, artifact search (document analysis) and observations.

The use of a multiple data collection process will authenticate the information that is collected and facilitates the collection and verification of data by the researcher from a variety of sources for a single case. These approaches will help enhance the validity of the study (Stake, 2010). Qualitative research is selected for its appropriate use in the study of people as it allows participants to tell their story in their own words.

A thick description of the research subject(s) is produces through the use of qualitative research (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Stake, 2010), providing a thick description is a key factor in qualitative research. Thick descriptions can bring the researcher to a point of saturation which indicates that the correct themes and patterns
have been identified that will help answer the research questions. Ryke (2012) says that “a thick description gives multiple layers to a single complex act” (p. 2). A single act might be denied one way only to be described differently when we examine what happened before and after that act. The more observations and interpretations, the thicker the description becomes. According to anthropologist Clifford Geertz (2012), a thick description is created from the interpretation of the researcher.

Thick description can be considered an account of information based upon the theory of the research study told by the participants. The study participants relate their personal experiences in explicit detail to the researcher, which allows an accurate report of information that literally takes the reader to the research site (Patton, 2001; Stake, 2010). The results of interviews, observations and artifact searches included in this research study will provide vivid descriptions of the subject and will enhance the comprehension of the reader to better understand the goals and objectives of the study (Stake, 2010).

Through the use of multiple data approach methods, this researcher becomes the research tool, going into the field to personally interact with the participants through interviews and observations. These activities lead to the establishment of trust with participants (Patton, 2001; Stake, 2010). Qualitative research is better suited in the study of the perspectives of individuals than quantitative research since it deals with people instead of numbers. Quantitative research is numerically based and does not allow for the creation of a thick description of unusual phenomenon that is called for in case study research.
By using qualitative research, the investigator will generate descriptions from the “lived experiences”, an oral history provided by the participants, to help visualize and better understand the knowledge base of the AEC research participants (Stake, 2010). The concept of lived experience is most used in phenomenological research. This method can be adapted to case study research because it is dependent upon the researcher’s collection of information from participants about the events they have lived through. After the investigation, the researcher develops a description of these experiences which discusses the “how’s and what’s” of those experiences to tell the participants stories that will provide responses the AEC investigation (Creswell, 2013).

**Case Study Research**

A case study approach is used as the method for collecting data for this research study. A case study is a detailed examination of one specific setting, a single subject, document and event” (Bogden & Bilken, 1992, p. 62) and produces a thorough description and an examination of one or more cases (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Creswell, 2007). The AEC is the specific place or the single case to be studied. A case study is perceived by some researchers to be what is selected to be studied, not a methodology. The AEC study will use qualitative research for data collection and the case study approach will be utilized as research design. (Creswell, 2007).

According to Stake (1995) a case study should be organized around an issue. The issue that has emerged in the AEC study is the excessive assignment of young Black men as recipients of the discipline interventions of suspension and expulsion, and who may be assigned to schools and centers such as the AEC. An inquiry is made regarding the
demographics of the students who are referred to the AEC and what the infractions are for the referrals. This data can be useful in determining what issues might be prevalent in the center. The surfacing of the issue of the overrepresentation of Black males can provide a progressive focus for this study, as issues surface. According to Stake (2010) as issues surface, they change the focus of a study over time.

Qualitative research allows document analysis to be conducted at any time throughout the process; before, during or after data collection of historical and current documents, policies and procedures will be examined for the significance of the study (Stake, 2010). Johnson & Christensen (2008) note that qualitative research is most suitable for generating information about the history, establishment and organization of institutions. Thus qualitative research is well suited for this study of AEC.

**Historical Aspects**

It is very important to ascertain the history of the HCSAEC because of its longevity and status in the Harmon City Schools and community at large. According to Glesne (2010), in order to really understand how an organization works, we need to know its history. The history of an organization provides a framework and answers questions about significant activities that occur over time to impact the organization (Patton, 2001).

A description of the present is also a description of the past; we have to find out what happened in the past so that we can see and understand what is happening today, allowing us to make predictions about the future (Barzun & Graff, 1992). For example, an individual reads the newspaper to find out what happened yesterday in order to determine how the news will impact their day. In the same way, an organization’s
history informs us about the established climate of the organization and serves as context for what is occurring there presently. Consistent with Glesne (2010) the history apprises whether or not the organization has remained faithful to its original goals and objectives or if they have changed them over the years as well as how staff and student enrollment has changed and other aspects of the AEC. Answers to all of these questions will provide the context for this study and will help set the stage for telling the detailed story of the Harmon City AEC.

**Purposeful Sampling**

This research study will be conducted in the AEC, a part of the Harmon City Schools, during the 2014-2015 school year. The duration of the research is a nine week grading period and nine individuals participate in the study. Purposeful sampling is utilized as the method for selection of participants in the AEC study. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to consider the attributes of the potential study participants to make sure that they will be able to answer the research questions. The sample population selected to be a part of the AEC study are those who are now employed or were formerly employed as teachers, staff and administrators, at the Harmon City AEC. Purposeful sampling is commonly used for case study research (Stake, 2010; Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

The sample population for the AEC study is composed of two AEC administrators who will be interviewed. These two administrators will provide plenty of material about the centers past as well as the current operations of the AEC. One instructional assistant who has worked at the AEC for almost the entire time that it has been established will
provide information about the AEC’s history. The researcher will also interview two teachers who currently work at the AEC to ascertain the daily operations of the school, discipline techniques used and any special programs being utilized. In an effort to determine some exact reasons that students are referred to the Expulsion Hearing Office (EHO) to be assigned discipline interventions, two traditional school principals will be given a questionnaire to determine why they make referrals for student expulsions. Additionally, two expulsion hearing officers (EHO) will be interviewed to determine why they assign students to the AEC. Additionally, numerous documents and historical information from the HCS and the HCS AEC were examined for relevance to this study.

**Informed Consent**

Before the research process begins, the researcher must obtain permission to collect data and to conduct research about the people who work at the AEC, permission had to be obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB consists of a committee of people affiliated with a local University who are responsible for ensuring that researchers are honest and ethical with participants during the research process. The IRB committee was informed in writing of every aspect the researcher plans for the study from beginning to end (Johnson and Christensen, 2008).

The researcher is also required to obtain consent from participants prior to conducting research. Letters requesting consent to conduct research were given to all potential participants (See Appendix A) prior to the distribution of any research tools such as questionnaires or participating in any conversations with individuals about this research study.
Data Collection

Four multiple methods generally used by qualitative researchers to collect data include the following (Marshall & Rossman, 2011):

Direct observation - The researcher served as the instrument for data collection during the observation period. In order to study student behavior in the natural setting, pupils were observed at the bus stop, during breakfast and as they passed through the hallway during class change and in several classes (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Even though observations are primarily visual, they will be written as well as recorded so that valuable information is not lost when the field notes are transcribed (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Questionnaire - Questionnaires can be used for both qualitative and quantitative research to obtain the thoughts and feelings of study participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Generally, the questionnaires used by qualitative researchers allow respondents the opportunity to answer freely. Two principals, from the middle and high school level, were given a questionnaire so that they could explain exactly why they refer students to the expulsion hearing office for the assignment of discipline interventions.

Document analysis – Many newspaper articles, board minutes, pictures, and other artifacts were examined to produce the history of the AEC. Documents from the AEC were utilized to report the feelings of the students about their quality of education while they were assigned to the center. Consistent with Marshall & Rossman (2011) even though observations are primarily visual, they will be written as well as recorded so that valuable information is not lost when the field notes are transcribed (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).
Interview - The in depth interview process is important for qualitative researchers since during the interview the researcher constructs the information that becomes part of the theme of the research study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The researcher conducted all of the interviews at the expulsion hearing office or at the AEC. When necessary, the researcher followed up with a participant for clarification or to gather additional information with face to face personal conversation or via the telephone (Glens, 2010). Although the AEC researcher was prepared to write pertinent information from the participant responses, a voice recorder was utilized at each interview to insure that no information was lost. The recorder was used to clarify information provided in the interview (Creswell, 2007).

The researcher elected to use the standardized interview format for the AEC study. Standardized interviews are highly scripted and the questions are sequenced so that each participant is exposed to the same information so results can be compared (Marshall & Rossman, 2011); Johnson & Christensen, 2008). This interview method was used for teachers and teacher assistants, all participating AEC administrators, and expulsion hearing officers.

Management and Analysis of Data: The Process

As described previously, a multiple data collection method was used in this case study and the analysis of data is focused on the construction of a meticulous account of the particular case and its setting. Data analysis is an ongoing process that requires the researcher to put all materials into categories and file them. A professional transcriptionist was hired to transcribe all field notes as soon as the interviews,
observations and other research activities were completed (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992, Patton, 1990). Any lose ends that needed to be attended to, such as field notes that contained missing information which needed to be gathered, was attended to before analysis of the information.

This researcher used structural coding to analyze data collected for the study. Coding is done after the data is collected and can consist of one word, a sentence, a picture, an interview transcript, a document, or any variety of variables that support the researcher to delineate the study and answer the research questions. Structural coding allowed me to use the research questions as part of the actual interview questions. This allowed me to collect information that was similar and use it to synthesize the coding process. Structured coding is especially suited for use with qualitative studies, is question based and allows the researcher to locate information essential to the study quickly.

When using structured coding the research questions naturally provide categories of relevant data, the majority of which can be used in the study and I was able to keep better track of the data (Saldana, 2009). Some researchers recommend the use of the eclectic approach, which allows one to use any data extracted from the field notes to help in understanding and explaining the case (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). This coding process for my field notes allowed me to take the information apart and put it back together in a more meaningful way and helped me to paint a picture of the AEC and its operation as suggested by Stake (1995).

Another tool used for analysis of data in the AEC study was cross category analysis. To do this, the researcher developed two charts: The Grade Level/Behavior
chart and the Behavior /Ethnicity Chart that provide information on the grade levels students are referred to the AEC. Only level 3 behaviors are used for the charts (See Appendix F) since that is the level at which students are referred to the hearing office for discipline interventions. Once completed, the grade level/behavior chart shows at which grade levels the majority of students received AEC assignments and for which offenses.

**Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of this study present the conditions that the researcher has no control over. Limitations encompass things that may otherwise affect the results of the research study (Roberts, 2010). Special education students are excluded from the study as they are covered under unique conditions according to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Operating Standards for Agencies Serving Children with Disabilities. These students’ may not be suspended or expelled so are offered other educational supports such as home instruction or in some cases, assignment to the AEC.

**Credibility and Trustworthiness**

All researchers want their work to be considered authentic and usable for reference in other studies by maintaining their credibility. Assurance that the information produced is trustworthy is essential to all qualitative researchers. The researcher wants to know if we are doing the work correctly and if the information that we are producing is accurate. In order to assure that our research is credible we use different methods which are explained as follows.
**Triangulation**

The researcher used triangulation as the primary method to check credibility for this research study. Triangulation enables the researcher to verify information by usage of several data sources. It allowed the researcher to look through different lenses to make sure that the written research report accurately represents what participants did and said. Triangulation techniques allows the researcher to perform checks and balances to see whether or not the research findings are valid by examining them in more than one way (Stake, 2010). In order to assure the trustworthiness of their research, qualitative researchers “triangulate their evidence” (p. 123).

The credibility checks and triangulation methods that the researcher used for the AEC study consisted of member checking, prolonged engagement and peer-debriefing. The process in which the researcher discussed the study with participants who are able to verify that information was interpreted accurately is called member checking. (Johnson Christensen, 2008). Prolonged engagement puts the researcher in the field for uninterrupted intervals of time so that the researcher can form trustworthy relationships with participants. The peer debriefing process allows the researcher to share information about the research study with other professional colleagues who are knowledgeable about the subject and to get their opinions and suggestion about the validity of the data (Glesne, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). These techniques help prevent researcher bias or alert the researcher if it is occurring.
**Researcher Bias**

The AEC study is considered backyard research, denoting the researcher is involved in the setting of the research study. Having been an administrator in the Harmon City Schools for more than thirty years, the researcher is very familiar with the administrators that work in the AEC. The association of the researcher with the source(s) of the research can account for researcher bias according to Glense, (2010). In order to avoid this bias, the researcher must be careful to use the check and balances that have been previously discussed to validate the research findings and ensure that they are true and not a representation of the researcher’s perceptions.

Credibility checks are important in qualitative research because qualitative analysis is dependent upon the insights and conceptions of the person conducting the analysis rather than numerical formulas and rules. The qualitative approach can leave people skeptical about the research findings. A researcher’s credibility is important to their good reputation Marshall & Rossman, (2011). During the research phase it is important for the AEC staff to relate to the researcher only; not the school administrator they may have worked with or associated with while employed by the Harmon City Schools. The role of the researcher must be maintained throughout the entire research process.

**Summary**

Qualitative research mixed methods is used for the collection and analysis of the HCSAEC. This method is popular for use in case study research since it allows the triangulation of research findings from various sources. This method allows participants
to express their personal feelings during interviews with the researcher serving as the primary research tool.

The AEC study is a case study that will trace the history of the center and present a thick description of its policies, procedures and day to day operations. The subject of Black males as the primary occupants of AEC’s has surfaced during the research process and this study will tell the stories of Black males. They will discuss the reasons for their assignment to the center and elaborate on the impact of their assignment on their behavior and scholastic achievement.

Purposeful sampling will be used for selection of participants for this study. All participants are required to give their written consent to participate in the study. This informed consent mandates the researcher provide a written description of the study, information about benefits and any physical risks that may come with participation in the study. The interview process, observations and records searches, are the qualitative methods used to collect data. The use of a variety of techniques to gather the data that helps to confirm that the research is credible is called triangulation. Member checking, peer debriefing and prolonged engagement will be used as credibility tests (Patton, 1990).

The theoretical lens which this study is viewed through is CRT, which relates to education by asking communities and school personnel to look at policies and procedures that relate to racism in schools and begin to talk about changes that need to be made for racial equity as well as SJT which refers to the equal treatment of all people regardless of the complexion of their skin, the God they worship or their selected gender.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

Introduction

Data supporting the findings were amassed from interviews, document searches or analysis, observations and questionnaires. Document analysis was used to extract information regarding the history of the AEC. The AEC has a rich history that validates the reasons that it has remained an important asset of the HCS for the past 25 years. The history describes why the center was established, problems it encountered and the methods used during program implementation. The history of the HCAEC was constructed from document searches as well as personal interviews. The following sections detail archival information that the researcher gleaned from the document search in the HCS.

History of the AEC

A Nation at Risk was published in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education because of a governmental concern about the lack of quality in the American educational system. This publication made recommendations for curriculum improvements that could be implemented by school districts throughout the United States (US) and the information in that document motivated many school districts to convene task forces to study school policies and procedures to make improvements. The term “at risk”, which referred to large numbers of students who were either people of color or members of communities of low socio-economic status, was introduced at that time (Hixson, 1993).
During the 1988-1989 school year, the HCS was well into educational reform and convened several task forces and committees for school improvement. At this time, the Primary and Intermediate Task Force, designed to improve school scholastics, and the Blue Ribbon Task Force and Discipline Intervention Committee, designed to collaborate with the public to formulate programs to improve school discipline, were convened. These two committees and a combination of administrators’ and teachers worked together to provide information and models for school improvements. The HCS created a new model for district leadership at that time which consisted of both a supervisor (administrator) and a coordinator (teacher working co-operatively as building and program leaders.

Further, in 1989 the HCS Board produced a policy statement regarding the right of all students to an education, uninterrupted by unruly students and regardless of background or learning potential (HCS Final Report Blue, 1989). This policy statement led the HCS Board to devise a code of conduct, providing rules and regulations for school discipline. Their earlier elimination of corporal punishment and the realization that they were suspending and expelling students in large numbers, guided them to focus on the interventions for suspensions and expulsions.

Historical documents show that the HCS Board found during the 1987-1988 school year that suspensions and expulsions were excessive. That year student enrollment was 65,557 of which 10,714 students were suspended one or more times and 284 students were expelled, in some cases as long as eighty days. They determined that suspensions impact on students were worse than expulsion, with the combined effect of
suspensions exceeding a single expulsion. It also came to their attention that all educational services to students were discontinued during a period of suspension or expulsion, which left students either behind in their work or subject to failure. Most importantly the Board discovered that during periods of suspension and expulsions, when students were not supervised, various crimes were being committed in the school community.

Based on this information, the HCS Board felt something needed to be done about this situation and initiated the creation of the Harmon City Schools Alternative to Expulsion Program (AEC). The Blue Ribbon initiative was thus undertaken to insure that student education would not be interrupted during a period of expulsion and that communities would remain safe (“Final Report Blue”, 1989)

The goal of the Blue Ribbon Task Force, which worked in conjunction with the Harmon Education Association (HEA) and school administrators’, was to design a program for students who displayed chronic discipline problems which would continue to provide educational services to them during a period of suspension or expulsion. This program was designed to continue to provide students individualized psychological evaluations and assessments as well as intensive attitudinal, vocational and academic evaluation (The Primary and Intermediate School Task Force, 1990).4

Following a lengthy feasibility study in 1989, the Blue Ribbon Task Force produced the following recommendations:

4Information is on file with researcher
• HCS will establish a Coordination of School Discipline Committee which will be managed by a supervisor (school administrator) and a coordinator (teacher). HCS will establish a community resource panel to assist and provide guidelines to the clearing house staff.

• Some linkage will be established between the local school in-school suspension (ISS) program and the alternative to expulsion (AEC) program. The proposal was for an ISS program to be established in each elementary, middle and high school, staffed by teachers. The overlying philosophy for this idea was that when students were suspended or expelled from school, the child became isolated. This proposal would insure that the student remained near an HCS educational facility during suspension and expulsion. HCS will establish an alternative to expulsion center (AEC) as a pilot program to be staffed with a counselor, intake psychologists, three certified teachers, a coordinator and a supervisor.

• Students assigned to the AEC would receive individualized math, science, language arts, and social studies equal to the instruction plan provided to them by home school teachers. Community agencies were asked to supplement the work of the teachers and counselor by providing supportive social and psychological services which would include conflict resolution and crisis intervention.

• HCS Department of staff development will establish both short and long term in-service programs for all employees to inform them about the programs.

• HCS will provide a Guide to Student Conduct for all staff, and families that will define the rules and regulations that will govern the district.
HCS will commission the Attendance Policy Committee to create an attendance policy. (The Blue Ribbon Intervention Committee Feasibility Study HCS, 1989).

Immediate decisions were made regarding the new discipline programs for HCS. A supervisor and a coordinator were assigned to lead the development of the AEC and both leaders were highly qualified. Their first steps were to create an external task force to research and present recommendations to the board for new discipline policies and procedures and to create an Institute for Coordination of School Discipline to serve as an umbrella for all the newly created discipline programs. The Institute for Coordination of School Discipline was established to maintain order in schools and to assure that discipline was administered uniformly.

The Institute for Coordination of School Discipline was developed to gather and distribute information about positive discipline techniques and activities to teachers and to oversee the process of establishing both ISS and AEC (North center officials: school won’t be prison, 1989)\(^5\). Extensive research was conducted by the Institute for Coordination of School Discipline to ascertain the current attitude of parents, students, teachers, and the general public about school discipline. Part of this research was a survey designed to obtain feedback from community members about acceptable and effective discipline methods that they thought could be successful. The information from

\(^5\) Information is on file with the researcher
these surveys contributed to the creation of the In-School Suspension (ISS) Program (The Harmon Educator, January 1990).  

**In-School Suspension Program**

District documents suggest that the In-school-suspension (ISS) program was created in every school in the district with all middle and high school centers staffed with both a certified teacher and an educational assistant. The ISS centers located in elementary schools, because of funding, were staffed only with an educational assistant. The goal of the AEC program was the continuation of educational services during a period of school exclusion for students on the intermediate and high school level and provide a time out place for elementary students that focused on changing student’s inappropriate behavior. The program allowed students to be removed from the classroom but still be associated with the schools they would not be isolated from the school setting. The ISS program minimized classroom disruptions for all students as well as the out of school suspensions and expulsions (Institute for Coordination of School Discipline, 1991).

The AEC was designed to provide a continuation of services for chronic discipline problems from ISS to the AEC. During the first year of AEC, 43 centers were established in middle and high schools and 87 centers in elementary schools. Throughout that year there was a 50% reduction of out of school suspensions and about 10,000

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students were assigned to the AEC on the middle and high school level with 20,000 on the elementary school level. The cost for implementation of the AEC program was 4.2 million dollars (Institute for Coordination of School Discipline, 1991).8

The Alternative Education Center

The AEC was designed for students who displayed chronic discipline problems as an alternative to suspension and expulsion. Student instruction was based upon the idea that students who have constant discipline issues may need an individual plan to assist them with changing their behavior. At the AEC students were identified early and evaluated jointly by a counselor, psychologist, counselor, or teacher etc. to determine what special needs they exhibited and what treatments might be necessary in remediation (Institute for Coordination of School Discipline, 1991).

The AEC was designed to be expanded with locations outside of the HCS school buildings in sites throughout the school district community. HCS would provide teachers, transportation, school lunches, educational materials and everything else needed to fulfill the goals and objectives of the program. HCS wanted to ensure that the public did not perceive the AEC and its programs as too punitive. These alternative schools would be friendly, with activities designed to help students to solve problems, gain self-esteem and improve better interpersonal relationship skills. It would be seen as a continuation of services provided by the ISS centers in middle and high schools. AEC

8 Information is on file with the researcher
was initially considered a pilot program but the expansion as described above was never accomplished (The Primary and Intermediate School Task Force, 1990).

**The First Year**

In keeping with the goal of not isolating students from educational facilities, the first AEC Center was established within an existing adult education center, creating a school within a school concept. This center was staffed with three teachers, a counselor, a school psychologist and a community liaison. There were 28 students enrolled in the first AEC program from both middle and high school (“The AEC Program,” n.d.). In the fall of 1989, the first Guide to Student Conduct Booklet was created by the Institute for Coordination of School Discipline staff. This booklet explained student’s rights and responsibilities as well as outlined the consequences for inappropriate behavior designed to be used to keep school environment safe for all.

The Code of Conduct provided four categories of behavior which were: Level I behavior or conduct which impedes orderly operations of the classroom or school, Level II behavior which is illegal and/serious misconduct – not life or health threatening, Level III behavior which is illegal and or serious misconduct-life or health threatening, and Level IV Behavior which is bus misconduct (Reaching Out, 1989, p. 1).

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During the first year of AEC, there was concern about the implementation of the programs, especially from the community members in which the center was located. The residences had the perception that AEC was going to be a “kiddie-prison” populated with youth offenders and other undisciplined students and those “violent criminals” would be roaming the neighborhood causing problems. The coordinators of the program and the community group held several meetings to disclose the reasons for the establishment of the AEC, deliberate and to clarify the goals and objectives of the AEC. During these meetings a profile of students to be served at the AEC was provided and, and the security precautions that would be taken to keep all parties safe were explained. The community had to be assured that students who committed incidents such as teacher assaults or possession of drugs or weapons would not be sent to AEC and that the center would not become a mini-reform school in order for it to be successful (Booster, August, 1989)\(^\text{11}\).

During the organization and implementation phase of the AEC two groups of Black community members, the Committee to Remember the Children and the Coalition for Concerned Black Citizens, met with the HCS board members after the local newspaper published an article which inferred that the majority of the students who would be enrolled at the AEC most likely would be Black males. They would be the ones to be excessively disciplined, especially those from low income families. That information guided these groups to ask that the HCS reconsider the idea of creating the

\(^{11}\) Information is on file with the researcher.
AEC and ISS programs because they could conceivably become overpopulated populated with Black males (Harmon City Herald, 1990).

The threats and fears of these community groups were unfounded because the first year of the program proved to be successful even with information in a report generated by the school district that documented that the predominant ethnicity and gender of students sent to AEC for the first year were Black males. By December of the first year there were no incidents or problems in the community that related to AEC and the residents took a wait and see attitude. In later years, when budget problems threatened to close the AEC because of its successful operation the community worked together to keep the center open (Booster, 1989).

**Assignment to the AEC**

The assignment of students to AEC was and still is a relatively simple process. It begins when a student exhibits inappropriate behavior in the classroom and an office referral is made by the classroom teacher. The decision is made by the principal regarding which discipline intervention a student should receive when referred to the office. These interventions range from taking no action, lecturing the student, assignment to ISS, assignment or OSS according to the level of the student’s behavior as listed in the written code of conduct (See Appendix F). Only serious Level II and Level III behaviors are referred to the expulsion hearing office (EHO) where assignments for expulsion or to the AEC are made. Once a referral is made, the student and parents must attend a disciplinary hearing at the EHO. Assignment to the AEC generally is limited from five to
nine weeks depending upon the student’s infraction and students found with fire arms in
their possession are automatically expelled for one school year (Appendix F).

After an AEC assignment is made, both the student and parent must agree to this
decision by signing a printed agreement. In order for the student to attend AEC, the
parent must also commit to a two-hour intake/enrollment meeting during which the
student and parent are interviewed by the community liaison and the school counselor
and given a tour of the building and during this time the school rules and regulations are
explained. AEC students are not allowed to have trapper keepers, book bags,
pocketbooks, hair brushes, perfume or any additional personal paraphernalia for security
reasons and the school provides students with a notebook and pencil. Cell phones are
permitted but cannot be used during the school day. Any questions or concerns that
parents may have about the program are answered during this enrollment meeting.

The Alternative Education Center Staff

The AEC historical records show that the first AEC staff was composed of one
teacher each for language arts/reading, social studies, math, and science, a counselor, a
school psychologist and a community liaison. These teachers and with the addition of
several educational assistants were considered to be highly qualified; however, they did
not receive any additional training for working with students at risk. While at the AEC
students were given individual plans on how to achieve the goal of high school
graduation and any students with severe learning or psychological problems were quickly
identified and referred for extra support.
A day at the AEC is very structured with many prearranged activities that provided help for students with socialization and self-discipline. The first AEC program consisted of cooperative learning, small group instruction, counseling for individual and group, mandatory community service, and goal setting. Students participated in educational field trips with the Ohio Commission for African American Males and received lectures by many positive community members. These activities were scheduled daily and students were rewarded for positive behavior both daily and weekly.

At first there was no follow up on students who had “graduated” from the program regarding their progress once they returned to the home school. In later years once students had completed their tenure at AEC, a detailed description of the assessments they received academically behaviorally, were sent to the student’s home school so they would have information about how to proceed with accommodating student needs and assisting the student in maintain positive school behavior (“What’s working: Success,” 1995).

Early in the program the AEC staff was constantly defining and re-defining the program and in an effort to determining what programs and enrichment activities were best for the student and fulfill the expectations of the community. The AEC was a work in progress and remained at the first location for 19 successful years. The AEC was

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12 Information is on file with the researcher.
operating efficiently and effectively by the end of the school year in 1990 and people understood that the HCS wanted students to stay in school (“Discipline Reform,” 1991).13

**Student Profile**

The Institute for Coordination of School Discipline generated an annual report that described a typical profile of the students who were assigned to the AEC. It was suggested that some AEC students might have the following characteristics:

- Comes from a one parent family (usually female).
- Has a family income at or below poverty level.
- Has experienced academic stress or failure since the early school years.
- Has below average academic skills (third or fourth grade level in many cases).
- Has minimal social skills and frequently sent to AEC as a result of a teacher or student conflict.
- Has been referred for psychological testing; has been tested for a special program; has been placed previously in a special program and dropped for a variety of reasons.
- Has poor school attendance.
- Has a rather strong tendency to refuse accepting responsibility for his/her actions and/or the consequences.
- Sexually active (frequently is a parent).

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13 Information is on file with the researcher
• Has not passed all components of the proficiency tests.
• Identified as juvenile delinquents by police and courts (Institute for Coordination of School Discipline “Annual Report,” 1998, p. 10).

The AEC was designed to be a pilot program however during the 25 years of operation, this program has not been replicated by the HCS. The AEC resided in its first location for 19 years and during that time was known to serve as many as 100 students at the same time. After 19 years, the building in which center was located was closed and the AEC moved to a much smaller site on the grounds of a high school. At that time the maximum student capacity for regular students was lowered to 40 students and 12 special education students because the new building was much smaller than the previous one. When the building location changed the profile of students assigned to the AEC also changed from the profile of a troubled individual as described previously in the student profile section to very successful students with few behavior or scholastic problems.

After only four years in the second location the AEC moved again, this time into the basement of a middle school with a lot more space than the previous location. Even with more space, the student capacity of the building remained at 40 regular education students, 12 special education students and the addition of 15 elementary students. This expanded the possible capacity of the AEC student enrollment to 65 students at any given time.
Student Discipline

During the development of the AEC, discipline was considered to be corrective so that students could understand why their behavior was unacceptable and how this negative behavior could be changed. Numerous programs were designed for the students to enhance their self-esteem and good behavior was rewarded with awards and incentives. Explicit details of the discipline system used at the AEC appear later in this document.

Staffing New Students

The staffing of students consists of a meeting of all AEC staff members for the purpose of reviewing the history of new enrollees. During this meeting and any pertinent information about the student that was shared during intake/enrollment meeting is reviewed to insure that all staff are familiar with the incoming students. Some information reviewed includes the child’s code of conduct infraction, the behavior and scholastic records along any involvement the child may have had with the police or juvenile authority. The student staffing meeting is usually conducted at the end of each day that students are assigned to the AEC.

A Day at the AEC

The following description of the AEC is a result of the observations conducted by the researcher and documents uncovered during document searches. The program that was created 25 years ago still looks and functions much like it did during its creation thanks to effective and efficient planning and implementation. What follows is a description of a typical day at the AEC. A day at the AEC begins early in the morning
when students board the school bus from their neighborhood to go to a central location to board the school bus to the AEC. When they arrive at the bus compound at 7:10 am an educational aide is waiting there to take roll, give students instructions and to load them onto another bus which arrives at the AEC at 7:30 am. If students do not ride the school bus their parents are the only individuals authorized to transport them to and from school.

The AEC, a school within a school concept, at this time has moved into its third location, the basement of a HCS middle school. Overall the center environment is very upbeat and projects a very sunny learning environment. The walls are covered with student work and affirmations that serve as constant reminders to students to treat others with respect, use attentive listening and make optimistic comment about other.

The space is shared with a General Education Diploma (GED) Program which provides an option for students who did not graduate from high school the opportunity to earn their diploma and a virtual credit advance (VCAP) program, which enables students to make up credits for classes they failed in the tradition school setting to earn credits toward high school graduation. There are four classrooms for instruction of the core subjects being Social Studies, Science, English and Math, a staff lounge, a counseling office, male and female bathrooms, a mail room, a meeting room, a storage room and the AEC administrative office.

When the students arrive at the AEC, two educational assistants take them to a self-contained breakfast in an AEC classroom. The school day begins at 8:00 am and there are approximately 12 to 15 students assigned to the AEC two or three students to each classroom. On the first day students attend the AEC; they are given a series of
surveys and questionnaires to determine their learning modality and reading level. Each student is given a Reading Inventory; How do you Like to Learn? and a My Personal Goals worksheet on which to record both long term and short term goals. After these documents are evaluated, an individualized course of study is prepared for each student.

**Pupil Teacher Ratio**

According to interviews with an expulsion hearings officer the total student allocation of the AEC is 40 regular education students, 12 special education students and 15 elementary school students (added 2014-2015 year) for a total enrollment of 67 students at any given time because of the way they are assigned to and released from the center. Students can be assigned to or released from the AEC both daily and weekly which causes an almost daily change in the enrollment. The exclusion of the special education students and elementary students limits the enrollment of regular education students to 40. There were no more than 15 students assigned to the AEC with an average of 3 students per classroom as observed by the researcher. The pupil teacher ratio (PTR) was 1/1.5 which included the educational assistant assigned to the classroom.

The AEC classrooms are student-centered with lots of visuals on the walls consisting of completed student projects and motivational posters. Chairs and tables are arranged theater style for student seating and each classroom has a smart board and computers which are used during instruction by both students and teachers. With a limited number of students in each classroom during instruction teachers are able to use excellent teaching methods such as allowing wait time and providing prompts and repetition for students.
That original AEC staff researched and used best practices. The staff also worked hard to make the center a place where children could re-discover and believe in themselves as well as gain both self-confidence and self-respect.

**Research Findings**

The data for this research study was analyzed according to a structural coding method which uses the actual research questions to sort the data (Saldana, 2009). This allowed the researcher to concentrate on and collect the information that is most relevant to the research study. The first research question looks at the history of the AEC and its uniqueness in the community for the past 25 years. This information taken from interviews and observations agrees with the information from document and records review used to re-create the history of the AEC as presented previously in the AEC history.

The original administrator of the AEC was passionate about the mission of the organization. In his interview he stated the following:

The AEC program and the other programs that came under the reform initiative were supposed to be examples of the reform movement…there were some other programs that came out, most of them discipline related but the AEC is probably the only program still standing from that reform period.

Interviews with the past and present administrators, teachers and educational assistants of the AEC provided additional information about the evolution of the program. One teacher’s opinion of why the AEC has been so successful throughout the
years is the following.” The success of this program can be attributed to the fact that it is exactly opposite of regular school in nearly every way.”

When the AEC was established, it was considered part of the school reform movement of the 1960s and a partnership was forged between the Harmon Education Association (HEA) and the Harmon Board of Education (HBE). A part of this agreement mandated that a teacher and a school administrator serve as leaders of the AEC and all decisions would be made in a collaborative manner between the two of them. This relationship lasted for 15 years and was very successful. The two of them were used as examples by HCS and HEA to demonstrate how school reform and teacher/administrator partnerships could bring about better results for children.

A document analysis of the researched organization revealed that the AEC was established as an alternative to expulsion programs because of the number of increasing expulsions and new policies and procedures that were passed at the national level regarding student discipline. Additionally, the AEC was designated as a pilot program and at a later time to have a center located in the four regions of the city. The thought was that the different locations would provide easier transitions for students to and from their home school. The first AEC was located at the HCS Adult Education Program, a school within a school concept. This location was selected so that the AEC would not operate in isolation, in a separate building located in a distant corner of the school district that would enable students to be stigmatized or stereotyped.

Document analysis efforts included a review of historical newspapers and documents from 1989 highlighted the negative perspectives of the AEC program. Local
community publications revealed a negative perspective about the alternative program and community members began to feel nervous because “bad kids” were coming to the neighborhood and they were afraid their children would be mugged and their businesses would be robbed. Some safeguards were put into place to avoid any disasters.

According to the original administrator, the AEC students were supervised at all times, the staff never allowed students to freely roam around the building without an adult available to escort students to any location they needed to be in the building. The administrator elaborated that because of the structured program there were no incidents in the community and after several years the AEC program was completely accepted by the community. This acceptance was so positive that when it was suggested the AEC be terminated, the community came out in full support of the program and it has continued to exist.

Originally the program goal was that the coordinators would work out the problems during program implementation. The original administrator reported the following:

The program started out with a skeleton staff and no merit programs or real procedures. Since the program was evolving, we had to make changes almost on a monthly basis. During that time the staff was expanded, and the coordinators came up with protocols for different programs and orientations. It took about five years to get things running up to expectations and by that time, the AEC was professionally recognized as a complete alternative program since most of our adaptations were based on best practices and research at that time. Many people
from different parts of the US came to assess and view the program based on information they had heard through educational circles.

**Student Selection and Building Capacity**

Additional document analysis elaborated on the student admission process. Based on the infraction detailed in the Code of Conduct students in grades 6-12 were referred to the Expulsion Hearing Office for the assignment of a discipline intervention. During program inception there were about 100 students enrolled and criteria had not yet been developed for student admission to the AEC.

During the time that the HCS student enrollment was about 100,000 and approximately 100 students attended the AEC. Today there are about 55,000 students enrolled in the HCS and the AEC enrollment fluctuates from about 40 to 55 students with the building capacity of about 67 students when elementary, regular and special education students are served at the same time. The capacity of the school was reduced when it was relocated in a smaller space. However, when the AEC moved to a larger building, the student capacity did not change and fewer students continue to be served.

**Discipline Philosophy**

According to staff members during the development of the program, discipline was considered as corrective. Student misconduct was addressed in a corrective manner since it gave the students a chance to have something to build upon and to learn how to address situations in a constructive manner. Further, students were allowed to have input into the creation of the three initial merit programs which facets were attendance, academics and attitude and behavior. These three strands of this program enhanced the
climate of the school because students worked very hard to meet the expectations of the three programs. Students were motivated to be compliant because they were awarded with pizza parties, ice cream sundaes and free play in the gymnasium as they achieved certain merit levels. Currently there are no awards or incentives for students however several teachers have their own awards that are given to students for their achievement and success in individual classrooms.

The teachers agree that because of the low pupil teacher ratio of the AEC classroom there are few problems. When there are classroom discipline problems students are given empowerment assignments, (writing assignments) designed to allow students to think about their behavior and to make change. This discipline is usually assigned by the classroom teacher and is usually a homework assignment to be returned to school the next day. On other occasions students are not offered alternative options to solve their problems, and when their behavior relapses to the behavior that sent the child to the AEC, they are expelled.

**Parent Workshops**

As articulated by the AEC staff the first required meeting for parents is the two-hour enrollment meeting. During this meeting the parent, teacher and community liaison discuss AEC policies and procedures and the students are enrolled into the AEC program. Students must actually enroll at the AEC because when they are either expelled or assigned to the AEC they are withdrawn from school. If parents or their representatives do not attend this meeting their child cannot be enrolled in the program.
When the AEC was first established and for about the first twenty years of the program parents were required to come to the AEC for a three-hour period to work with their child and staff to design a behavior plan or develop some goals based upon the student’s need. The AEC staff helped support those goals with the resources available at the center. About 95% of the parents participated in these workshops which are no longer required.

**Evolution of the AEC**

Based on an interview with an educational assistant who has been employed at the AEC for the last 24 years, the change in the building can be attributed not only to the administration but also to the teachers and students. The AEC has had three administrators, and for the past few years the teacher coordinator has not been a component of the program. This position was replaced by a vice-principal an additional administrator.

The educational assistant noted that AEC program changed when the general population of HCS decreased from 100,000 students to about 55,000. The allocated enrollment of the AEC changed when the center relocated into a smaller space. During that time the total enrollment of the AEC was reduced to 40 regular education students and 12 special education students. At some point when the student enrollment changed the expulsion hearing office began to refer only those students with passing grades and good behavior to the AEC. This was done to ensure that those students would not have to endure a period of expulsion and risk school failure. There is no documentation of this change in the profile of students referred to the AEC.
The education and enrichment programs have remained constant at the AEC. The programs Get Real! and the resource periods are almost exactly as they were designed in 1989. This is due in part to the fact that the original administrator continued to work as assistant administrator after retirements and also served as consultant which helped the continuity of the program. Through the years there have been different priorities, budget cuts and staff reductions which are responsible for some of the changes in the AEC program, other changes have been made we little or no explanation provided.

**School Climate/ Discipline**

It is the opinion of some of the teachers that currently the educational climate of the AEC is excellent because there are few students with discipline problems enrolled and the low pupil teacher ratio which often ranges from 3 to 6 students per class. However, it is the opinion of others that AEC leadership has gone from total tolerance to zero tolerance. Currently there is more discipline of students then there has been in the past and consequently the school has become less student-based.

The discipline policies have begun to change from a corrective teaching style of discipline to a more punitive type of discipline. Currently if a student exhibits a discipline problem at the bus stop, on the way to school or in the classroom the first intervention for that child is frequently expulsion. The current discipline philosophy at the school is that the students have already been disciplined and this is their last chance. If they are not successful at adhering to the rules and regulations of the AEC expulsion is often the first choice.
The climate is calm because there is constant supervision of students. There is supervision each morning and afternoon when students board the school bus to and from the AEC. There is supervision in the building as students pass through the halls going to class as well as when they need to travel individually to the bathroom or other locations in the building.

**Student Assignment to the AEC**

According to the Code of Conduct (Appendix F), the process of assigning a student to the expulsion hearing office (EHO) for a discipline intervention hearing begins when a student is given an office referral for a level II or III discipline infraction by a classroom teacher or school administrator. Information provided by a survey of middle and high school principals recommends that prior to sending a student for an expulsion hearing the administrator should:

- Thoroughly examine the situation to get the facts.
- Review the student’s discipline and scholastic records.
- Consider the safety of the building and other students

Repeated negative behavior by the student and other factors mentioned above determine whether expulsion or suspension is appropriate (Appendix F). Principals are authorized to assign students to a period of suspension of no more than ten days. Any removal of students from school for more than ten days must be executed by an EHO, who is a designee of the district superintendent.

The EHO uses the same method as a building principal to determine whether or not a student should be assigned to the AEC or expelled from school.
**What is the student involvement while at the AEC?**

As previously stated by interviewees, the AEC center is drastically different from the traditional school setting. The AEC addresses students on an individual basis by working with them one on one with discipline, personal problems and scholastics. This helps the staff “get in depth” and research why a student is having difficulty.

While students are at the AEC they experience smaller class sizes, a lower pupil teacher ratio which allows for more interaction with teachers and more personalized instruction than at the traditional school. Students are assigned to classrooms by grade level and all classrooms are multi-grade level classrooms and individualized instruction programs are prepared for each student from a series of entrance examinations administered to students on their first day. Students are offered four core classes which are language arts, social studies, math, and science.

The AEC student instruction booklet dictates that while assigned to the AEC students are not allowed to have book bags, trapper keepers, pocketbooks or any other such personal possessions. They are allowed to have a cell phone but may not use it on school premises. According to the dress code sagging pants are not allowed nor is any paraphernalia that denotes gang affiliation. Though this is a school within a school concept, the AEC and regular education students are not allowed to mingle at any time. All of these rules and regulations must be adhered to at all times.

The grades that the students earn while at the AEC are averaged with the grades that they have earned at their home school. Usually when students leave the AEC they
have earned better grades than they had prior to their enrollment, are able to keep their status as honor roll students or able to graduate from school on time.

The document analysis also included student exit essays. The students are required to write these essays prior to their transfer from the AEC back to their home school and they are encouraged to reflect on their AEC enrollment as a life event that was worthwhile and be a positive or negative life event. Information gathered from student exit essays reveals how the student felt about the AEC experience. Many of the students express that they were scared when they received their referral to the AEC because they did not know what to expect. Some said they tried to get out of going the first day by staying in bed but their parents made them attend school. Other students were surprised by their AEC assignment because they thought that expulsion meant that they would be put out of HCS completely and they did not know about the AEC program. Other students were happy because they were given a second chance and did not want to make a mistake there and get “kicked out.” Some students articulated feeling disappointed in themselves for the negative behavior that sent them to the AEC and understood the disappointment of their parents over their AEC assignment. Most students recognized the discipline would be strict.

Their essays also included their expression of concern about the climate of the school, wondering whether it would be “lame” (not fun) and located in a “dirty old basement.” Their essays reflected their wonder about whether or not the AEC teachers would be mean. Students noted that they found the AEC to be similar to their home school except for smaller classes, a quieter environment and the aspect that they received
more help from teachers who urge them to do their best at all times. The students seem to enjoy several of the programs that are offered at the AEC, helping them with their emotions, behavior and scholastics especially Get Real! In their essays the students indicated that sessions like Get Real! would work in the traditional school.

**AEC Observation**

As noted previously, data collection included researcher observations of the AEC. Breakfast program, bus stop procedures, Get Real! and the resource period. All the During a period of five-days the researcher observed AEC several classrooms, the students enrolled in the AEC intermediate and high school program participate in a motivational session called “Get Real! During these sessions the students are involved in activities designed to enable them to understand concepts about mutual respect, active listening, being a positive person and showing appreciation to others. During this time all the teachers and educational assistants are assigned to attend the session and interact and aid the students. Each teacher is assigned to moderate this group for one week on a rotating basis and must provide an activity for students.

There are two resource periods during the day. Students are separated according to grade level, either intermediate or high school level, to attend the workshops which are held at the end of each day. This time is reserved for cooperative learning, speakers from the school district or community or time for students to complete special programs such as VCAP, test prep or other special activities.

Students like the resource period because it enables them to complete work and it is a very quiet period. What follows is a description of the kind of program activities
that are offered during these sessions. At the beginning of the session the students were given two assignments, one called “I Feel Good”, which requested students to cut out pictures and words that described some positive aspects of their personalities, and the other assignment students were given was to write a Cinquain Poem of 5 lines that described their personality. Both of these activities when completed on large chart paper and presented to their classmates and later to be displayed in the hallways of the building. This activity took two class periods and all of the students were able to complete their assignment with the assistance of the adults in the classroom.

While at the AEC many students develop special relationships with teacher’s comments such as, “I like all the teachers at the AEC; they are real cool and get you going in class” are heard. “The teachers help you a lot here with your work.” “They make learning seem easy, but sometimes it is hard; the teachers will help you one on one if you need it.”

**Do these activities help the students when they return to the traditional school setting?**

The AEC program is designed to help assure that the transition back to the home school would be successful. One of the sessions indicated that, “The AEC is a successful program and is a way for the Harmon Board of Education to keep kids in school even though they might have committed a misdeed; it helps us to do our part to keep them from getting further behind.”

A major reason for success of students who return to the home school is the work of the community liaison. The Community liaison serves as a connection between the
center and the returning students' home schools and is responsible for ensuring that all 
grades the students earned while enrolled at the AEC actually are transferred to the 
student’s home school to be averaged in with grades earned there.

As the researcher reviewed the exit essays the benefits of attending AEC were 
evident for students as they expressed what they learned will being in the program.
Students said the program allowed them to learn from their mistakes and to make-up 
missing work, bringing up low grades. Many students felt “pumped up” and 
encouraged to be successful in the future. One student stated that, “it changed me in a 
way that I, my mother, and others family members can see. I learned that I have no more 
chances and that my actions reflect on everyone around me—good or bad.” Another 
noted that, “As a result I learned to stay focused on my academics and not on the social 
drama.” There are rules to follow at the AEC and “everyone gets treated the same as 
long as you treat others the way that you want to be treated.” One student purported that 
“If you make a mistake the teachers will warn you before you make the mistake again 
and get into trouble. At the end of their AEC assignment many students realized that the 
AEC was “really cool and they liked it ’for real’.”

Sometimes however those students who are transferred from the AEC back to 
their home school have immediate problems and are sent back to the EHO for the 
assignment of another discipline intervention. Unfortunately, students can only be 
enrolled in the AEC once while attending middle school and once while attending high 
school. Since the span of time between middle school and graduation is 4 years and a
student is only eligible to attend the AEC for 2 of those years, the child may face expulsion from school with no scholastic support.

Why are so many Black males assigned to the AEC?

The AEC personnel alluded to the fact that there are many reasons for the assignment of an overabundance of Black males to the AEC. The staff and the EHOs who refer students to the center agree that most of the students are sent to the program are Black males. They also agree that this is a reflection of the demographics of the school district which is predominantly Black.

As far as the grade levels of the students assigned to the AEC an aid indicated, “most of the students that are assigned are high school students, then middle school students and a few elementary. This staff member suggested that as high as 95% of them are African American males” (the AEC became a k-12 center during the 2015-2015 school year). The staff discussed a variety of reasons why Black males are overrepresented as students assigned to the AEC and teacher attitude was a great concern.

One AEC teacher articulated, “Teachers do not understand Black which teaches males to be active, verbal and assertive at a young age. This behavior is viewed by teachers as threatening and the students are considered discipline problems. Another stated:

Teachers, especially from suburban areas who are not prepared or educated regarding how to “handle” our Black males. These teachers may feel intimidated or maybe just don’t want to be bothered with trying to handle whatever the situation is; they’d rather just kick them out.”
Staff suggests that the lack of Black teachers affects the number of Black males assigned to the AEC. This was specifically cited as a problem by another AEC employee who suggested, “There is a lack of understanding about that cultural group [Black males] and there is a lack of understanding by those responsible for providing their education and most importantly, their social and emotional growth (AEC teacher). This staff member also alluded to the idea that predominantly White staff serves a student population that is majority Black and thus the staff does not seem to understand the student culture.

Targeting was also a concern of the teachers. They [Black males] are not overrepresented but it seems as if they have targets on their backs and are overdisciplined rather than taught. I don’t know the reason but they [Black males]) are generally at-risk in modern society. Other interviewees suggested that Black boys just might be the problem saying,” “There are more behavioral violations committed in schools by Black males. Whether this is actually the situation or whether they are the first ones to be identified remains a question.” Another teacher offered these ideas on that topic:

In my own personal opinion, it goes back to our heritage, slavery days; our African American males seem to be more hostile. I think some of that’s got to do with what was embedded from back in slavery, Jim Crow laws, the right to vote, etc. When I talk to the young Black males assigned to the AEC, I talk to them and tell them not to use that as an excuse for their behavior.

Regarding the profile of the typical students sent to the AEC one employee categorizes them as being at risk students and provides reasons. Speaking for students being at-risk this employee stated, “The negative behavior of students is frequently related to the
reality that their parents are young, uneducated and considered to be at risk when they were students, thus their children are at risk.”

Black males are sent to the AEC most generally for a discipline infraction called volatile acts. When asked about student referrals an expulsion hearing officer stated:

I would say that the most common levied III infraction is a volatile act. It can consist of students who perhaps strike somebody or students who are involved in fighting but then escalated to a higher level when students re separated and they keep on being the aggressor and accidentally injure a third party.”

As previously described, a volatile act is defined as” disruption of school activities by use of violence, force, intimidation, threats to students or staff or disorderly conduct. This includes menacing and provoking others towards acts of disruption (individual or group related)” (Code of Conduct, HCS, 2014). In an effort to determine how often the discipline infraction of a volatile act is used as the reason for discipline referrals, the researcher prepared a table that illustrate the number of students who were assigned to the AEC during a six-month period in the 2014-2015 school year, the Code of Conduct infraction they were assigned for as well as their race and gender.
Table 1 Ethnicity, Gender and Behavior Table HCS 2014-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infracton</th>
<th>Black Male</th>
<th>White Male</th>
<th>Hispanic Male</th>
<th>Multi-Male</th>
<th>Asian M</th>
<th>Black Female</th>
<th>White Female</th>
<th>Multi-Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insubordination</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Look-alike gun</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual misconduct</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical assault</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Volatile act</td>
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<td>Weapons</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Arson</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Theft</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drug possession</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>99</td>
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</table>

Table 1 reflects the AEC enrollment for six months during the 2014-2015 school year according to ethnicity, sex, and discipline code infraction.
Table 2 Grade Level Behavior HCS 2014-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Look alike Gun</th>
<th>Misconduct</th>
<th>Physical assault</th>
<th>Sexual Misconduct</th>
<th>Drug possession</th>
<th>Volatile act</th>
<th>Explosives</th>
<th>Weapon</th>
<th>Arson</th>
<th>Theft</th>
<th>Bullying</th>
<th>Sexual Offense</th>
<th>Insubordination</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td><strong>5</strong></td>
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<td><strong>9</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 reflects the assignment of students to the AEC according to grade level and discipline infraction for a six-month period during the 2014-2015 school year.

The information from these charts will be analyzed in chapter five. There are many reasons for the overrepresentation of Black males as recipients of discipline interventions in schools and centers such as the AEC.

**Summary**

The HCAEC was established amidst great controversy because the HCBOE was concerned students suspended and expelled from school were not getting the free education they should be provided and when they were out of school students, were causing havoc in their communities.

After extensive research and planning the school opened amid controversy regarding the nature of the school, accompanied with fear that it would become a “jail for children.” Established within five years, the school came together with many innovative
programs for students created with the input of both students and parents. One program entailed inviting community members to the school to give positive motivational speeches. Parents were required to attend parenting and discipline workshops.

The curriculum at the center remained the same as that of the traditional schools and each student is instructed on his/her own level. At least four certified teachers and educational assistants, a special education teacher, a counselor and a community liaison, one administrator and one assistant administrator have comprised the staff of the AEC from the time it was established.

Initially the students assigned to the AEC were generally troubled, most of the students referred to the program were accepted and at times the enrollment was over 100 students. The school has operated in three locations since it was established and has been considered an excellent program. The HCAEC was established as a pilot program. The research findings are discussed but not analyzed in this chapter. The findings represent the participants’ response to the research questions.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Alternative schools have been a part of the American school system for decades and the original alternative schools were designed for discipline (Kim & Taylor, 2008). HCS created several special emphasis schools or magnet schools in the late 1960s along with the AEC. The AEC is among the few of these schools that is still open and continuing to serve the needs of students. As the results of this research are analyzed it makes one wonder if the AEC is still loyal to the initial goals and objectives upon which it was established. Findings have shown that some of the original goals of the AEC are still in place while some of the goals are changing.

One of the reasons for this study is my interest in determining whether or not the majority of the students served in the AEC are Black males and why. During my career as an elementary principal I observed teachers continuing to discipline Black boys after they brought them to the office for me for discipline because the teacher felt that my discipline was not enough punishment for the student. Since having these experiences I have questioned the inequities of discipline of Black males in school settings and want to know what can be done about it.

Historically Black males have always been the ones to receive excessive punishment both in and out of school, whether from the paddle, which has been outlawed in many states, all the way to jail and the penitentiary system (texasapplseed.net, 2010). Current questions about excessive punishment of Black males, relates to the problem of Black males being hurt or fatally injured by police officers who are often White. There is no record of how many times these tragic confrontations have happened but American
citizens are now aware of them and have demanded that justice be served. People of all
creeds, colors, and sexual orientation are staging Civil Rights demonstrations in the
streets of the cities and towns in which these incidents occur as a display of their outrage
about these injustices. A new Civil Rights movement, Black Lives Matter, has come to
the forefront of these demonstrations when and wherever the freedoms of Black people
and others are being challenged.

This case study provides a depiction of an alternative to expulsion center (AEC)
established in 1989 that is still functioning well and is located in a sizable state in the
Midwestern section of the US. The alternative program is recognized as an important
part of the school district though it has experienced some changes during its years of
operation. During the research phase of this case study, the subject of Black males
surfaced and became an import aspect of the study. As noted in Chapter three according
to Stake (2010), case studies can be organized around surfacing issues which over time
can change the focus of the study.

The research questions that were guides for the study are the following:

1. What is the history and significance of the AEC Program?
   a. How has the AEC evolved from 1989 to the present based upon
      administrative leadership?
   b. Who are the students who attend the AEC and what are the reasons for
      their assignment?

2. What is the student experience at the AEC?
3. What might be the reason for the overrepresentation of Black males in the AEC?

Some of the data selected to be included in this research study is information about alternative school typologies, the characteristics of students served at the AEC, public perceptions of AECs, some of the reasons for student assignment, how teacher attitude contributes to the assignment of Black males to ADS, racial bias and microaggressions.

Three theories were selected to frame this research study. The first is the theory by Quinn & Poirier (2007) regarding how should alternative schools be organized to best impact student achievement. The Quinn & Poirier theory asks three questions. First, should ADS’s be organized to concentrate on increasing the impact of student outcomes? Second, should they be organized to provide highly innovative programs? Finally, should the total educational system be changed?

The second theory is the SJT which is concerned with the ways in which the culture and climate of a school can sometimes allow the treatment of students to be influenced by political factors and other social injustices based on race creed and color (Dantley & Tillman, 2010). The last framework is CRT which is a concept that originated with Derrick Bell and expresses interest in changing the range of power between the races in America. Bell describes racism in America as being so subtle that it is almost unnoticed making it difficult to correct. Concepts related to microaggressions, a relatively new term that refers to the subtle racism (Delgado & Stafancic, 2001) were also considered in relation to this study.
Purposeful sampling was used for the collection of research data to ensure that the information collected from participants was relevant and provided information to answer research questions. The participants in the study were past and present AEC administrators, teachers and educational assistants. None of the students enrolled in the AEC were interviewed however information was available through the review of student exit essays in which they expressed their feelings about the AEC assignment. Historical archives were searched to gather additional information to collaborate interviews and observations.

The data was analyzed through the use of the structural coding, a process in which the researcher relates data to specific research questions from interviews. This process enables the researcher to understand the data quickly, creating an efficient way of organizing information (Saldana, 2003). During data analysis it became clear that many of the programs created for AEC students were based upon the principles of SJT and CRT and have remained strong components of the school in 2015.

Analysis of Research Questions

What is the history and significance of the AEC program?

This AEC is noteworthy because it may be one of few programs of its kind developed in the 1960s that still exist and is still operating effectively. The design of the AEC closely aligns with Quinn & Porirer’s (2007) model of an ADS that has made major changes to the school’s programs and practices. The AEC is uniquely different from the traditional middle and high schools in the district. The individualized instruction plan for students, lower pupil/teacher ratio, corrective discipline, self-esteem programs, and
constant supervision of students provide a school setting different from any the students have ever experienced. This concept has worked so well that often students want to make the AEC their home school after their assignment in the AEC is completed.

Findings revealed that an atmosphere of social equality and democracy was established in the AEC by school leaders. The AEC educational administrators cultivated a socially just environment to ensure that social injustices, such as ostracism, or discrimination based on race and religion were not issues during a student’s AEC enrollment. This atmosphere reflected elements of SJT, which embraces social equality and democracy in schools.

During the first five years of operation, the administrators were dedicated to researching the best educational practices in the US in order to implement best practices in the AEC. These educational leaders were aware that there were community concerns about where the school was to be located because citizens thought that it would put their community “in harm’s way”. Community members felt that the AEC would equate to having a kiddie jail in their midst and so they were concerned. After many meetings between the community and the HCS Board of Education an agreement was reached regarding efforts to ensure neighborhood safety. As a result of the district and community agreement, the administrators created safeguards to ensure community safety.

One of the safeguards instituted by that the administrators was a system that required educational assistants or teachers to escort students anywhere they traveled either inside or outside of the building. By escorting the students everywhere, the staff ensured that students could not leave the school and go into the community and cause
problems. The concept of escorting students from place to place in schools is also being used in traditional school buildings in HCS because it is considered a positive discipline technique.

Findings also revealed that there are other unique programs created by the ACS that are good for children and that would work well in traditional school settings. One of these programs is Get Real!, a workshop that immerses students into activities to help them understand the concepts of mutual respect, active listening, respect for others, self-love and self-esteem. Many of the activities of this program could be transferrable to the curriculum of any school.

Another activity that would be effective in a traditional school setting takes place during the resource period in the AEC. This resource period activity entails inviting speakers to the AEC to tell their life stories that includes both their failures and successes. This activity relates directly to CRT’s “Voices of People of Color” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). I think the idea of inviting speakers to the AEC is a great idea and although the stories presented might not be about race and racism, and although all of the speakers may not be Black, the presenter testimonies are still autobiographical. Further, the speakers allow students to see, from the experience of others, that their situation is not unique and they can still be successful in their lives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

When the AEC was established the leaders set up a required three-hour parent workshop during which the parent, student and teacher worked together to design a behavior plan or to develop some goals based upon the student’s needs. This activity helps the students to self-reflect on the behaviors that got them assigned to the AEC, and
to discuss strategies to reverse this behavior when faced with confrontational situations. It also allows parents to earn social capital by networking with the school and helping to formulate programs that benefit their children and add to their success in school (Allen, 2010). This is a technique that a traditional school could use as an initial discipline intervention prior to a student’s suspension or expulsion from school and affords the student a chance to work to change negative behavior and to stay in school as well as give the parent a sense of involvement.

There are two other procedures that are used at the AEC that might also be beneficial if used in regular school settings. The first is the practice of administering a battery of simple tests to the students on their first day of attendance to determine their learning levels. This enables them to receive instruction at their own level and this may also determine if the student has learning differences or needs a special education program. Often in the traditional school setting a student can attend classes for several weeks or even months before someone notices that he/she is experiencing learning difficulties. The use of this procedure would help to eliminate the problems of students attending school and not receiving needed educational services.

The other procedure is the “staffing” which is a meeting that the AEC staff convenes each day that students are enrolled. This meeting usually takes place at the end of the school day at which time all of the student’s records, as well as the reasons that they were assigned to the AEC, are examined. During this session any other important information that teachers might need to know as they interact with the child are reviewed by the AEC staff. These techniques are time consuming but can be beneficial to students
and by ensuring that they receive a quality education that begins the first day they attend
the AEC.

The AEC is significant because it has existed as a part of HCS for many years and
is still considered a valuable part of the HCS district. The AEC, according to the original
administrator was once considered a model for discipline programs and people from both
the US and Europe visited the center to get ideas for the implementation of programs and
operations at their ADSs.

As a testament to the worth of the program, one student wrote the following on an
exit essay:

While at the AEC I learned that I should focus on academics because I’ve been
slacking this whole year. Being at the AEC really helped me…showed me how to
think before I react to certain situations. The AEC also showed me that being
negative is not always the solution.

This indicates that the students really gain something from the experience at the AEC.

The programs in the AEC although established in the eighties are still a valuable
part of the program. Even though the center has never been formally evaluated during its
years of existence, it continues to run with relative ease in spite of the internal and
external changes which have occurred in the organization. The original administrators
can be proud of what they created.
A). How has the AEC evolved from 1989 to present based upon administrative leadership?

The leadership of the AEC remained under the original administrator and coordinator for the first fifteen years and because of consistent leadership few changes were made. Even after the first fifteen years with leadership changes, the AEC remained basically the same because of inertia. The AEC program that was initially established was strong and the original administrator maintained a leadership position there for many years and was still affiliated with the AEC at the start of this research. This educational leader helped to set the tone of the center and helped to keep school traditions in place.

Several years ago the administration at the AEC changed and the original administrator is no longer a part of the staff. Following these transitions noticeable changes are beginning to be seen in the AEC climate. These changes are primarily in the area of student discipline. The new administrators’ beliefs and philosophy on discipline are different from that established when the school was organized. These philosophies are often not corrective and occasionally the first intervention used when students misbehave at the AEC is the reversal of their AEC assignment to an expulsion.

In the past students were counseled or otherwise disciplined with written assignments and time-outs and given another chance when rules were broken. General perceptions echoed what one staff member mentioned when they suggested that “school climate of the AEC has changed within the last few years because of a change in the discipline philosophy that went ‘from total tolerance to zero tolerance’ with more student
discipline.” It is the opinion of the various staff members that the discipline policy is damaging the positive climate of the school.

As reported in chapter four when the AEC was first established, extensive student reward programs were created with input from students, consisting of food such as pizza, ice cream sundaes and free play periods in the gymnasium. Most of these rewards have been discontinued and have not been replaced. In a center such as the AEC, student rewards are important because in the traditional school setting problematic students seldom receive rewards. These students need to know that good behavior and good work is rewarded in our society. Often administrators new to a program want to take ownership by making changes before they have a good basic understanding of a program or because of conflicting philosophies. This is a good example of how the leadership sets the tone of the building and influences both negative and positive change (Fullan, 2003).

Another reason the school climate has not changed drastically is the caliber of students now being assigned to the AEC. Initially any and all students who were to receive expulsion as an intervention were assigned to the AEC regardless of their grades or behavior until the allocated enrollment of the building was met. Currently only those students who have passing grades and few office referrals for discipline are assigned to the AEC. In part the reason for this change has to do with the relocation of the AEC to a smaller space which reduced the allocation of students. When the allocation of students became smaller the decision was made to send only students with passing grades and good behavior to the AEC. The origin of this change in policy is unknown. Though the selection of the students by these criteria keeps the center environment calm this change
seems to defeat the purpose of the AEC and does not align with the original profile of AEC students.

Further although major changes in the operations of the AEC have not been made, it is a concern that the subtle changes that are occurring in policy and procedure will soon completely change the climate of the AEC.

B). Who are the students attending the AEC and what are the reasons for their assignment?

Many times when students are offered enrolment at the AEC instead of an expulsion, they do not initially accept it because of the negative perception that people harbor about schools for discipline interventions and these students who attend them. Often ADSs are considered places for unruly children who may have had interaction with the local authorities may be failing scholastically or come from single family homes (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Parents have to be convinced that the students who attend ADSs are just like their children, not a discipline problem rather a child who made a mistakes.

During the first few years of the AEC’s operation the Institute for the Coordination of School Discipline produced a profile of the typical student who attended the AEC and some of the student's characteristics included students who come from single family homes, low socioeconomic status, have failed on or more grades, are sexually active, etc. (“Annual Report”, 1998, p. 10). This profile has generally aligned with the students assigned to the AEC but right now the profile is changing. Presently students who are doing well scholastically, have few discipline problems and come from two parent families are being assigned to the AEC. There is not an official change and
there is no documentation of this change however, one hearing officer expressed that by
assigning more successful students to the ADS enabled these students to remain
successful and stay on track to graduate from school.

Some staff members agree that the gender and racial breakdown of the majority of
students assigned to the AEC are Black males. This opinion agrees with the actual
statistics uncovered by researcher. One teacher stated that he thought at least 95% of the
students assigned for discipline interventions are Black males. Further this teacher
indicated that he recognized that this may reflect the demographics of the school district.

The ethnicity of the students who attend HCS are important in determining one of
the reasons why Black males are over-represented as enrollees of the AEC. According to
information provided by HCS the total student population is around 44,900. Of the total
student body approximately 30,800 (68.5%) of these students are Black and 14,100
(31%) are White. The total Black male population of HCS is 15,800 (35%) and the total
White male population of HCS is 7,250 (16%). This information concludes that more
Black males are assigned to the AEC because there are more Black males enrolled as
students in HCSs than there are White males.

In order to demonstrate the ratio of Black/White students assigned to the AEC I
developed two tables with information collected from the archives of HCS during a six-
month period of the 2014-15 school year. These tables are located in chapter 4. Table 1
reports this information according to the ethnicity, gender of the student, and discipline
code infraction that the student violated. During that time the total AEC enrollment
was 99 students and Black males received 45% of the referrals and, White males received
8% the referrals. This information indicates that Black males are being assigned to the AEC at a rate of about 5 Black males to 1 White male. This is significant because these numbers represent only the students who are assigned to the AEC and do not include those students who are excluded by suspension or expulsion. By combining the number of students who are excluded by suspension, expulsion, and assigned to the AEC provides a more accurate account of the numbers of students put out of the HCSs.

As noted in Table 1 more students were referred to the AEC for volatile acts than any other infraction. Stated previously in chapter 4, a volatile act is the code of conduct infraction for which students are most often referred to the AEC. The perception is that the category of a volatile act is a catch-all and is used to cover many discipline offenses. Table 1 also illustrates that 19 Black females were referred to the AEC for a volatile act. This is surprising and may be an indicator that the discipline situation that exists for Black males is becoming just as problematic for Black females.

Table 2 displays the frequency of student assignment to the AEC according to the student’s grade level. Though the evidence is inconclusive, the referrals to the AEC increase slightly in the 8th grade and decrease as the students move through the upper grades. The larger number of students are referred for a volatile act with at least 15 referrals, and there is at least one referral for a volatile act in each grade level between grades 6th and 12th, with the exception of 7th grade. There were nine referrals for physical assault, one in every grade level except in 10th grade.

One of the threads of this research study is about how negative teacher attitudes contribute to the ratio inequality of Black, male vs. White male student enrollment at the
AEC. The consensus of the AEC staff aligns with the reality that most students are referred for discipline interventions and assigned to the AEC for a volatile act. This assignment often depends upon a discipline report filed out by a teacher and could be based either on teacher attitude or judgement rather than an accurate report of what happened. A volatile act can be expressed in many different ways; an argument between students, students talking back to the teacher, throwing something or a bad fight. All of this behavior is subject to the interpretation of the adult in charge.

Teachers sometimes have negative attitudes about children because they do not have basic knowledge about cultures that are different from their own. An AEC staff member offered an opinion that the reason Black boys are referred to the AEC so often is because many teachers’ perceptions about Black males come from stereotypes such as being aggressive, loud, angry, violent and overly sexual (Woods, 2010) rather than personal knowledge.

Woods (2010) in her study discusses what she calls the ‘adultification’ of Black males. Adultification, which was discussed earlier in this document, occurs when some White female classroom teachers identify Black boys in their classrooms with Black male adults rather than children and discipline them in a harsher manner than they would if the comparison to adult Black males was not made. These negative teacher attitudes have been cited as a major cause for some discipline issues that occur daily in public schools as early as kindergarten.

The speculation about the attitude of some of the White female teachers led to the investigation of the number of White female teachers who work for HCS. During the
2014-2015 school year the total number of teachers working for the HCS numbered roughly 3,000 and approximately 2,300 or 78% are White women. In addition, 700 or 23% are Black women. This information concludes the larger amount of teachers employed by the ACS are White females. Even though more of the teachers in the HCS are White females an assumption cannot be made that they are administering all the discipline referrals in the school district.

In large urban school districts, where the majority of the students are Black and the most of the teachers are White, every effort should be made to educate staff on basic social justice policies and procedures. This should be a practice in the school district in order to avoid any suggestion of inequity in student treatment. Further it is possible that people do not realize that their actions are offensive or unfair and conducting a series of sensitivity building workshops for staff and students might enhance and help redirect the school climate (Dantley & Tillman, 2010).

The fact that many Black male students strive to be “bad boys” at school because of peer pressure, social media, lack of parental controls and lack of good role models is another reason for the overassignment of Black males to the AEC. Often when a Black male comes to the expulsion center I examine their records and see that during their primary school years and sometimes during intermediate school they earned good grades and had few discipline infractions. However, by the time they reach the high school level their behavior and grades have deteriorated and I often ask the young men why this has occurred but they have no answer.
Monroe (2005) has a theory that by the time young Black males reach the middle school grades they have decided to be “bad boys” thinking that being unsuccessful in school and a discipline problem is a good thing. Lee (2002) states that according to Dr. John Ogbu, our Black males are looking at the wrong role models for guidance. They are looking at rappers and entertainers rather than people who have stable jobs or professions. Additionally, Ogbu related that the parents of these children do not assist them with or encourage them to complete homework which is very important in all levels of school, elementary, middle and high school. I agree that many parents do not pay enough attention to how their child is performing in school and will add that parents also do not take the responsibility for teaching their children about their Black Heritage. We currently have a generation of children who know little or nothing about their heritage and the plight of Black people in America.

It seems as though these young Black males do not want to be successful leaders at school, even when they have the ability because they do not want to be perceived as acting “White” (Lee, 2002). It often becomes a vicious circle with students misbehaving and performing poor scholastically in school resulting in teachers having no expectation for them either behaviorally or scholastically. Because of their behavior these bad boys receive no encouragement in school and often either face failure or drop out of school. Though there is no exact reason for the excessive referral of Black males for discipline interventions in HCS several variables contribute to the issue of inequities for Black males.
What is the student experience at the AEC?

It is difficult to determine the student’s experience who are enrolled at the AEC because everyone perceives things in their own personal way. Additionally, I did not directly interview students enrolled in the AEC to get their personal testimonies but rather, used their exit essays. Some of the student essays reflected how they initially felt about their AEC enrollment. Some of the students wanted to stay in bed rather than go to the AEC that first day. Other students expressed that they were ashamed of the behavior that got them assigned to the AEC and were finally able to identify with how their parents felt about the assignment. Many of the students were apprehensive because they were unfamiliar with the school and wondered about what might occur on the first day.

According to the exit essays written by students during their last week of attendance at the AEC, the student experience is vastly different from that of the traditional classroom and generally a very positive one. This is consistent with the perspective of scholars who note that one of the positive features of Type II alternative schools is the low pupil/teacher ratio which is much smaller than the traditional school (Kim, 2011). In the exit essays students expressed that the teachers seemed more “understanding” than those in the traditional school. This is also common in the literature. These two things are directly related because when teachers have fewer students, there is time to forge more relaxed relationships with students.

During the weeks of their attendance at the AEC, most of the students developed positive relationships with teachers making statements such as, “The staff at the AEC is cool and get you going in class… they make learning seem easy and the teachers will sit
down with you one on one if you need it.” Students also understand that good behavior is the key to a successful residency at the AEC. One student stated “Just do not do anything stupid and you won’t have to see the principal.” Students do understand that there is no tolerance at the AEC if you are not compliant. Many of them enjoy their experience at the AEC so much that they ask to make the AEC their home school.

The course of study at the AEC is the same as that used in the traditional school. When a student is enrolled they are given a battery of tests to determine their scholastic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Once these areas are accessed, students are taught at their level of comprehension. This leveled method of teaching relieves the frustration of students who have learning differences and are either below or above average learners. In the traditional classroom it can be difficult for students who do not fit into the average norm in the classroom and for that student who is below grade level, learning is virtually impossible. This situation commonly leads to discipline problems.

It can be concluded that the majority of students have positive experiences during their enrollment at the AEC. Their experiences are so positive that we often forget about the negatives. There are several negatives associated with AEC enrollment. Some students when assigned to the AEC never attend because both the child and their parent feel that the environment traditional school.it is too punitive. According to an AEC staff member the reason that students enjoy their AEC experience is because it is entirely different from the traditional school.
What might be the reason for the overrepresentation of Black males in the AEC?

There are several reasons for the overrepresentation of Black males in the AEC that have previously been discussed in this document. The first and most obvious reason is because the majority of students enrolled in HCS are Black males, however, there is a large gap the numbers of Black and White male students assigned to the AEC. Black males are assigned to the AEC at a rate of about five Black males to one White male and this does not include those males who are suspended and expelled from HCS. According to Welsh and Payne (2010), suspensions for even one day are very detrimental to students because they can be assigned at the building level and because students can be excluded from school more often.

The majority or 78% of the HCS teaching staff are White females. We might think that because White females are a majority in the HCS that White female teachers are responsible for writing most of the office referrals but that assumption cannot be made without validation. A referral to the office is a first step in the assignment of a student for a discipline intervention and these referrals are often more subjective than they are objective. As suggested by the literature, it is possible that there are subjective or racial behaviors underlying many of the referrals. This could be an area for further research.

Many Black male students strive to be “bad boys” because of peer pressure, social media, lack of parental control, and a lack of good role models. It often becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy for these students who continue to misbehave and perform poorly
scholastically in school. These behaviors can in turn cause teachers to have low expectations of the students behaviorally or scholastically. These boys choose this path because they are trying to assert their identity to both protect themselves as well as to escape from their current environment and bring about some order to their lives. They have no positive role models and their attitude in turn causes resentment from the teacher; it is cylindrical and in the end the child is usually the loser.

In relation to the problem stated above, according to Monroe (2005), at school Black boys are the victims of the discipline gap because they are punished more severely than other groups and they are perceived to be threatened simply because the teachers are often unfamiliar with the history of the students that they teach and unfamiliar of their culture. Throughout the years in school, unless there is some positive intervention, Black boys are often punished excessively (Brown, 2011). Further, instruction is delivered with less vigor and little or no scholastic growth is achieved by the student (Brown, 2011),

Regardless of teacher attitudes, inequitable rules, lack of culturally relevant teaching and some of the other variables that provide reports about the overrepresentation of Black males in ADS, Welsh and Payne (2012) suggest that the most detrimental variable to the success of Black boys in school is the color of their skin. It is unfortunate that the race of the student often determines the severity of the reprimand. One of the themes of CRT is *White Supremacy* which simply states that in America Caucasian people are the dominant law makers and control the culture. Further, this CRT perspective suggests that many in the dominant group consider White skin as a property right or an asset and that this makes them superior no matter what their social status may
be (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Conversely, Black people are racially identifiable, and no matter what, are often seen as “Black” people, regardless of their social-economic status and education. This could support Welch and Payne’s (2012) premise.

**Implications for Actions**

Based on this research, I have several recommendations that might be used by other individuals and institutions to address some of the problems that might exist in establishing and operating schools for discipline intervention.

The AEC is currently operating effortlessly by using the same goals and objectives upon which it was established. However, several changes have been made including those in the area of discipline, in the student profile, and the number of students assigned to the school. If many of these changes continue they will alter the school climate and work against the original goals of the organization. Recommendations include:

- Conduct a total program evaluation of the AEC to determine whether or not the goals are still relevant to today’s society and the needs of HCS. This will enable HCS administrators to assess whether or not the activities of the AEC are consistent with the desired outcomes for the center.

- In order to make all discipline fair, HCS should create and present workshops and other activities designed to enhance the knowledge of staff that will discuss the differences between the cultures of the students who attend school in the district. These workshops should include subjects related to racism and microaggressions.
Some of the descriptions of the HCS Code of Conduct infractions are vague and can be interpreted in several ways according to the feelings and emotions of the adult who is making the discipline referral. In order to make the assignment of discipline interventions fair and evenly distributed among students, an examination of school and district rules that are somewhat subjective or vague and leave room for too much personal interpretation should be conducted. A great example is the description of a volatile act which is one of the discipline codes used excessively to refer students for interventions.

- School districts should review the Code of Conduct in order to ensure that the descriptions of infraction are more objective. This would ensure that a particular code of conduct infraction is not used excessively.
- School districts should require and train teachers to strive to write more descriptive accounts of discipline incidents prior to assignment of an intervention. This will allow the teachers to begin to think more objectively about why they are making the discipline referral.
- There is a discipline gap in schools (Skiba et al., 2000) and teachers are not generally trained in student discipline prior to beginning their teaching careers. Discipline is a very important facet of school life, and good classroom discipline is not occurring in many schools. Classrooms are often chaotic and in that atmosphere little or no learning takes place. Good education and good discipline go hand and hand and educators should be trained regularly to improve their discipline practices.
• School districts should make sure that both teachers and administrators are required to attend a series of yearly discipline workshops. More extensive professional development will enable them to strengthen classroom discipline techniques which will better enable them to deliver more effective instruction to students.

• Colleges and universities should begin to provide teacher training and discipline prior to a teachers’ first classroom assignment. Many teachers come from small communities and have not had much experience working with people whose culture is different from their own. This would ensure that they would at least have some idea about the social differences between cultures and in turn might not penalize students for behavior that the teacher considers inappropriate when the behavior displayed may just be common to the student’s culture. Also real knowledge about different cultures could help to overcome any stereotypes previously learned.

Suggestions for Further Research

The study, An Alternative to Out of School Expulsion (AEC) – Providing a Second Chance for Children, does not begin to cover the array of variables that are associated with this topic. There are many avenues that can be explored related to further research. Several suggestions for further research follow:

The AEC study included a very small segment of the HCS student population and did not include those students who are expelled or suspended excessively from school. The problem of excessive suspension and expulsion of Black males is not unique to HCS
but is a problem throughout the nation. Thus, issues related to suspension and expulsion require additional inquiry. It is suggested that scholars:

- Conduct research that examines district suspension and expulsion policies because the problem of excessive numbers of Black males being assigned to ADS continues to be very important. The information about the total number of students who are assigned the three discipline interventions of suspension, expulsion and ADS enrollment, as well as the reasons why, provides significant data. Once this information is deconstructed, methods, programs, and practices can be created and implemented to work toward solutions.

- Conduct research to determine how other school districts are working toward solutions to this serious problem. School districts need to begin work collectively to solve problems that are common to their districts such as suspension and expulsion. The problem regarding the over-assignment of Black males to ADSs is a universal problem and better strategies may be found if school districts work toward solutions.

During the time that the AEC was established other such schools were also established. Therefore, researchers are urged to:

- Conduct research to determine what other alternative to expulsion programs exist in school districts and assess their operations to discern those programs that still may be described as best practices. These programs can be implemented into other school districts.
Additionally, the number of Black females referred for discipline seems to be increasing. The findings of this study revealed data that pointed out that Black females were sometimes assigned to the AEC in excess of Black males. This appears to be a new trend. These issues warrant additional study and it is recommended that scholars:

- Conduct research to determine the reasons for the increase of Black females being referred for disciplinary intervention and begin to implement prevention programs to support them.

Concluding Remarks

Though this process has been long and tedious, it has been my pleasure to conduct this research in this school district. Having been an employee of my school district for over 35 years in various capacities, I can remember when my district’s AEC was established and was being created. At the onset of my employment, I did not have the opportunity to interact with or to learn much about the AEC program. This research study has allowed me to become more familiar with the operations of the program and I am delighted that the AEC is still functioning adequately. However, in order for it to remain a valuable asset of the HCS the program should be evaluated.

The AEC is only equipped to accommodate a minute percentage of of the students enrolled in HCS and the question remains, what happens to those students who are never assigned to the AEC. These students who are mostly Black males, can be expelled from school a minimum of 4 times between intermediate and high school.

This is problematic because they are the ones who eventually become school drop-outs or eventually inmates in the penal system. Quinn and Poirier, (2007) suggest
that when school drastically districts change the way in which they educate students, better learning takes place. Since the programs utilized at the AEC work well for children perhaps school districts should begin to change the way in which they educate children and establish new and different programs that will allow students to learn at mastery levels in reading and math by the third grade. Additionally, people believe that children are disciplined at home but that is not always the case. It is important that teachers establish discipline standards in their own classrooms and begin to teach children appropriate behavior.

It is also important that the negative stereotypes about Black males be dispersed and replaced with true and positive images of Black life and Black males as well as information about other cultures who are enrolled in our schools. Classrooms. When this occurs it is my hope that Black males and females have an equal opportunity to learn as all children, when they enter the classrooms of America. If Black males have adequate supports to help them to become efficient scholastically, and if they are taught appropriate behavior and self-discipline at school then perhaps they will not become disenfranchised about school at an early age. Further, if classroom teachers have more positive attitudes about Black males perhaps they can better support these students and will in turn help Black males become more successful and productive in school and in life. It takes a village and everyone, home, school, family and community must all work together to make this happen.
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Appendix A – Adult /Minor Permission Letter

Dear ____________________________

You are being asked to participate in research. In order that you are able to decide if you want to participate in this project, you should know what the project is about and the possible risks and benefits so that you can make an informed decision. This process is called informed consent. This document describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks of your participation in this research as well as how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this letter, or it has been read and explained to you, you will be asked to sign it giving your permission for you or your child’s participation in this research. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

This historical case studies being done because the researched based information about alternative education programs, especially those for discipline, is scant and provides few models or information that assist in their effective and efficient operation. Another issue that has surfaced in this study is the overrepresentation of Black males as AEC students. This is also examined in this study.

ADULT – If you agree to participate you will be asked to take part in an interview and/or give the researcher permission to observe your interactions with students at the AEC.

MINOR CHILD – If you agree that your minor child can participate, you will be asked to give the researcher permission to observe your child’s interactions at the AEC, conduct an interview, or look at his school record to acquire critical information.
You or your child should not participate in this study if you have any objections to the topic or information that will be shared during the process.

Your participation in the study will last for six months or until the research process is completed. There are no risks or discomforts associated with this research study. This study is beneficial to society because this information will better inform you of the processes and procedures connected with suspension and expulsion and the history of alternative schools in general and particularly that of the HCS AEC.

Your study information will be kept confidential because the names and identities of all participants will be kept confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- Federal agencies, for example, the Office of Human Research Protections.
- Representatives of Ohio University (OU).
- The Harmon City School District.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Dr. Dwan Robinson 740-593-9453 or e-mail robin3@ohio.edu or if you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, 740-593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that

- You have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.
- You have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
• You are 18 years of age or older.

• Your participation in this research is completely voluntary.

• You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in this study, there will be no penalty.

Signature______________________________________________Date___________

Printed Name_____________________________________________________
Appendix B – Minor Participant Assent Form

Dear ________________________________,

My name is Patricia D. Brown. I am trying to learn about alternative schools, especially those designed to improve student discipline and Black males. I want to find out who is expelled from school and why they are expelled. I also want to see if being expelled from school helps student discipline and self-control. If you would like, you can be in my study.

If you decide you want to be in my study, you will simply allow me to interview you about your stay in the AEC and how it felt to attend school there.

There are no risks involved in your participation in my study but there are benefits. By participating in this study you can learn more about the I-Pass Center and the pros and cons about school suspension and how expulsion relates to Black males.

Other people will not know if you are in my study because names or other identities will not be used. No one will know who is who.

Your parents or guardian will have to say it OK for you to be in my study. After they decide, you get to choose if you want to do it. If you don’t want to be in the study, no one will be mad at you. If you want to be in the study now and change your mind, that’s OK. You can stop at any time.

My telephone number is 614-818-4663. You can call me if you have questions about the study or if you decide you don’t want to be in the study any more.

I will give you a copy of this form in case you want to call me later.

Agreement
I have decided to be in the study even though I know I don’t have to. Ms. Brown has
answered all my questions.

Signature of Participant ___________________________ Date ____________

Signature of Researcher ___________________________ Date ____________

Ohio University 2014
Appendix C - School - Administrator Interview Protocol

Name__________________________________________ Date_______________

1. What grade levels are served here and how has that changed?

2. How would you describe the climate of the AEC during your administration?

3. How would you describe the culture of the AEC during your administration?

4. Has the climate of culture or other environmental characteristics changed during your term as AEC administrator?

5. How is the program funded and how has that changed throughout the years?

6. How is the educational program offered at the AEC different from that of the traditional classroom? Please explain.

7. What if any changes made during your term as administrator? Please explain.

8. Who are the students who attend the AEC and what criteria are used for their selection?

9. How are students prepared to return to the traditional high school?

10. How is the AEC perceived by the school community and the public community?

   Please discuss any topic regarding the AEC that you think might be important to this study.  Patricia Dimmy Brown 9/17/14
Appendix D – Teacher/ Educational Assistant Interview Protocol

1. How long have you worked for the HCS and how long have you been at the AEC?

2. During your tenure what changes have you observed?

3. How are students assigned to your classroom?

4. How is working at the AEC different from working in a traditional school?

5. How are students disciplined for behavior infractions?

6. Are there programs for student rewards?

7. Are parental workshops designed to provide information about school policies and procedures available?

8. Are student counseling services available?

9. Please describe the student population.

10. Please discuss any topic regarding the AEC that you feel is important to this study.
Appendix E - School Administrator Survey

What Situation Would You Refer to the Expulsion Hearing Office?

Please read the following scenarios and select either yes or no regarding which of the situations you would refer to the Expulsion Hearing Office (EHO).

1. An elementary student brought a knife to school without the knowledge of parents. He told someone he had a knife and they reported it to the teacher who reported it to the principal. Yes___ No____

2. A high school student was continuously involved in fights with the same student on the school bus for nearly a year. He was referred to the expulsion hearing office after the last fight with this student. Yes___ No___

3. A middle school student was playing in the hallway with other students. Some teachers asked them to move on and the students became aggressive and refused to leave. When the teacher touched one of the students made aggressive moves as if to hit the teacher. The student continued to be out of control and was taken to the office. The principal referred her to the expulsion hearing office. Yes___ No___

4. An elementary school student became upset in art class and fought with another student and would not stop. He picked up a pair of scissors and went after another student. When the scissors were taken away from him he got another pair. He was taken to the office and the principal referred him to the expulsion hearing center. Yes___ No___
5. A high school student was observed by the school cameras lifting a male student off of his seat reaching into his pocket and taking out some money. After doing this he ran from the building. The principal was able to identify the student and he was referred to the expulsion hearing office. Yes___ No___

6. A middle school student pushed a teacher who was trying to restrain her during a fight. The principal referred the student to the expulsion hearing office. Yes___ No___

7. Two high school students, one male and one female, had consensual sex in the boy's bathroom. They were not caught in the act but were reported by another student. The two students have been recorded on school video entering and leaving the bathroom on school vides. The principal referred both students to the expulsion hearing office. Yes_____ No____

8. An elementary student had a knife with a three-inch blade in her pocket at school. She says she brought it for protection because she was harassed on the way to school each day and she was afraid. She has not had prior discipline problems at school. The principal referred her to the expulsion hearing office. Yes___ No___

9. A high school male student is lining up to leave a classroom. A female student walks up behind him and gently tugs down his pants (away from his waist) and hugs him. He pulled his pants up and continued to leave the classroom. Who would you send to the expulsion hearing center? The Girl___ The Boy___
10. Two high school students are found off campus smoking marijuana. One student has a bag of marijuana the size of a baseball in a plastic bag. When questioned about where he got the marijuana he said a man gave it to his as he was on the way to school. The principal referred both students to the expulsion hearing office. Yes ___ No___

Please select one of your yes and one no answer and discuss the reasons for that answer below. Use additional paper if necessary.
Appendix F - HCS Definitions and Levels of Student Behavior

Level 1 Behaviors

Tobacco smoking – Using or possessing any tobacco products such as cigarettes, dip, and chewing tobacco.

1. Dress Code Violation – Wearing unapproved articles of clothing to school.

2. Disruptive behavior – conduct that is distracting to one or more classmates will be considered disruptive.

3. Profanity – Swearing, cursing, or making obscene gestures.

4. Tardiness Absenteeism Truancy –

5. Gambling – Playing any games of chance or skill for money or items of value.

6. Electronic Communication Devices – The misuse by students of pagers, beepers, cellular telephones, and other electronic devices such as iPod, mp3 players, tablets and including look alike devices for receiving and/or transmitting messages during school time.

7. Forgery/Fraud/False Identification – Writing the name of another person or changing times, dates, grades, passes, or permits; giving false information to school district personnel or a school resource officer.

Level 2 Behaviors

1. Fighting – Mutual participation in an incident involving physical conflict.

2. School bus/Vehicle Disruption – Conduct not specifically listed that obstructs the orderly and safe operation of busses/vehicles.
3. Sexual Misconduct – Any action or behavior that includes unacceptable touching or making references to their private body parts or those of another person verbally, pictorially or in writing. Included in sexual misconduct are actions involving touching of a sexual nature, with or without consent of the other party and possession of inappropriate sexual materials. This includes “sexting”, sharing, viewing or possessing pictures. Test messages, e-mails or other material of a sexual nature in electronic or any form on a cell phone or other electronic device.

4. Bullying, Harassment, Coercion, Intimidation and Threats – Any act written or verbal, gestures, photographs, drawings or any other form of communication used to intimidate, harass or threaten harm to another person based on race, gender, religious belief, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, or violence within a dating situation.

5. Insubordination – Behavior that substantially disrupts the orderly learning environment. Refusal to follow a request, direction or instruction by an adult. All other disruptive, aggravating, and/ or disobedient behavior not mentioned in any other category.

6. Extortion – Getting money or a promise by using threat or force. Students must not make a person do anything he or she does not want to do by using threat or force (Guide to Positive Student Behavior, 2013).

7. Firearms Look Alike – Any item that resembles a firearm but does not have the explosive characteristics of a firearm but may use a spring loaded device or air
pressure by which to propel an object of substance (i.e. toy guns, cap guns, bb
guns and pellet guns).

8. Theft – Taking or assisting in taking another person’s property without his/her
permission.

9. Vandalism – The intentional destruction or damage of property without
permission of the owner or the person having control of the property.

10. Trespassing – The act of being on school property without permission or refusing
to leave the premises of the property.

11. Cheating/Plagiarism – Using, submitting or attempting to obtain information or
answers dishonestly. Taking ideas or writings of others and presenting them as
your own.

12. Unauthorized or inappropriate use of internet, computers or computer soft –ware
Any action that violates local, state or federal law or the CCC Acceptable Use
Policy

Level 3 Behaviors

1. Use, possession, sale or distribution of alcohol – possession, being under the
influence of, buying of selling alcohol or illegal drugs.

2. Use, possession, sale or distribution of drugs other than tobacco or alcohol – same
as above.

3. Physical Assault – Physically attacking another person. Unprovoked hitting,
kicking, shoving or otherwise causing physical pain or harm to another outside
the contest of a mutual conflict is considered assault.
4. Use, possession, sale or distribution of a firearm

5. Use, possession, sale distribution of ammunition or a dangerous weapon other than a firearm, explosives, incendiary device or poisons.

6. Use, possession, sale or distribution of explosives, incendiary devices or poisons.

7. Volatile Act – Disruption of school/ school activities by use of violence, force, intimidation, threats to students or staff or disorderly conduct. This includes menacing and provoking others toward act of disruption (individual or group related).

8. Arson – Setting fire or attempting to set fire to a school building or property located on school grounds or any property belonging to, rented by or on loan to the school district.


10. Sexual Offense – Any sexual act or attempted act committed on school property, or during school activities.

11. Serious Bodily Injury - any serious bodily injury that may require medical attention.