EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE, SCHOOL CULTURE, AND INTERPERSONAL

RELATIONSHIPS IMPACT ON STUDENTS OF COLOR

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by

Jan B. Jennings

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Judy A. Alston, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Abstract

The problem of exclusionary discipline and the negative impact on students of color has been documented in the literature for many years. This pragmatic, qualitative dissertation examined teachers' and school administrators' practices and interventions they utilized to avoid exclusionary discipline. A structured interview process was used to interview eight teachers and two administrators from an urban school district in the Midwest. Teachers and administrators were asked what daily behavioral challenges they faced and what actions they took to avoid exclusionary discipline. Key findings from the research indicated efforts by school personnel to prevent disciplinary actions and exclusions. Interventions were built around relationship building, clear communication of expectations, and creating an inclusive school culture that is proactive versus reactive. There are also implications for teacher and administrator training, in creating caring, communities built around positive relationships.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my paternal uncle James Boffman, who inspired me to complete a

doctoral program and set the example of determination in pursuit of this degree, and to

my mother, June Elizabeth Boffman, who always told me I would be an author. I made it!

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with these wonderful beings. They provided the reason to show the power of study,

knowledge, and perseverance no matter the obstacles.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, many studies have focused on the growing number of young people being removed from school (e.g., Eisenberg, 2016; Okonofua et al., 2016; Willoughby, 2012). The problem of exclusionary discipline policies, exacerbated by the 1994 Gun Free Schools Act, has coalesced into a punitive perspective in school discipline grounded in the "get tough" attitude held over from the 1980s (Muniz, 2021). The problem of young people being excluded from mainstream education has been the primary approach to school discipline since the 1970s; however, what has changed is the increased numbers of school removal as well as the reasons for which students are removed (Muniz, 2021).

The 2018 data from the Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, confirmed that schools continue to rely on exclusionary punishment at alarmingly high rates (Wiley et al., 2020). Exacerbating the problem of the number of youth school exclusions is the problem of inequity as is documented in the ratio of African American student exclusion as compared to other students (Cruz et al., 2021). Research has shown that school removal has had the most deleterious effect on African American youth (Bottiani et al., 2018; Fisher et al., 2020; Gregory et al., 2016; Wilkerson & Afacan, 2022). Studies have revealed immediate negative effects including increased likelihood of additional school sanctions, academic difficulties, and future increased possibility of justice system contact (Wiley et al., 2020). Additionally, increased adverse experiences in adulthood have directly been related to school suspension (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). The Children's Defense Fund (2020) cited the number of children receiving out-of-school

suspensions in the state of Ohio exceeded the national rate. Discipline numbers for the district studied reflected 6,023 African American students being suspended as compared to 1,152 Caucasian students. African American students are being suspended 5 times more frequently than Caucasian students (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2021).

Statement of the Problem

Discipline data from the Office of Civil Rights confirm the problem of discriminatory discipline practices and inequity reflected in the discipline gap (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2018). McElderry and Cheng (2014) noted the overrepresentation of African American students subjected to harsh exclusionary discipline and cited the long-term negative effects of school removal, including lower levels of academic achievement, additional school sanctions, and increased incidences of student disenfranchisement. Despite numerous studies validating the negative effects of suspensions and expulsions and the disproportional numbers of African American students who are the recipients of this harsh discipline, the problem continues to exist (Mittlemen, 2018).

The problem of African American students being punished at a much higher rate than their peers strike at the heart of a larger societal problem of racial bias and discrimination (Romero, 2018). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense & Education Fund (LDF, 2017) reported the need for racial equity, particularly in educational institutions. It highlighted a well-established fact that African American students face excessive, harsh, and exclusionary discipline (Quereshi & Okonofua, 2017). Racial disparities and discriminatory discipline practices continue to plague African American students with real-world far-reaching

effects, including being repeatedly criminalized often resulting in what is commonly referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline where large numbers African American students are taken out of classrooms and put into the criminal justice system (LDF, 2017).

The case of Freddie Gray, an African American young man who had been the recipient of numerous school suspensions, illustrates this negative consequence. Freddie succumbed to the consequence of school removal: incarceration and interaction with the criminal justice system. Eisenberg (2016) also pointed out that in Freddie's case, one last altercation with officers resulted in the loss of his life. The case of Freddie Gray is just one example. Rosenbaum and Logan (2016) compared non-suspended and suspended youths' outcomes 12 years after suspension and found suspended youth were less likely to have graduated from high school and more likely to have been arrested, be on probation, or to have interacted with the criminal justice system. They argued the negative outcomes result from exclusionary discipline practices (Rosenbaum & Logan, 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore what interventions are being used to mitigate exclusionary discipline practices to close the discipline gap. By examining schools which have success with positive as opposed to negative approaches to discipline, I hoped to add to the literature of interventions, resulting in fewer instances of exclusionary discipline. I sought to address the problem of disproportional discipline and the discipline gap by researching interventions to prevent removing students from the educational environment. I looked for solutions to the growing number of students suspended, expelled, and receiving Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs). Existing

literature confirmed that harsh discipline measures resulted in a disassociation with academics as well as with school, culminating in increased incidences of removal of African American students from the educational environment (Dankner, 2019; Eisenberg, 2016; Heilbrun et al., 2018; Milner, 2017). I utilized a pragmatic qualitative exploration to determine which interventional measures could be instituted to keep students in the classroom. A pragmatic research design was used, seeking solutions to the problem. Those excluded from schools should be able to get the education to which all students are entitled. As *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) directed, all students should be provided an opportunity to an education and to learn.

Research Question

The research question for this study was as follows:

How do educators describe their intentional daily practices and interventions to avoid exclusionary discipline for African American students in an urban public school in the Midwest?

Significance of the Study

Although the problem of disproportional discipline has been well-documented and researched, there is significance in this study. Additional ideas for decreasing the discipline gap can be found from discovered interventions. Findings from the study contribute to the literature documenting the discipline gap and add to strategies to combat the problem. The study is unique in determining how interventions are applied at schools, specifically how disciplinary infractions do not culminate in exclusions. The study adds the unique perspective of what has gone well and why. There is value in determining what changes must be made in the decades old problem of excessive school suspensions

that disproportionally effects African American students. The study also examined interventional measures and strategies which yield success in decreasing exclusionary discipline.

This study has significance in working toward stopping the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP), whereby students excluded from the learning environments often find themselves in the pathway of the criminal justice system (Skiba et.al., 2014). By keeping more students in school instead of removing them and sending them to the streets, the pipeline is not continuingly being fed. Interventions can make inroads to help students have more positive thoughts about school and provide a motivation for the potential suspended student to find worth in staying in class and in the building. The significance of the study lies in reversing the current climate which communicates, "We don't want you here; you are a troublemaker" to that of "We are here for you; we want to help you to succeed." The research explored successful interventions and how they may be replicated. African American students in general may benefit from the study and a change in culture from negative to positive forms of discipline can make all students feel more valued and create a climate of inclusivity. The study is significant for those feeling the sting of discriminatory, exclusionary discipline.

My research sought to provide strategies that may inform practice in educator preparation programs as well as in professional development programs. It is significant for leadership in the school and at the district level as suspension rates can be lower, teacher preparation and skills can be improved, and the culture of the school can be enhanced. Results of the study called for a change in discipline policies and direction needed to result in a more equitable distribution of discipline measures. Graduation rates

may improve as a result. The significance of the study adds to the research calling for closing the discipline gap underscoring a change in harsh, unequal discipline practices.

Methodology

A pragmatic approach to the research was used for data collection, through interviews with the goal of determining meaningful thesis and patterns. The focus was to find solutions to the problem of disproportional exclusionary discipline. Utilizing a pragmatic approach assisted in looking for successful interventions seeking answers that could result in actions to tackle the problems, in this case, the problem of exclusion. A pragmatic research design calls for practicality and often restraints of time and resources (Patton, 2014).

I interviewed individuals in one middle and one high school to determine what interventions and strategies were employed to render a more compassionate, positive, approach to disciplinary issues. Site selection involved examining the suspension records of the district to identify schools with fewer numbers of suspensions and expulsions. I then sought information from administrators, teachers, and counselors as to what measures contributed to the decrease in numbers of ODRs, in- and out-of-school suspensions.

I employed a combination of criteria and purposive sampling selecting administrators and teachers. Marshall & Rossman, (1996), in noting the aim of qualitative sampling approaches, posited the selection of an appropriate method is dependent upon the most productive participants to answer the research question. In this case selecting participants directly involved in removing students would yield the most data; this was the criteria for selection. I examined data to determine trends in school exclusion. Using

school data regarding Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs), I attempted to identify teachers with fewer incidents of ODRs. There was the potential for snowball sampling as a part of the interview process; I asked teachers and administrators about positive discipline measures that may be supported by their peers. A combination of sampling techniques was justified (Marshall & Rossman, 1996). Insights from interviews with those in charge of discipline in the building yielded important data. Open-ended and semi structured question were used with follow-up questions added where appropriate. Details of the setting and situations and rich descriptions of participants' experiences were recorded. Grounded theory was used with the intention of examining and analyzing the data of successful interventions helping to mitigate exclusionary discipline.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study initially was Critical Race Theory (CRT). As this study was at first exploring the ways to lessen the impact of the unequal administration of exclusionary discipline measures, the application of critical race was most appropriate. CRT is applicable in the field of education (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Ultimately, participants and data collection was obtained from two schools with homogenous students populations. The application of critical realism (CR) was the most effective lens through which the study progressed. Findings showed contrary to most exclusionary discipline practice literature, teachers and administrators worked hard to avoid excluding students and, in fact, employed undocumented, overlooked strategies of creating warm, accepting, and empathic climates that greatly reduced and often negated the need for disciplinary measures. The key was creating a climate based on interpersonal relationships.

Researcher's Lens

My positionality as a researcher greatly influenced my perceptions regarding effective interventions and how they may be applied to keep students in the classroom. Having served as a school counselor in urban and in suburban school settings, I often met with students who were victims of exclusionary discipline. An examination of a student observed while I was working in a large, urban school district in the Midwest provides an example of the negative trajectory school removal can have on students and informs my ontological and epistemological approach to the research.

A recounting of a student's experience can give clarity. After receiving an Office Discipline Referral (ODR) for what a teacher saw as disruptive behavior, issues in this and other classes resulted in additional ODRs escalating to in-school and eventually a two day out-of-school suspension. As his counselor, I spoke to him about behavior alternatives and strategies to use when working in groups so as not to raise the ire of teachers. Two days later he was again removed from class and the negative trajectory continued resulting in failed classes and a significant loss of credit for the school year. In a high school made up of one-third African American students, I consistently observed school removal discipline measures given in disproportional numbers to African American students. In the district where I was employed, the effects of such harsh disciplinary measures generally had a grave effect on students and often resulted in increased negative behavior as well as loss of valuable instructional time. The academic effects of being removed from the educational setting were even more devastating resulting in numerous class failures and in general negative feelings toward teachers, administrators, and the school in general. I would often observe feelings of hopelessness

wherein some of the students would give up and not try in classes where much of the educational instruction had been lost. I became interested and worked hard to stem what seemed to be the rising tide of denial of education for the youth with whom I worked. Increasingly the greater number of students exposed to exclusion were African American often in schools with small percentages of minority students.

Speaking with students and confronting the growing numbers of disproportional discipline cases, it became clear that there was a need to implement interventions to close the discipline gap. I became intolerant of seeing student after student removed from classes and virtually forfeit a year of their education. What could be done to stem the tide of losing these young people? This is what I hoped to examine. I saw the problem from the perspective of students who felt disenfranchised in the school wherein they should have felt valued. I chose to confront the research that acknowledged the problem and then to look for solutions. I was compelled to do so as those returning from suspension were often the brightest minds in the building. Given these experiences, I viewed my research from an alternate standpoint of how intervention could change a trajectory. My ontological view is shaped by these experiences having seen this reality evidenced in many school settings. I hoped to examine the how and why of what I observed. My epistemological viewpoint is based on my opinion that disproportionality would be evidenced in the data and my knowledge enhanced.

Definition of Terms

Critical Race Theory (CRT): systematic racism is embedded in all aspect of society including educational systems as well as reflected in regulations and procedures that lead to different outcomes by race (Dunn, 2021).

Disproportional discipline: disciplinary actions not given in proportion wherein African American students are recipients of punitive discipline in greater numbers than their White peers (Barclay et al., 2022).

Interventions: actions taken by appropriate persons that may result in alternate behavioral response and are activities or strategies that are used when difficult behavior has become an issue (Edvocate, n.d.).

Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs): a written request or directive sending a student to the administration in response to a behavior choice made by the student (Newman, 2021).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS): a framework to increase academic and social behavioral outcomes; a three-tiered system where all school staff participate (Gage et al., 2020).

Restorative Justice Practices: adoption of preventative forms of discipline that relies on building positive relationships as opposed to punitive practices to approach behavior problems in response to conflict and discipline (Oxley & Holden, 2021).

School-to-prison pipeline (STPP): the practice of punitive exclusionary discipline in schools that push students out of educational settings into the juvenile justice system (Skiba, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

This study had two assumptions, first that I would be able to recruit teachers and administrators from schools in the district. It would seem like the topic of the discipline gap and disproportional discipline would be subjects of interest, and teachers and administrators would be interested in sharing their experiences. There were no questions

about sensitive topics or asking for participants to share personal information. The second assumption was that teachers and administrators would provide honest responses and not socially desirable answers to questions. The study was limited to teachers and administrators in the Midwest for convenience. Limitations in this study stemmed from the small participant sample. By selecting a purposive sample, the results of my study may not be applicable to a larger population. However, it would provide some insight about the interventions and practices that teachers and administrators used to minimize exclusionary discipline. Delimitations are recognized in the choice of this single district. I acknowledged the shortcomings that might have been better handled if additional districts across the Midwest were a part of the study. Convenience and familiarity were reason for the selection of this district.

Summary

The problem of unequal treatment of students by the imposition of harsh exclusionary discipline must cease. More research about this topic and presenting strategies to achieve the goal can improve the odds for more equitable treatment. This chapter presented the topic and an overview of the significance of the study, why it is important, and the framework through which the research was undertaken.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The disciplinary exclusion of African American students from the educational setting in significantly greater numbers than their peers has been thoroughly documented and researched (Bottiani et al., 2017; DeMatthews, 2016; Gregory et al., 2016; Martinez et al., 2016; Milner, 2017; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019; Sprague, 2018). Similarly, there have been many calls to curtail exclusionary discipline that often results in students dropping out of school and delinquency (Dankner, 2019; Eisenberg, 2016). Yet, the discipline gap, as the disproportionality has been termed, has continued for decades (Skiba et al. 2014). The question is why, given so much research, has something not been done about the problem? This chapter presents an examination of the literature regarding disproportional discipline, its causes, negative outcomes, and interventional measures. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the lens used to delve into the topics with a critical eye toward interventions to curb the inequities that result in the discipline gap.

Through this study I intended to add to the current research on interventions that produce positive outcomes, lessening the number of African American youth experiencing exclusionary discipline. I use a "V" or "funnel" approach (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019), presenting general material related to the study of disproportional discipline first, ending with sources that have direct bearing on my study, interventional methods. Thematically, this literature review addressed the following topics: (a) Disproportional discipline, the discipline gap and its effects, (b) Implicit bias, (c) Interventions, (d) Positive Behavioral Interventions (PBIS), and (e) Restorative Justice Practices (RJP).

Subtopics include examining literature discussing the school-to prison-pipeline and restorative discipline practices.

Literature Search Strategy

Google Scholar, journal articles, EbscoHost, full-text on-line library data bases, peer reviewed articles, and selected books titles were used to select relevant literature for the review. Utilizing the inter-library loan capabilities and reference librarian also provided resources to further the study. A wealth of scholarly peer-reviewed articles became readily available using the following search words: *disproportional discipline, discipline gap, exclusionary discipline, harsh discipline, African American, school-to-prison pipeline, discrimination, critical race theory, school suspensions,* and *implicit bias.* As the basis of the study dealing with exclusion of African American students at excessively high numbers is a problem that has been discussed since the 1970s (Curran, 2019), I primarily examined more recent articles from 2018 going forward. Additionally, although not explicitly a part of the study, I researched selected articles discussing social emotional learning as well as articles dealing with counselor recognition of implicit bias.

Disproportional Discipline

Racial Disparities in Discipline

Heilbrun et al. (2018) wrote of the overuse of removing students from class and validated negative outcomes for students, including increasing racial disparities in discipline. He is supported in this thought by many scholars in the field (e.g., Wilkerson & Afacan, 2022; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Martinez et al., 2016). Specifically, validation from Skiba (2014) cited the need to rethink harsh discipline practices. Nearly thirty years earlier, as far back as 1975, investigations by the Children's Defense Fund

(2020) noted irregularities and racial disproportionality in how discipline decisions were decided in schools. There have been many scholarly voices validating disproportionality (e.g., Bottiani et al., 2018; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba et al., 2014).

As a school counselor working in an urban school setting—many times with only one-third minority population—one only needed to walk by the in-school suspension room where students are housed for infractions of school policy to note the overrepresentation of African American students. The racial disparity in how discipline is administered is very real. Gregory and Weinstein's 2008 study examined the problem of over-representation and noted most infractions and referrals that resulted in students being removed from the educational setting involved issues of defiance. Yet, Curran (2019), in his study of Zero Tolerance in school discipline, argued that exclusion policies do not apply to minor offenses such as defiance, especially to the degree implied in the media. Studied again in examining office discipline referrals, citations for removal from class were often dependent on teacher attitudes and tolerance in matters of discipline (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). He also noted that records of school removal were not evenly distributed across racial and ethnic groups. Nonetheless, removal from the education environment in any form resulted in the denial of an education and for African American students who are more frequently victims, and this had many negative results.

In opposition to this, Zehr (2011) cited the testimony of teachers at a hearing with the United States Commission on Civil Rights who maintained rule infraction, student behavior, and disciplinary measures were unrelated to race. The group appeared before the commission and were critical of Obama-era policy aimed at assuring schools are equally using disciplinary measures. Accounts of teachers' views regarding what was

termed "disparate impact" (Zehr, 2011, p. 1) varied with concerns ranging from feelings that constraints would be put on classroom discipline to feelings of pressure from administrators to reduce the overrepresentation of minority groups being problematic and interfering in teachers' ability to educate. Others supported a focus on disparate discipline citing PBIS as an intervention that reduced overrepresentation of African American males in exclusionary discipline (Zehr, 2011). Fisher et al. (2020) examined Black and White disparities in exclusionary discipline and concluded that African American students experienced higher rate of exclusionary discipline as well as less welcoming school climates. In their study examining race and school suspensions, Fisher et al (2020) concluded that African American students were experiencing school in different ways than their White counterparts and this included inequity in discipline policies.

Effects of Exclusionary Discipline

Bottiani et al. (2018) spoke of the "sequelae" associated with suspensions and exclusionary discipline citing detrimental effects. The negative outcomes included but were not limited to school dropout and delinquency as well as an added dimension, "adjustment problems" (Bottiani et al., 2018, p. 532). Chu and Ready (2018) agreed and in their examination of longitudinal data confirmed what the literature underscored, which was the negative association of school removal and academic outcomes was valid. They found that suspended students' problems manifested in attendance problems, failure to complete courses, loss of credit, poor test scores, and an increased likelihood of dropping out.

Eisenberg (2016) presented an example of another result of exclusionary discipline, interaction with the juvenile justice system in her portrait of the life and death

of Freddie Gray. Freddie experienced numerous suspensions, eventually dropped out, and ultimately lost his life in his last interaction with law enforcement. The case of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American young man from South Florida, illustrated another example of the devastating effects exclusion from school may have. When he was fatally shot while walking home from a convenience store, he was serving a 10-day out-of-school suspension (McNeal, 2016). Both tragic examples involved the use exclusionary discipline practices. Exclusionary discipline contributed to the achievement gap, and the dropout rate resulting from students' disconnection from school (Chu & Ready, 2018: Rosenbaum & Logan, 2016). Often because of suspensions, students became stigmatized as troublemakers and there was an increased likelihood of their juvenile delinquency (Wilkerson & Afacan, 2022; Skiba & Losen, 2016) summarized long-term results for students suspended offered bleak odds for success in life. Denying students the opportunity to learn had dire consequences.

The school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) is a way by which students are removed from the educational setting and put into the criminal justice system (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Having established the disparity in the number of students facing exclusionary discipline who are all too often African American, McNeal (2016) argued harsh exclusionary and discriminatory discipline was most often applied to African American students which steered them from school into the juvenile and criminal justice system. Furthermore, she maintained that implicit racial bias was a causal factor in negative school disciplinary decisions that resulted in excessive numbers of African American students who experienced exclusionary discipline resulting in STPP. Riddle and Sinclair (2019) disagreed. While acknowledging disparities and racial bias existed, they

maintained that no prior research had established a causal link between racial bias and disciplinary outcomes. School suspensions increased the likelihood of criminal behavior, and incarceration as adults (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). The school-to-prison pipeline and the effects of exclusion were seen when the long-term effects of school suspension were examined.

In describing the relationship between exclusionary discipline and contact with the juvenile justice system, Skiba et al. (2014) maintained that there is a clear relationship. Given the empirical literature, current policies with respect to school discipline leading to STPP required a shift away from exclusion to inclusion and more equitable policies must be implemented (Skiba et al., 2014). This concept is again echoed by Losen and Martinez (2020) in the report to the UCLA Civil Rights Project. They concluded that to understand STPP, educators need to examine many factors, including policy decisions and practices in districts as well as personnel choices. They recommended examining and avoiding unnecessary removals, developing more effective policies, and responding to disproportional discipline to promote more equitable discipline policies (Losen & Martinez, 2020).

Implicit Bias

Teachers' implicit biases can be seen in matters of discipline, especially in situations where there is a subjective component, and this contributed to discipline disparities based on a student's race (Staats, 2016). The idea of implicit bias contributing to disproportionate outcomes in education had also been cited in research conducted by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2018). Ford (2016) saw implicit racial bias as the direct reason why students of color were suspended at such high

rates and cited findings that showed African American student suspensions were often for subjective offenses such as disrespect or disobedience as compared to objective offenses of their Caucasian peers such as drug use or carrying a weapon (Ford, 2016). In another study in the case of school counselor attitudes, there was, "mixed evidence for the existence of bias among counselors" (Boysen, 2009, p. 246).

According to Westerberg (2016), the effects of implicit bias were particularly insidious when examined in educational settings. He maintained the results of unconscious bias set the stage for the youngest children to have negative attitudes toward school and for microaggressions by teachers. Interestingly, a framework for combatting implicit bias in the health profession is also applicable in the educational setting. According to Sukhera and Watling (2017):

> Our framework includes six key features: creating a safe and nonthreatening learning context, increasing knowledge about the science of implicit bias, emphasizing how implicit bias influences behaviors and patient outcomes, increasing self-awareness of existing implicit biases, improving conscious efforts to overcome implicit bias, and enhancing awareness of how implicit bias influences others. (p. 2)

I agree that each feature could be applied to increase awareness of and to lessen the effects of implicit bias. All responsible adults in the educational community could benefit from the application of the features, leading to fewer numbers contributing to disproportion.

Interventions

School Culture

McElderly and Cheng (2014) examined the discipline gap from an ecological perspective and found some factors which were associated with reduced likelihood of school exclusion. Specifically, two factors were (a) parental participation in school activities, and (b) parents feeling a general overall satisfaction with the school. The literature confirmed the idea of involving parents in the educational process as a positive factor in reducing school exclusion (Cummings et al., 2017). There was a correlation between school exclusion and academic achievement as documented by poorer attendance rate, lower test scores, and the decline in academic achievement of children removed from the classroom (Chu & Ready, 2018; Henderson & Guy, 2017; Sparks, 2019).

Sparks (2019) maintained that the discipline gap fuels the achievement gap. I Promise Schools, by adopting and supporting the family, had raised achievement rates. The same was achieved when expulsion rates were considered, and space in schools was created for parents to be more heavily involved and lessened the discipline gap (Sparks, 2019). Romero (2018) stated: "Disciplinary sanctions that remove students from the classroom do more than just punish students for poor behavior; they simultaneously deny students access to instruction and aggravate discrepancies" (p. 2). This idea is supported in that the discipline gap and the achievement gap can be seen as two sides of the same coin (Sparks, 2019).

Reducing disproportionality involves reducing the overall suspension rate and interventions are needed to keep students in school buildings where critical access to

positive adults is needed to foster relationships that lead to improved academic and social outcomes (Henderson & Guy, 2017; Willoughby, 2012). Gregory and Weinstein (2008) agreed, and in their study examined relationships in the classroom that resulted in fewer ODRs. Data demonstrated that African American students were overrepresented in suspensions and had fewer incidents of defiance and more cooperation with teachers who were viewed as trustworthy, caring, and who had high expectations. The scholars highlighted the importance of student teacher relationship and the need for teacher qualities that fostered cooperation and trust with African American students. I agree with this position, and as a school counselor have seen teacher qualities that may contribute to discipline disproportionality. In my experience the importance of adult/student relationships cannot be overemphasized and in classrooms where a positive relationship between teacher and student are found, fewer incidents of removal from learning environments occur. As teachers develop skills to shape such classrooms, efforts toward disassembling disproportional discipline began (Cummings et al., 2017).

PBIS

Utilizing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) methodology has contributed greatly toward producing substantial change and can be utilized as an intervention to prevent and reduce disproportionality (McIntosh et al., 2018). According to Sprague (2018), applied behavioral analysis is the foundation for PBIS. As such, its usefulness as an effective intervention to reduce exclusionary discipline was applicable. "PBIS has been found to create positive reductions in use of exclusionary discipline, although the evidence suggests that specific attention to issues of race, culture and difference may be necessary if PBIS is to reduce disciplinary disparities" (Skiba et al.,

2014, p. 4). Here, scholars agreed about the effectiveness of PBIS as an interventional strategy moving from punitive, reactive discipline to proactive support although the effectiveness of PBIS to address racial disparities was unclear (Skiba et al. 2014).

Additionally, Bastable et al. (2021) examined factors influencing implementing equity focused PBIS interventions and documented the effectiveness of interventions to reduce disciplinary disproportionality. The study concluded that factors of defensiveness on the part of teachers as well as competing school priorities made PBIS equity interventions challenging. In addition, there was reluctance to discuss racial equity in schools. Findings called for more than consciousness raising activities and indicated the need for strategic methods to address equity focused PBIS (Bastable, et al., 2021). Similarly, McIntosh et al. (2018), in a PBIS publication, considered the steps necessary to reduce discipline disproportionality in schools utilizing a 5-point intervention technique that included:

1. Collect, Use, and Report Disaggregated Discipline Data
2. Implement a Behavioral Framework that is Preventative, Multi-Tiered, and Culturally Responsive
3. Using Engaging Instruction to reduce the Opportunity (Achievement) Gap
4. Develop Policies with Accountability for Disciplinary Equity
5. Teach Strategies for Neutralizing Implicit Bias in Discipline Decisions (p. 1-3)

PBIS as an interventional strategy for reducing disproportional discipline was highlighted in much of the literature (Skiba et al., 2014). They proposed that PBIS should be a part of a comprehensive, school-wide discipline plan effectively delivering realistic

responses to school disruptions. Cruz et al. (2021) examined the use of PBIS systems incorporated into School-Wide Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (SWPBIS). Their study focused on improving discipline practice across school systems targeting a variety of interventions, supports, and data analysis. Findings indicated that when disproportionality is examined through the lens of SWPBIS, results indicate a benefit more so to White students than to other students and no direct relationship between disparity and PBIS implementation can be found. McIntosh et al. (2018), in examining using SWPBIS, specifically focused on the data.

Restorative Practices

Restorative principles and practices are seen in the criminal justice system wherein there is restitution paid to those who have been wronged (Payne & Welch, 2013.) In that sense, restorative practices in school discipline similarly focus on acknowledging wrongdoing, but a reparative versus punitive approach is adopted (Payne & Welch, 2013). The authors explained the practice. Those who have been offended and those who caused the offense must reconcile to restore the relationship. As an alternative to traditional punitive discipline, restorative justice principles (RJP) require a dramatic shift in the traditions of power as opposed to what is often seen in schools and as represented in exclusionary discipline. Reparative circles employed in RJP represent a dramatic paradigm shift (Kaplan, 2020). Payne and Welch (2013) underscored the idea of a fundamental shift necessary when a restorative model of discipline is maintained. The shift would apply to the entire school community and school climate as well.

A restorative approach to school discipline employs a multifaceted set of practices that are designed to encourage inclusivity, respect, social engagement, relationship

building, care, and dignity for all members of the community (Kaplan, 2020). In

interviewing Kerri Berkowitz, a Restorative Justice Practices (RJP) administrator who

has worked in school districts overseeing transformations of school climate and discipline

practices, Kaplan (2020) highlighted one of the main principles of RJP: the importance of

creating trusting relationships to build a strong sense of community in schools.

Henderson and Guy (2017) concurred in citing the need for "social connectedness" (p.

39) with teachers and the school to achieve a reduction in exclusionary discipline and

lower suspension rates. As a counselor, I have observed the power of establishing

relationships, and I have seen the best happen in schools where there is specific time

dedicated to community building which often translated into a positive school climate. As

scholarship validates, there can be no argument about the positive effects trusting

relationships have on learning and academic achievement (Kaplan, 2020). As

demonstrated, this may also be seen in the positive reduction in disproportional discipline

often greatly effecting African American students.

Ted Wachtel, Founder of International Institute of Restorative Practices, defined

restorative practice as a way of thinking based on respect, kindness, and caring

relationships designed to facilitate communication (Wachtel, 2016). As such, RJP

implemented in schools established these principles to intervene in reducing exclusionary

discipline. Other scholars criticized the practice for not equipping educators with the

skills that would make RJP effective (Skiba et al., 2014). Payne and Welch (2013) argued

for the adoption of preventative forms of discipline that relied on building positive

relationships as opposed to punitive practices. Further, they cited punitive practices such

as exclusion more often found in schools with higher minority populations and with

reparative approaches in matters of discipline more prevalent in schools with smaller minority populations. Skiba (2014) argued society cannot afford to continually discard those who present behavioral challenges in schools through exclusionary discipline, especially when those excluded are disproportionally represented by groups traditionally marginalized in society.

Prior research has confirmed the use of punitive practices directly related to racial disparities (Heilbrun et al., 2018). We see this when African American students are the recipients of harsher penalties and exclusionary discipline. Fisher et al. (2020) maintained racial disparities are directly related to the likelihood of being suspended with Black students suspended at a higher rate than their peers. "Arguably, the historic system of educational stratification still extends to racialized discipline policies, practices, and experiences as well" (Fisher et al., 2020, p. 1496). The literature confirmed the constructs of race in the exclusionary discipline disparities.

Foundationally, RJP practices closely align with social justice principles, and the converse is also true as exclusionary discipline is at odds with social justice orientation. Additionally, using RJP afforded schools opportunities to approach behavior problems and avoid punitive, exclusionary discipline practices (Oxley & Holden, 2021). Yet, a study conducted by Lustick et al. (2020) found implementing RJP had no positive effect on reducing disproportional discipline and "evidence of persistent racial disproportionality appeared in research on restorative practice" (p. 89). As with two sides of a coin, perspectives differed; however, the effectiveness of using RJP as an approach to combating disproportional discipline is highlighted by numerous scholars in the field (Kaplan, 2020; Oxley & Holden, 2021; Reimer, 2020; Skiba et al., 2014).

Critical Realism

Critical realism (CR) provided a framework to guide this study. CR is constructed from our real-world observances of behavior and can be used to explain outcomes and events in natural settings, the "how" and "why" of occurrences (Sturgiss & Clark, 2020). CR was useful in data collection with participants telling of their actions to improve the culture in classrooms as well as in the entire school to avoid removing students from the educational environment. Strong interpersonal relationships were the outcomes manifested in responses to teachers' strategies of empathic responses, daily check-ins, and kind and caring responses to some of the challenging behaviors exhibited by students. I adopted a critical realist view in exploring the ways in which teachers and administrators avoided exclusionary discipline. CR was used as a lens through which observances of how teachers and administrators interacted with their students. Stutchbury (2022) maintained that CR is useful, not as a method used in isolation, but as a means to observe the reality of events in their natural setting. The natural setting of the school provided the backdrop and the vehicle through which the social reality of classroom culture and interactions were observed and documented, ultimately resulting in the avoidance of exclusionary discipline.

Summary

This chapter explored the literature and scholarship that has been discussed and documented regarding school exclusion, school culture and disproportional discipline, the discipline gap, and the negative effects on children of color. Factors related to the relevance of CR in examining the factors contributing to the problem are included. Finally, pertinent literature regarding the role that interventions such as restorative

practices and positive behavioral interventions play in lessening exclusion were

discussed. The next chapter will explore the methods used to obtain data to determine

effective interventions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The study employed pragmatic design in a qualitative examination of interventions that can be used to lessen the numbers of African American students being removed from school, thereby reducing the inequality of disproportional discipline. A pragmatic research methodology was used in interviewing participants to determine interventions to reduce exclusionary discipline and discipline disparities. Pragmatic theory "directs us to seek practical and useful answers that can solve, or at least provide direction in addressing, concrete problems" (Patton, 2014, p. 243). Its appropriateness in seeking information regarding useful interventional strategies can directly be applied to real-life situations and was relevant to this study. A pragmatic approach got to the core to in seeking action-oriented discoveries getting to the core of the research questions. What works best in finding answers to the problem of exclusionary discipline? Taking a pragmatic approach to qualitative research can supply evidence- based strategies to solutions of problems (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). By choosing only one school district and just two schools to investigate, the study has some elements of a case study.

Research Question

How do educators describe their intentional daily practices and interventions to avoid exclusionary discipline for African American students in an urban public school in the Midwest?

Table 1

Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Questions Teachers	Administrator
How do educators describe their intentional daily practices and interventions to avoid exclusionary discipline in an urban public school in the Midwest?	What are some specific practices you engage in with your students to manage behavioral challenges? Probes: Do you use any Restorative Practices (RP)? Positive behavioral Intervention Strategies (PBIS)?	What are some common or daily challenges that teachers have with students at this school? What are some specific practices that you engage in with students and teachers to manage the behavior challenges?

Setting

The research took place in a large urban school district in the Midwest. The focus was on one high school and one middle school in the district.

The District

Profile of district demographics show a diverse student body enrollment of approximately 45,000 students, of which approximately 8,000 receive special education services and approximately 8,000 are limited English proficiency. Gifted student enrollment is 3,338 and limited English proficiency student enrollment is reported at 8,554 students. Current enrollment for the 2023-2024 school year is 46,000, making the district the largest in the state. The district employs 1,845 people, of which 9,000 are teachers. All students in the district are eligible for free lunch. There are more than 100 school buildings in the district, inclusive of 20 high schools. Racial demographics note 80% minority enrollment.

The High School

The high school is one of the community schools within the five community school districts. Students are assigned from middle school as a part of the district-wide lottery utilized by all students from the community. Dress codes are required and strictly enforced. The school boasts numerous community partnerships who provide a variety of outside resources for students including physical, mental, and sociological health services. Additional opportunities include a college readiness component including mentors, financial assistance for college, and a unique health service academy celebrated for the medical program provided to those accepted into the academy.

The Middle School

The middle school is also located in the third regional district in close proximity to the high school in the study, and many of the students then attend the high school. There are 350 students enrolled who are required to observe a strict dress code. Since the community ranks among the highest poverty level in the county, clothing requirements for students are sometimes fulfilled by donations to the school. This is a neighborhood school whose focus in on educational opportunities to enable students to excel in future endeavors. There is also an emphasis on student activities and sports.

<center>**Sample**</center>

I employed nonprobability purposive sampling in seeking teachers and administrators to participate in the study. Purposive sampling is useful in identifying participants to provide data about the phenomena of interest (Bhardwaj, 2019). In this case, I hoped to obtain data about interventions teachers and administrators used to avoid exclusionary discipline. To increase the number of study participants, snowball sampling

was also employed asking participants to identify others who would potentially have an interest in participating in the study. As it was difficult to find subjects to participate, the use of snowball sampling was appropriate (Bhadrwaj, 2019). Schools had just returned in person after many months of in home instruction because of the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a reluctance on educators' part to add to an already full agenda. As a result, the sample size was small, including eight teachers and two administrators.

Acknowledging the debate regarding the appropriateness of sample size, Blaikie (2018) posited there are many variables that determine the "range in the sample size that "might" be required (p.636). I sought information from the small sample group with direct experience of exclusionary discipline. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2003) indicated that the use of smaller numbers in qualitative research is more the norm and that "interpretivists" tend to select purposive samples to provide rich, thick data (p. 6). The validation of purposive sampling was provided by Ravitch and Carl (2021) in acknowledging participant selection is determined by those uniquely qualified to answer the research question. Selection was determined by those with specific knowledge of the phenomena studied. In this case, I used a pragmatic inquiry into what was happening involving discipline in the building, specifically what interventions deter student exclusions.

I began my research obtaining data from two administrators and two teachers. Participants were interviewed in their natural setting, the physical building in which they work, and interviews took place via Zoom. For the study, I chose to interview educators actively involved daily with students. Purposeful sampling calls for including participants who have been specifically chosen because of their experience in and specific knowledge

which enables them to answer the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Examining the experience of the participants in the field allows for looking at the problem from a larger lens for glimpses into the actions undertaken in interventions in disciplinary issues—specifically, administrators who have the ultimate decision-making at the school level of deciding whether to remove a student from the educational setting.

In choosing participants, I hoped to glean information beyond what is typically sought with educators regarding academics. I sought out those who had experience in seeing multiple sides of situations, not a focus grounded in what students learn. At the classroom level, I selected teachers with the least number of incidences of removing student from class through ODRs. I intentionally selected those who, as determined by peers and administrators, had a more intimate relationship with students. I utilized linear snowball sampling and asked participants to refer others (Bhardwaj, 2019). I asked participants to provide the information of others who used a positive form of discipline, ultimately trying to keep students in classrooms.

Data Collection

Patton (2014, in his text validated interviews as a valid method in pragmatic study of questions designed to elicit answers to address concrete problems. Data Collection involved obtaining data via interviews with administrators, teachers, and potentially support personnel. Ravitch and Carl (2020) cited the use of interviews as integral to the qualitative methodology. In seeking specific interventions used by participants, interviews provide the tools necessary to explore insights into the processes participants use in preventing exclusionary discipline. Specifically, I sought to interview principals, assistant principals, teachers, and counselors/social workers.

Interviews were utilized to collect data to explore the experience of participants. McGrath et al. (2019) validated the appropriateness of interviews as a data collection tool in qualitative research. They underscore the preference of interviews when exploring an interviewee's perspective of a phenomena. As such, interviewing administrators' and teachers' perspectives about interventions to foster positive discipline as opposed to negative exclusionary discipline added greatly to outcomes sought in the study.

Ethical considerations were observed, gaining consent from participants and observing HSRB protections. I collected data, including observations and participants' experiences documenting resolution of disciplinary occurrences that do not culminate in removal from the educational setting. Interview guides included questions aimed at determining what daily practice administrators and teachers used to avoid harsh, exclusionary discipline measures. After gaining permission and selecting my participants, I developed an interview protocol with a prepared introductory script to include the manner of the taped interview, again confirming their participatory involvement. My aim was to reduce anxiety and establish rapport. I involved participants in choosing the settings for the interview.

Interviews

According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), interviews are the mainstay of qualitative research and are effective ways to gather information and effectively draw conclusions. Through the interview process, the researcher questions and participants respond adding to the acquired knowledge. Additionally, interviews "reflect the naturalistic and interpretive values of qualitative research" (Ravitch & Carl, 2020, p.127). Patton (2014, in his text validated interviews as a valid method in pragmatic study of questions

designed to elicit answers to address concrete problems. In this study, interviews were used to determine what interventions reduced the likelihood of student being removed from the educational environment. Interviews are an effective data collection tool to generate qualitative data to address several research questions (McGrath, 2019). Utilizing a pragmatic approach through the interview process was targeted to discover specifically the best practices in curbing exclusions.

My interview protocol contained a scripted opening and closing containing a set of questions to guide the process. How interview instruments are structured is foundational to collecting accurate data that will be useful in research studies (Croix et al., 2018). Making clear the purpose of the interview, obtaining informed consent and permission to record the interview, and also addressing issues of confidentiality are part of effective interview practices (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I conducted a pilot interview to test the effectiveness of questions in eliciting relevant data and found it necessary to rework questions regarding specific interventions. In preparation for actual interviews, I deleted Question 6 as it was one of the misunderstood questions by participants and also failed to reveal any pertinent data, resulting in many clarifying questions. All other questions elicited detailed and lively discussion from the volunteer. Another, change was to include the definition of "interventions" in Chapter 1's Definition of Terms. In seeking information about effective interventions, I hoped to elicit meaningful data as information was gathered from participants. Pilot interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

I used an interview guide and conducted interviews via Zoom, and interviews took place at participants' schools, usually in teachers' classrooms. Two participants completed interviews at their homes. Privacy and confidentiality were assured. I

explained the interview process. After the interview, I utilized Ravitch and Carl's (2021) standards for before, during, and after interview advice. I asked open-ended questions, beginning with basic questions then moving toward more abstract ones. It was my plan to personally transcribe as well as to utilize transcription services. Ultimately, the transcription services of Scribe and Rev were used to accurately capture all that was said. I read the transcript of each session repeatedly, noted observations, and took notes during interview recordings. I checked for reliability and validity by sending transcriptions of interviews to participants. Transcription services were used to assure accuracy.

To answer the research question I obtained data regarding experiences where participants observed examples where a potentially exclusionary disciplinary offense did not result in removal from the educational environment. I inquired how they saw the school working toward bridging the discipline gap? I then posed the research question to the two administrators; I sought information about specific interventions that have helped African American students avoid harsh exclusionary discipline. I also inquired about their experiences in working with student and their own feelings about interventions that foster feeling of inclusion for students.

Pilot Interview Results

I conducted two pilot interviews and recorded responses via Zoom and audio recordings. I interviewed a teacher and also an administrator. I found there were several adjustments to be made because of the pilot interview. Many responses called for clarification and necessitated rephrasing the questions for clarity. Additionally, I found that responses often generated discussion from my part. As such, I limited such feedback and responses when the actual interview process took place because my interjections

sometimes curtailed respondents' discussions. From this pilot, I gained a clearer understanding of what data might be forthcoming during the actual interviews. I determined the need to differentiate questions asked of both teachers and administrators as responses from administrators appeared to take on a more global perspective of the entire school building as opposed to teacher responses, which generally focused on their specific classroom.

Data Analysis

To address the research question, questions were posed to determine what interventions were used in the participants' classes to curb exclusionary discipline. A pragmatic design worked well with this form of inquiry as interviews allow the researcher to describe actions and experiences in depth (Ravitch and Carl, 2021). Once the data were gathered, thematic analysis (TA) utilizing Clarke and Braun's (2017) model was used to address Research Question 1. TA is recognized as an effective means to analyze qualitive research and to develop themes. The guidelines for developing codes provided greater flexibility recognizing the role of the researcher (Clarke & Braun, 2017). This was appropriate and effective given this study's goals, circumstances, and contexts. The five-step context involved was as follows:

1. Becoming familiar with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Search for themes
4. Review themes
5. Write up

This five-step approach provided a clear and usable framework for analyzing the data that allowed for a thorough examination, organization, and interpretation (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

For this study, I analyzed and grouped the responses of participants according to the research question, examining first the teacher responses followed by the administrator responses. To complete the first step, I read and reread the transcribed interview responses of the participants. For step #2, I organized the data by examining interview transcripts, then using transcription services and physically printing the transcripts. Dedoose was used to become familiar with the data. Primary and secondary codes were established and a comprehensive reading of all the interviews ensued. The initial codes were developed using Dedoose and organized as it related to the interview questions. Relevant themes were established.

An inductive approach to coding of the data (Patton citation needed here) was utilized consisting of color- coding responses from participants and organized around participant responses to interview questions. Repeated lines, words, or phrases noted recurring themes. Open coding during the first and second reading of the transcribed interviews focused on specific responses closely related to the research questions. Ravitch and Carl (2021) discussed open coding to initially approach data highlighting and summarizing text data, grouping data which can be done with different colors with related or similar themes. Basit (2003) maintained that manual coding is an effective way to organize data and is also a way for researchers to understand and to think about to a greater degree the data obtained. I approached the task of analyzing data by being thorough in checking transcription of interviews and again by having participants check

for accuracy. Physically examining each transcript was important to ensure the capture of rich details. I then reviewed and organized the data, looking for common words used or common themes that may frequently come to the surface. The Dedoose program delineated primary and secondary codes. It was important to spend time reviewing transcripts to ensure my interpretations reflect participants' responses and to ensure my analysis accurately reflected the data. As I used a pragmatic approach, I looked for responses that shared what interventions worked best in curbing exclusion. A pragmatic design seeks to find solutions to problems and is useful when researching organizational processes (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). The goal was to remain as close to the data as possible.

In summary, the data were analyzed for emergent themes expressed by participants, looking for any shared understanding of the phenomena. This was done by transcribing the interviews, annotating when similar themes were present, and by having a member check performed by participants. In highlighting similar words, phrases, and ideas, brief descriptions of each of the interviews along with individual thematic analysis and quotes from respondent three themes emerged for Research Question 1, responses from teachers and two emergent themes were determined for Research Question 2 from administrators.

Trustworthiness

Ensuring trustworthiness is extremely important in undertaking qualitative inquiry and factors of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are provisions designed to insure its certainty (Shenton, 2004). For this study, it was important to ensure accuracy in transcription to be able to ensure I was examining interventions that

addressed disproportional discipline. Attention to detail and thoroughly exploring the topics with participants assisted in ensuring trustworthiness. Qualitative research was an appropriate vehicle for this study and the job of the researcher is to assure rigor and credibility. Ravitch and Carl (2020) spoke of assessing for validity and trustworthiness through several ways, including checking with participants in the study.

Credibility

Assuring credibility involved collecting rich thick data from interviewees. I also collected data from multiple sources (i.e., participants who are related), which is also a strategy to assure credibility. I detailed the importance and relevance of my sampling strategy, choosing participants representative of their various groups, teachers, and administrators. As rich, thick data were obtained, credibility was established and enhanced by thoroughly describing the context in which participants operated as well as by giving detailed experiences of the data presented.

Confirmability

Here the concern was objectivity and the influence of researcher bias. Considering how others might view my interpretations of the data was a factor in establishing confirmability. I included a "reflective commentary" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72) that included reasons for selecting the methods used in data collection as well as any weakness that arose when the data were collected. I included a discussion of the inevitability of researcher bias as well as tried to combat it. Care was taken not to impose my own feelings to influence the findings is another aspect in establishing validity.

Dependability

Shenton (2004), in his work on trustworthiness in qualitative research, wrote of the unlikelihood of dependability being established by traditional means of applicability of obtaining the same results given criteria of same context, methods, participants, and so on. There was a possibility for this study that the data could change as the methodology for disciplinary responses may vary from school to school. I addressed dependability in this research by being as detailed as possible, validating the proper use of research practices ensuring that the data matched the findings. The methodology in the study can be duplicated via obtaining data through the interview process of practices that curtail disciplinary exclusion practices. Transcribing the interview with administrators and teachers and drawing conclusions based on the finding satisfied the established criteria for dependability.

Transferability

As previously discussed, it was necessary to provide very detailed description of both the setting and the participants to assure transferability. To establish transferability, it was necessary to show how the results of the findings could be applied to other situations. Given the specifics of each individual's experience, that is difficult to do. Shenton (2004) proposed questions of transferability could be enhanced by seeing similar projects using similar methods in different environments as evidence of results of the results of studies being applicable in other situations.

<div align="center">

Limitations

</div>

One limitation of the study was that data were only collected from an urban school setting. According to Roberts and Hyatt (2019), population can be a limitation and

may affect the ability to generalize the findings. As data were only gathered from one urban district, transferability could be questioned. The interpretation of results can be affected by participants' relationship with the researcher, given that I had a personal relationship with some of the participants. I attempted to mitigate this limitation by being professional yet friendly in all interactions with interviewees and by being transparent with participants. Other shortcomings involved the timing of the study as the time the participants had available for interviews was limited by individuals' personal circumstances. Lastly, there were unknown limitations that are out of the control of the researcher as are present in all research studies.

Summary

This chapter presented the methods to be used in conducting the study. Methodological considerations that are included are: an introduction, restatement of the research questions, description of the sample selection and the setting, the interview protocol to be used, the proposed data collection and considerations of trustworthiness. The next chapter will be a presentation of the results.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents an analysis of the data obtained through one-on-one interviews with teachers and administrators in two urban schools in the Midwest. Teachers and administrators were asked to share their thoughts and experiences regarding disciplinary issues with the goal of determining what interventions prevented excluding African American students from the educational environment. Using a pragmatic design to obtain data regarding interventions, the following research questions were posed, and themes were subsequently identified.

Table 2

Research Question and Themes

RQ	Themes
1) How do educators describe their intentional daily practices and interventions they use to avoid exclusionary discipline for African American students in an urban public school in the Midwest?	• Building positive relationships with students • Setting clear expectations • Restorative Justice Principle (RJP)

The research question was designed to elicit specific practices teachers and administrators use. Initially, interview questions were framed to determine what common disciplinary and behavioral challenges had occurred in their classrooms which could result in exclusionary discipline for students. After a discussion of factors resulting in removal of students from the educational environment, interventions that lessened harsh discipline were sought. The interventions are presented below.

Findings

There were nine study participants in this study. Five high school teachers were interviewed as well as two middle school teachers and two high school administrators (see Table 3). Study participants ranged in age from 24 years of age to 50+ years of age and had from 1-25 years' experience in the K-12 arena. Five participants were African American and four were White, six being female and three males. Ira, the youngest teacher participant with the least number of years of experience, represented an experience that typically permeated throughout interviews.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Participant	Position	Gender	Years of Experience	Age	Race
Melinda	Middle school teacher	Female	25	48	African American
Stanley	High school teacher	Male	25	51	White
Judy	High school teacher	Female	23	53	African American
Helen	High School Assistant Principal	Female	15	40	African American
Ellen	Middle School Teacher	Female	17	44	African American
Ira	High school teacher	Male	1	24	White
Mary	High School teacher	Female	10	40	White
Carol	High School teacher	Female	21	45	White
William	High School Principal	Male	28	55	African American

Research Question

> *How do educators describe their intentional daily practices and interventions they*
>
> *follow to avoid exclusionary discipline for African American students in an urban*
>
> *public school in the Midwest?*

There were three themes that emerged from the data for Research Question 1. The three themes were (a) Building Relationships, (b) Setting Expectations, and (c) Restorative Practices. To contextualize the intentional daily practices and interventions teachers follow to avoid exclusionary discipline for African American students in urban schools, it is important to explain the behavioral issues teachers face in their classrooms. Behavioral challenges referred to specific incidences that prevented students from being included in classroom instruction and from receiving the instruction teachers were supposed to provide to them. There were three dominant student behavioral issues that teachers and educators reported: (a) attendance, (b) non-engagement in the educational process, including lack of parent participation for student success, and (c) phone usage in class.

The first student behavioral issue, attendance at school, referred to whether students attended either all or part of the school day. Stanley and Judy, both high school teachers, and Ellen, a middle school teacher, indicated that attendance was a daily common problem, while the three other study participants did not note this as a challenge. Stanley shared:

> So, the biggest challenge that we have here at [school name redacted] is
>
> attendance, and that's not the intervention that you wanna talk about at this point
>
> in time, and that's a huge issue that really hinders everything else, the change just

gaining trust. I think it's imperative for me in this particular building to build

relationships, so that barrier, that initial barrier is huge, and building that trust,

and then where we go from there.

The second student behavioral issue involved non-engagement in the educational process.

Non-engagement in the educational process can be defined as student apathy toward

classroom work and academics, which often leads to behavior problems. This was

described by Ellen:

Apathy with those, I would say not even my bottom 10, maybe my bottom five, is

where I'm truly fighting the apathy because I'd like to think that I'm a pretty fun,

hip, in-tune kind of teacher who does what she can to keep them engaged. And as

you can see, we're not in a lack of need for anything. Snacks, treats, whatever it is

to get them hooked in. But there are still those few kids I think that just lack

support. They don't have a village at home. And so, they're coming here every

day, come to school every day and do stuff like sleep. And it's like I can wake 'em

up, I can keep reminding them, but it's like how much are you missing while

you're sleeping? And I'm trying to get other kids going or I'm teaching a lesson so

they're again gonna be behind.

Judy and Carol, both high school teachers, noted the use of cell phones in class as a major

behavioral issue that led to disciplinary action. Instead of engaging in the educational

practices occurring in the classroom, students could be found instead playing games on or

looking social media sites on their cell phones.

They, some of them, have a lot of their cell phone use that is pretty rampant, so

you kind of you're dealing with some of those issues. You deal with issues; some

children are hungry. So those are some of the pretty common problems that I deal

with, it's usually profanity, it's a cell phone use or it's hunger.

Additionally, fighting, vaping, and sexual misconduct were noted as behavioral issues

that resulted in referral to administrators and possible exclusion. Melinda spoke of the

problem of vaping and the necessity to write an Office Discipline Referral (ODR) for

such an infraction. "So this specific year, I have only had two ones two. And it was based

around, one was around vaping, which had to be turned in," she shared. However, given

the numerous behaviors that could result in exclusion, teachers consistently expressed a

reluctance to write ODRs and remove students from their classroom. Ellen explained:

> If it's a heated situation and it's a kind of back and forth, I will put them out. But I
>
> will directly take them to a coworker's classroom, and very rarely do I take them
>
> to the office unless they're trying to fight another child. Then I'm like, well you're
>
> gonna go to the office. And I even try to not write 'em up. Then I try to just take
>
> 'em to the office, have administration, talk to 'em and then just bring 'em right
>
> back. I'm one of those teachers I know they're coming back. I'm cool with that.
>
> Just don't come in my classroom trying to flex on me after you come back. 'Cause
>
> then we gonna have to talk about that. But I literally just do all that I can to not
>
> write them up.

She again reinforced the idea of a great reluctance to refer students to administration

which could result in exclusionary discipline.

> Even if I feel like I'm talking to the wall or beating a dead horse, I just simply
>
> don't wanna write 'em up unless it's something that's like a level three, some
>
> sexual activity or something like that. Or I blatantly catch you smoking some

marijuana or something like that. Very rarely will I write a one 90 [an ODR].

Even if we've had a situation where it's got to yelling and they're like, you call me

a cuss word or something like that. I even still don't write the one 90 then I'm, I'm

angry. My feelings are hurt. I will definitely admit that but I still don't wanna

write that one 90 because I know that that season those kids records and I care

about that. I literally care about that 'cuz I don't want you to be a senior and

you've gotten everything together and now you wanna be class president or

something and they go into your infinite campus count, start reading all that stuff.

Reading all those one 90 s that you had and then somebody uses that against

them. I just don't want that for our babies. I just don't want that for them literally.

Melinda acknowledged certain disciplinary action were mandated administrative

referrals, vaping defined as the use of electronic cigarettes and the smoking of marijuana

was an example of such an offense. She detailed her experience of guidelines that called

for an ODR, or a "190."

So this specific year, I have only had two ones two. And it was based around, one

was around vaping, which had to be turned in, and the other was wrapped around

a physical altercation. So if I turn in so many one 90s, it becomes ineffective. And

then I lose classroom management. So my best practice is to find ways in, I'm the

only one interjecting in what needs to be correct.

A total of six teachers noted they infrequently or seldom referred students or excluded

students from their class. Ellen explained:

One 90? Yeah, that is not my thing. In fact, I'm usually not happy to write a one

90. They're usually, if I write a one 90, it's because administration has told me that

I have to write a one 90. I typically try to handle it myself. I will threaten kids with one 90 s. They know that but they know I'm not serious. Cause 90% of the time I'm not gonna write the one 90 because I don't want all those one 90 s out there in the world float with my name on it first of all. Cause I feel like if you write a letter of one 90 s that just says you have zero classroom management. That's just my personal opinion. But I think that I feel like as a teacher, if this is gonna be my classroom and I did the work, I paid the cost to be the boss essentially in this classroom, then it is my responsibility and my duty to maintain the environment in here for everybody to feel safe and everybody to feel valued.

Mary shared a similar sentiment:

Yeah. I've only had one referral in the past year, and it was because there was a fight that was about to happen and they were nonresponsive to me, so I called security, but that was the only referral I've had to write this year. Yeah, that's it.

Another theme that emerged was that although referrals occurred infrequently, teachers did refer students for what they considered serious offenses. These included if a student was a danger to himself or others, or if there was a threat of bodily injury to a student or to another person. Fighting would be an example of such a behavior. Mary further explained the meaning of "danger to self or others": "Yeah, only for altercations. If someone was in danger, that would be the only reason." She also cited a behavioral incident that occurred outside of her classroom where a disciplinary referral was necessary: "And that would be very much so this disruptive behavior that's destroying property, that would be something that I would write up."

Given the infrequency and reluctance to make referrals that could result in exclusionary discipline, interventions to prevent the occurrence becomes greatly significant. The three themes that emerged related to the intentional daily practices and interventions teachers follow to avoid exclusionary discipline for African American students in an urban public school in the Midwest is presented below.

Relationship Building

The most salient theme that emerged related to intentional daily practices and interventions that teachers engaged in was relationship building. The interventional measure was echoed by all the teachers. *Relationship building* is defined as establishing a more personalized interaction with students, considering, and valuing the whole child, and fostering positive feeling of acceptance among students. Examples given and subsequently echoed throughout the interviews was the idea of treating students as one would treat their own child. This action resembled a "motherly," loving, protective, proactive, and kind approach to discipline. Discipline is used in a positive way. The intention is to nurture students and to work toward assuring their success. An example of this is behaving in a manner as one would like their own child to be treated. Judy echoed this in saying, "I've also learned this, if you just treat people, treat people's children the way you want your own children treated, there's no problem. Treat them like your children." Carol expressed relationship building in this way:

They're just, they're kids. Good. I dunno. A lot of times I think of 'em as my own. So I try to treat all the kids as my own. I told 'em I may not be your mom, but you're my kids when you're in my class, even when they're not. That's the biggest

is I just think of them as my own and so I have those same high expectations for them that I would have for my own.

Melinda indicated that she established relationships with students by consistently offering positive reinforcement: "I tell 'em all the time how wonderful and how glad I am that they show up and that they come to class."

Also underscored in the importance of relationship building to combat behavioral challenges and lessen the need for harsh disciplinary measures were the ideas of learning about students' lives beyond academics and the classroom. Shane, a high school English teacher, explained this as an interventional practice that combatted discipline problems:

I have a huge advantage where I will give various writing assignments for various prompts that allow me to learn as much about the kid personally, the student personally, that I can then build that relationship, I show some interest with them. Hey, I see that you're into whatever the case may be, is all for you're into wrestling or you're into knitting, and then I will... I will ask about that on a regular basis to try to build that... Again, back to that relationship and that trust. In an environment like this, the relationship is so, so important, because without that, I have nothing, I have no motivation to get them here, I have no motivation to get them to perform, and that's my success in this building, and my test scores are pretty good. My passing rate is pretty good, are all based on that relationship piece.

Melinda also shared her practice to prevent disruption and the need for exclusionary discipline in her classroom. She gets to know and establishes a relationship with her students.

So, I have to make sure that I am having clear communication with my student, finding out who they are, going deep about who they are, and really embracing it with an authentic heart, and then spreading that to my other students so that they embrace it as well and welcome it and ask questions further.

Ira stated that he strives to build a relationship when he first meets students and recalls a quote he summons to mind, "Kids don't care how much or kids don't care how much 'til they know how much you care. So, I spend the first days establishing that connection."

Setting Expectations

The theme of setting expectations was echoed by three teachers. Setting expectations involved establishing classroom rules and holding students accountable to follow those guidelines. Setting the expectations for behavior in class was defined as rules and norms agreed upon by both teachers and students regarding how students will behave and treat one another in class. This was described by Mary:

They know what my expectations are. They know where the limits are in our classroom, and it's our classroom. It's not my classroom. And they know that if they want to have a learning environment, they need to manage one another. And it just is rooted in from day one when we start.

Another example of the theme was expressed by Ellen in how she speaks to her students regarding what she expects from them:

I know that you can do better. I know this 'cuz I see you every day. I spend a lot of time with you. I know what you're capable of and even though you don't have

adults at home that are letting you know this is terrible and that you shouldn't do it, I'm gonna tell you you shouldn't do it and this is why you shouldn't do it.

Restorative Justice Practices

An intervention utilizing Restorative Justice Practices (RJP) was a theme that emerged in three of the teacher responses with participants, citing it as an effective intervention but one not used with regularity. RJP is a process whereby actions are taken to improve or restore relationships. Using RJP involved students taking responsibility for making amends regarding their classroom interactions which were not deemed as positive. For teachers, it involved seeking to use corrective *versus* punitive discipline. For example, shifting the climate from teacher domination to more inclusivity in relationships with students was another aspect of RJP. Melinda described use of RJP as follows; "Oh, well, yeah, because our children here at [*school name redacted*] with so much trauma and we are really working towards restorative practices and restorative ways to transition them from trauma to healing." Conversely, Ellen questioned some aspects of RJP as an effective interventional measure:

I haven't heard a lot about restorative practices this year. Our previous administration was really big on that. It was to the point they was a lot with it. I don't know. I kind of buy the restorative practice part but then I don't love every aspect of it. And I know when our kids are mad 'cuz they were even doing it with us adults and I'm like, look, I'm gonna tell you one thing about me. What we not about to do is go sit in no circle and be talking about no kumbaya and what we gonna do to get along. I am not doing that. I'm simply just not doing that because

I simply don't care at this point what they had to say. And so sometimes I think they used to try to force it on us to try and encourage the kids to do it.

Ellen further clarified her feelings about RJP:

So I have a little bit of a hard time with buying into the circle aspect 'cuz I know that I wouldn't wanna do it. But I do see the value and the merit in it. But I do think we're naive and being naive if we think that these kids will just in the hallway knock down fighting, trying to literally kill each other and we think that they gonna sit down in a circle, they'll have a conversation and then they gonna be cool in five minutes. No, as soon as they leave us, they're gonna fight again. Or their friends are gonna encourage them to fight again. So I think there's merit and value in it, but I think it just needs to be revamped, tweaked a little bit for our children. Cause I sometimes think those are for those Caucasian kids. Okay, 'Cause I just feel like that's just not realistic 'cuz never in the history of Black men have we ever just been like, "Oh, you done messed over me. Now I wanna sit down and talk to you." That's not a thing.

Overall, although RJP was acknowledge as an effective intervention, teachers echoed their dissatisfaction and feelings of the practice not being used with fidelity.

Two themes emerged regarding practices administrators utilized. The two themes are building relationships and setting expectations and are further discussed below.

Building Relationships

Similar themes which emerged from the teachers' interviews also materialized from the administrators' interviews. As in the teachers' interviews, the theme of building relationships was a major theme for administrators. When describing building

relationships, teachers spoke about an individualized relationship with students, whereas administrators described a larger view. The importance of building relationships was underscored by both administrators who were interviewed. Administrators' perspectives encompassed building relationships within the entire building, from support staff to pedagogical staff to students.

For administrators, relationship building encompassed making sure everyone was creating relationships to form cohesive bonds throughout the entire school. The theme of relationship building is a way to promote positive behavior, eliminating the need for punitive, negative, and exclusionary disciplinary measures. Although not directly using the exact words of "treating students as they would their own child," one administrator likened the relationship as one of a favorite "Auntie" when describing a particularly effective relationship between students and an adult in the building. William described:

> I have one young lady on our staff security, safety, security personnel who's very good with developing relationships with the bulk of our kids. And she has conversations with them daily. It's almost like a mother hen in the building, and she could be walking down the hall and she'll say something like, why are y'all in this hallway? And they'll say, yes, Miss E, and they'll take off and go to class. So she's developed those relationships.

Helen underscored the importance of building a relationship with students as an intervention that limited and lessened the need for exclusionary discipline.

> I really feel like a lot of it has to do with relationships. A lot of the students have been there. This is my first year at this particular school, but because I've already started building relationships with the kids, they might have they hood up, but

when they see me coming, they take it down so I don't have to say anything. You

know what I mean?

When William was asked about measures implemented to discourage teachers from using

exclusionary discipline, his and the assistant principal's response differed, but the

intervention of creating relationships was expressed by both interviewees. He stated:

I keep telling these teachers, telling teachers that you manage your classrooms,

these are students and that you can be successful when you develop the right

relationships with them. So some teachers are very comfortable and some teachers

are not comfortable. But I think that whole cultural relevance is a key when it

comes to knowing your students, recognizing their gifts, talents, differences, and

all of that. And then making that a part of your instructional practice.

Helen described an incident with a teacher and student where her intervention as an

administrator repaired and enhanced what could have resulted in exclusion of the student

from class. She related:

And now her and the student have a really great relationship. She's one of her

students' helpers in the classroom, and they were able to turn it around. But I

think it goes back to what I originally said that it's all about relationships. It's all

about building relationships with kids to help them stay out of the discipline track.

If you don't have that then you're gonna have problems with that kid.

William spoke to the importance of proactive activity of establishing positive

relationships as a great deterrent to exclusionary discipline of suspension:

But what have more conversation as opposed to suspending is right now when

students are suspended, it has to be something where they're either a danger to

themselves or someone else. And what they do, the behaviors that they exhibit are very egregious and it causes a disruption in the learning environment. But those opportunities when we have to speak to students and a lot of it's proactive. If you do a lot of proactive, we don't have to react.

Setting Expectations

A second theme that emerged from the interviews with school administrators was setting expectations. This theme also aligned with the theme that emerged from the teachers' interviews. The theme of setting expectations for students was articulated by both administrators. Both stressed the need to communicate their expectation of students' success. In disciplinary measures, it was expected for students to abide by school rules avoiding the need for disciplinary measures. Implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions Strategies (PBIS) was a way to incentivize students. Specific behavioral strategies were articulated by William:

> As I stated, right now we're looking at our PBIS data and creating a culture of expectation when it comes to excellence. And one of the things we say at [school name redacted] is everyone achieves success together. And so that's one of the things I implemented when we got here, which the acronym for [school name redacted]. But just letting them recognize we all have an opportunity to be successful. And I think if we make that the mantra and them recognizing that we strive toward excellence and that's our goal, it minimizes something as simple as I'm constantly reminding students, particularly my male students, about wearing hoods up on sweatshirts and hats in the building, hoodies, and hats in the building. I want them to recognize and realize they come from a heritage of proud people.

And you don't have to hold your head down. You don't have to look like the worst

but look presentable.

From an assistant principal's perspective, it was important to set the expectation of

following school rules about head coverings, and it was important that teachers and

others in the building reinforce that expectation. Helen stated:

We talk a lot about consistency. Consistency is... The other thing that I would say

that they deal with is kids not wanna take off they hoodies. Not wanting to take

off their durags, not wanna take off bonnets. That's another challenge that we face

in the classroom. And I believe it's from the top down. Encouraging, telling the

teachers to be in the hallway, the administration to be in the hallway.

Helen, as the administrator in charge of discipline, reinforced the need for interventions

to avoid exclusionary discipline in quoting words to a teacher faced with disciplinary

problems in her classroom. She stated:

Yeah. I've had times where I've had conferences like, "Okay. Well sounds like

this is a real big issue between you and Mrs. So and So. So, I think we need to

have a conference with you and the teacher and the student and the parent and try

to see if we can get to the bottom because it just seems like the two of you are

having some issues." And students know who care about them and who don't.

And when they figure out that you don't care about them, you gonna have a long

school year.

Summary

This chapter presented the key findings related to answering the research

questions. In addition, the necessity to examine themes related to specific behavioral

challenges faced by teachers and administrators were determined as these were some of the issues that led to disciplinary problems. Interviews uncovered actions that triggered potential discipline to remove students from the educational setting. Behavioral challenges leading to disciplinary exclusion included fighting, vaping, using cell phones in class, non-engagement in the learning process, and attendance issues.

The themes that emerged for the research questions were building relationships, setting expectations, and using restorative practices as interventional measures to prevent disproportional discipline. Additional themes that emerged were relationship building and setting expectations. Although the themes were similar, their meaning differed between the administrators and teachers. Teachers focused on building relationships with individual students, whereas administrators' responses revealed a focus which encompassed the entire school building. With administrators, a cohesive relationship with staff, students, and all individuals in the building were ways to deter the need for exclusionary discipline. The next chapter will present the discussion, conclusions, how the themes align with other studies, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE

RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to pragmatically examine effective ways to reduce the disproportionate number of African American youth being excluded from the educational environment. Specifically, I wanted to research what actions/interventions teachers and administrators utilized to avoid harsh and exclusionary discipline measures. As a counselor working in a variety of high schools, I thought of—and saw exclusion as—a disciplinary measure used consistently in classrooms and also reenforced in administrators' actions of both in- and out-of-school suspensions. Adopting an approach grounded in CR, I observed and documented through interviews the real-time efforts of educators to avoid exclusion by a variety of ways. Establishing close interpersonal relationships, creating caring communities, and setting high and clear expectations were among the effort most often stated.

If research could uncover ways to keep students in class and detail specific interventions, that alone would keep African American students in the educational setting, and the growing number of African American students reflected in the discipline gaps could lessen (Okonofua et al., 2016). Several studies have confirmed that African American youth are more likely to experience exclusionary discipline (Cruz et al., 2021; Martinez et al., 2016; Muniz, 2021; Skiba et al., 2014). Research supports the detrimental effects being excluded from school have on African American students (Quereshi & Okonofua, 2017; Skiba et al., 2014; Sprague, 2018). Joseph (2020) supported this phenomenon and noted that the disproportional exclusion of African American students

is a burden placed upon these students who already face academic, social, and economic

barriers. CR was a way to look for explanations of what actually happens in the building

to foster fewer exclusions.

Research has validated exclusionary discipline occurring at higher rates combined

with the most deleterious experiences for African American students (Gregory &

Weinstein, 2008). This includes the likelihood of additional negative experiences in the

school environment (Bottiani et al., 2018; Reimer, 2020). Consistent with the findings

outlined by Muniz (2021), there is a relationship between discipline policies and

disproportionality wherein the school-to-prison pipeline is established. There are

potential opportunities to put into place interventions to reduce the likelihood of these

things occurring.

This chapter provides an overview of the findings of the study focusing on two

research questions. By examining the actions of teachers and school administrators

related to disproportional exclusionary discipline, contributions to the literature that

address the discipline gap can be made and uncovered interventions can be replicated and

expanded. A discussion, implications for practice, and future recommendations to address

disproportional exclusionary discipline also are presented.

<div align="center">**Discussion of Themes**</div>

This study aimed to answer the following question: (a) How do educators describe

their intentional daily practices and interventions they follow to avoid exclusionary

discipline for African American students in an urban public school in the Midwest? and

Three themes emerged as interventions which teachers used to avoid exclusionary

discipline, and two themes emerged as interventions administrators follow. A total of five major themes came from the data gathered from both teachers and administrators.

Theme 1: Building Relationships with Students/Teachers

The importance of building relationships with students was one of the most salient themes that emerged from the data. All participants in the study spoke of their desire to get to know their students as well as to give and to gain respect from them. In response to the question of specific practices they engaged in to manage student behavioral challenges that could lead to exclusion, each teacher stressed the personal efforts made to cultivate individual one-on-one positive interactions with students. When effective relationships were established, students exhibited a desire to please their teacher and not to disappoint them with behaviors requiring disciplinary actions. Teachers who led with warmth, genuine caring, empathy, and who treated their students as they would want their own child to be treated saw the best outcomes in student behavior, infrequently experienced any behavior that necessitated office discipline referrals (ODR), and rarely needed to exclude students from their classrooms.

Teachers who participated in the study related that went out of their way to keep their students in class and to not have them experience what one teacher called "the discipline track." *The discipline track* refers to having a student singled out as a troubled student which often led to further incidences of disciplinary referrals and sometimes resulting in in-school suspension or exclusion from the school building (i.e., out-of-school suspension). Wilkerson and Afacan's (2022) study supported the idea of initial school suspensions leading to additional sanctions and repeated suspensions. The study participants' actions showed that they sought to avoid these punitive measures.

The findings of the study were consistent with previous studies that have validated the importance of positive interactions with students, and also determined that such interactions establish favorable outcomes in academic grades well as in classroom behaviors (Cruz et al., 2021; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Kaplan, 2020). Prior research validates the importance of the need to build positive relationships between teachers and students. Cruz et al.'s (2021) study underscored the need for increasing positive relationships between teachers and students, and noted discipline practices are improved when this happens. This was also seen in the study conducted. Cruz et al.'s study highlighted relationship-building as an effective mitigator of discipline disparities; this is also consistent with the findings of the current study.

Every teacher in the current study spoke to creating a warm and caring atmosphere in their classroom and highlighted the necessity to establish this kind of relationship personally with students. Some participants spoke to extending the idea of building relationships with students in their classes and becoming involved in their outside interests as a way of fostering relationships. They also stated that they have implemented student arrival checks; an example of this is where one teacher asked students who were entering their classroom how they were feeling or by giving fist bumps. Creating caring communities within their classrooms was another of the ways teachers sought to build relationships with their students. As a result, disciplinary actions were often not needed. The findings of the study were consistent with what Skiba et al. (2014), who have been in the forefront in of disparity reduction literature, has advocated for; interventions can and should be used to reduce discipline disparities. Fostering

relationships was a major action teachers used to mitigate negative exclusionary and disproportional discipline.

Theme 2: Setting Expectations

The theme of setting classroom expectations also emerged as a salient theme. Many teachers spoke of the need to establish guidelines governing how students were to interact with and treat others in class. Findings from a study conducted by Santiago-Rosario et al. (2021) confirmed that teacher expectation literature has supported that teachers who set high expectations for students yield less conflicts in the classroom as well as achieve higher academic outcomes. Clear communication of classroom guidelines was a way to establish early on what was required of students and to let students know what is expected of them. Teachers created a culture of high expectations for students with academically challenging materials and clearly communicated expectations for students in order to meet the academic challenges. One teacher of an Advanced Placement class shared that she directly tells students what they needed to do when she was speaking or when classroom discussions were occurring. Providing explicit instruction is cited as an effective practice by Nese and McIntosh (2016) in their discussion on School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) .The practice is heralded as an efficient intervention in the prevention of problem behaviors and is a part of the first tier in the PBIS model, teaching appropriate behavior to prevent the need for exclusion. Consequences for not meeting classroom expectations were also communicated along with the expressed knowledge of the teacher's belief of the student's ability to succeed in their academic challenges. Collectively, it was communicated that teachers should hold high expectations for students. The theme of

setting expectations was consistent with Cruz et al. (2021), whose findings supported the need for increased academic rigor as an intervention by which discipline disparities could be reduced.

Theme 3: Restorative Justice Practices

Restorative justice practices (RJP) surfaced as a thematic intervention employed by some teachers; however, it was not as widely embraced as the previous interventions. Some participant teachers acknowledged their lack of support for RJP and indicated it was an intervention they did not use. Teachers spoke of district-wide initiatives supporting and promoting RJP to reduce exclusionary discipline but conceded that a lack of training and follow-through had resulted in the intervention having a minimal degree of success. The literature supports this idea. Reimer (2020) reinforced the idea of the lack of success in the implementation of RJP lies in the reluctance of schools to adopt a whole-school approach to RJP, and also failing to apply the RJP concept with fidelity.

At the same time, however, some of the teacher participants in the study acknowledged its potential as an effective intervention. One teacher spoke of the use RJP to help students deal with trauma and to begin teaching students ways of coping with ongoing challenges and stresses of growing up and maturing, while at the same time using RJP as an intervention to lessen the discipline gap. This is consistent with research conducted by Lusick et al. (2020) that examined RJP and its potential to reduce suspensions. The findings concluded there were some benefits to community building circles, a key component of RJP. Similarly, Payne and Welch (2016) acknowledged the effectiveness of community building techniques to combat exclusionary discipline. Some

participant teachers acknowledged their lack of support for RJP and indicated that it was

an intervention they did not use.

Theme 4: Building Relationships/Administrators

The importance of establishing relationships with students as an intervention to

lessen the discipline gap was a consistent practice of both teachers and administrators.

Liou and Liang (2021) explored relationship leadership and expectation for excellence in

their examination of leadership practices of Asian American administrators in urban

schools and underscore the importance of what they term "sympathetic leadership" (p.

403). For administrators, building relationships was critical with students as well as with

all staff in the building, which included the security personnel in the school. Working

together as a team resulted in fewer incidents which necessitated exclusionary discipline.

This finding aligns with DeMatthews (2016), who noted that there is a need to move from

traditional approaches and toward leadership that empowered staff in all aspects of the

school. The administrator recalled an employee who worked security in the building and

their efforts which resulted in reducing the need for harsh discipline simply by getting to

know the students and establishing relationships with them. When students interacted

with this particular security personnel, it was in a cordial, respectful manner.

Theme 5: Establishing Expectations/Administrators

Setting expectations was again prominently discussed as a practice to reduce the

discipline gap. From an administrator's perspective, a more global approach was

espoused as high expectations are set for all building staff as well as for all students. Nese

and McIntosh (2016) in discussing PBIS strategies focused on the need for school-wide

proactive and preventative approach to avoid exclusionary discipline. Building

administrators echoed the call for proactive actions building-wide to stem the tide of

exclusion. An administrator spoke of the expectation for teachers establishing classroom

rules and expectations as well as including culturally relevant teaching materials and

strategies to effectively engage students and reduce the possibility of behaviors

warranting ODRs and harsh discipline measures. The need for expectations for staff was

reflected in an administrator's recollection of security personnel and their expectation of

appropriate behaviors from students. When the bar is set high, even with adult

expectations, the standards are often met and disciplinary actions are reduced

(Valdebenito et al., 2018.) Administrators did speak to certain expectations that were

communicated within the context of policy, which is consistent with the findings of

Gullo and Beachum (2020) whose study of principals navigating discipline decisions;

there are some policy regulated expectations. Behavioral challenges of fighting,

Discussion of the Findings

How teachers described their intentional daily practices and intervention to avoid

exclusionary discipline largely centered around their daily practices and less around

formal interventions. Teachers did this by communicating general care for students,

which included doing daily check-ins on students' well-being. Teachers accomplished

this by frequently asking students how they were doing, by being empathic and showing

care and compassion. They were also understanding of home-life challenges that

sometimes interfered with students' academic requirements. They understood if a

working student was particularly tired after a late shift at work and did not challenge the

students' perceived lethargy. Based on these findings the solutions are presented below

Table 4

Findings and Recommended Solutions

Findings	Recommended Solutions
Fewer ODRs written	Creating caring communities in classes Treating students like their own children Building relationships with students Set clear expectations Daily check-ins Empathic response Understanding students' home/life challenges
Formal interventions not utilized	Adoption of school wide PBIS Additional training in RJP

Studies have shown that empathic discipline greatly reduced number of students experiencing exclusionary discipline (Okonofua et al., 2016). At the same time, high expectations for students were set, communicating a belief in their students' abilities to succeed. Teachers communicated this, voicing confidence in their students' abilities to perform the tasks through positive speech. Teachers expressed a belief in positive outcomes for their students. Teachers' expectation and its effect on student performance as well as on disciplinary referrals was substantiated in the study conducted by Santiago-Rosario et al. (2021).

Establishing relationships was paramount in reducing exclusions thereby reducing disproportional discipline. Treating students in a loving manner just as they would treat their own children was a way to establish this kind of trust. My experience as an educator for more than thirty years confirmed what seemed to be a reality, which was the continued escalation of harsh discipline practices manifested in students being excluded from classrooms and schools. The findings supported a reluctance to write ODRs that could result in exclusionary discipline. Key findings of the study showed teachers

employed strategies and interventions to prevent disproportional discipline. The findings are supported by Okonofua's 2021 study that determined the effects of teaching from an empathic perspective led to fewer to disciplinary occurrences. Participants' actions of getting to know students on a personal level, showing kindness and care in and out of the classroom as well as providing snacks, games, and movies as rewards were actions teachers took to create a caring classroom communities.

Findings showed few, if any, referrals were written. Only in the most severe cases did teachers write ODRs and even then, it was done reluctantly. In some cases, behavioral infractions and ODRs were mandated by school policy. These most serious offenses were fighting, sexual misconduct, destruction of property, vaping, or instances where students were a danger to themselves or others. Most participant teachers had numerous years of experience, and this may have contributed to their ability to intervene in and deescalate disciplinary matters. However, even teachers with fewer numbers of years of experience spoke to relationship-building and clear communication of expectations as interventions contributing to fewer disciplinary infractions in their classrooms. These findings aligned with previous research regarding ways to reduce disproportionality in disciplinary measures (Okonofua et al., 2016).

Similarly, when administrators were asked about intentional daily practices and policies, they engaged in to avoid exclusionary discipline for African American students, the findings were consistent with what was stated by teachers and included establishing relationships and communicating clear expectations. The renumeration of the two interventional measures illustrates the strength of the actions in reducing the discipline gap. Findings also showed that the two administrators' responses supported one another.

Both spoke of the ability to deescalate potential serious disciplinary infractions by having a prior relationship with students. Previous research studies validated the need for school leaders to reflect on student discipline on a case-by-case basis (DeMatthews, 2016). In the case of administrators, building relationships within the entire school community was emphasized. Additionally, both administrators indicated that following the prescribed discipline policies is difficult given the complicated nature of discipline. There was concurrence regarding the need for establishing consistent expectations for students and expecting excellence. Administrators echoed the same requirements for teachers, which was to set high expectations for students and be consistent in those requirements. Liou and Liang (2021) underscored the need for administrators to be at the forefront of assisting staff in establishing positive expectations.

Conclusions

The beginning objective of this study was to explore what interventional measures could be used to avoid exclusionary discipline of African American students. The premise was African American students were more often recipients of harsh exclusionary discipline practices (Nese & McIntosh, 2016). By exploring what teachers and administrators did that helped to keep children in classes, the disparity manifested so that the discipline gap could be lessened. Through the data collection process, it became clear that the framework I had planned to use to guide the study, critical race theory, needed to be supplanted by what the findings revealed. Using a framework of critical realism was the best approach to answer to the research question.

Critical realism (CR) as an academic framework is used to critically examine outcomes and events and considers the environment of the occurrences (Sturgiss & Clark,

2020). This most appropriately describes what I observed and what the interviews revealed. As described by Sturgiss and Clark (2020), a critical realist approach was taken in the interview process where the person being interviewed is the expert and the interviewer is the learner. What I found was educators working within the environment of the school trying to create a culture of caring and inclusion, not exclusion. They attempted to do this by establishing close interpersonal relationships with students, by setting explicit high expectations, and by utilizing restorative practices. A tenet of CR calls for seeking information in the social context of the environment (Stutchbury, 2022). This was evidenced in the study as participants spoke of trying not to exclude students, but were bound by the mandates of the school, the environment. Behavioral challenges that required exclusion were serious offenses warranting a student being danger to oneself or others, fighting, destroying school property, and other egregious behaviors.

CR also helps to understand what is going on in classrooms and schools as the outcomes of the study are examined. I noted none of the participants utilized exclusion as a means to deter unwanted behavior. Nese and McIntosh (2016) posited exclusionary practices do not prevent or teach students substitute actions to use in place of those behaviors. Explicitly stating and setting expectations provided that in their classrooms. As the outcome of their actions are examined, none of the teachers or administrators had utilized exclusion during the school year except in situations mandated by board policy. In the social context in which they were operating, participants are able to employ actions not immediately observable to effect fewer discipline referrals. In that way, the impact on disproportion, on the number of students excluded, and on African American students is greatly affected. The findings of this study align closely with CR in that in gathering data,

interventions preventing exclusions were ongoing and were as posited by Stutchbury

(2022) below the surface, not immediately recognized, but uncovered in the research

process. Whereas CR provides an overarching framework for the study, other theories

also provided context for the findings. The findings of the current study showed teachers

and administrators avoided exclusionary discipline by grounding interaction in the

establishment of personal relationships. As such, the interpersonal theory (Spilt et al.,

2022) also provides perspective and may be an appropriate theory for better

understanding the interactions between African American students and their teachers in

closing the discipline gap. Interpersonal theory involves developing relationships through

positive feelings and interaction between two parties. As described in the theory,

friendliness will elicit friendliness from the other party (Spilt et al., 2022). As seen in the

current study, participants continually focused on friendly, complementary relationships

as interventions to minimize using harsh discipline. Warm and friendly interaction was

promoted between student to student, administrator to student, teacher to student,

building staff to students, and to all within the building. This was accomplished, as the

data confirm, through establishing positive relationships with students, the importance of

which cannot be undervalued (Okonofua et al., 2016).

Setting and maintaining high expectations for students is an interventional

strategy that communicates care and concern for students. Thinking of students and

treating them like one's own children was a key point in the data. Surprisingly, every

participant who was interviewed expressed a reluctance to remove students; they also

self-reported not utilizing ODRs except in extreme cases. Fewer exclusions result in

lessening the number of African American students overly represented in school

suspension data. Restorative practices, acknowledged by some participants as being utilized, should have a greater emphasis if the full benefits of learning the skill are to be realized (Skiba et al., 2013).

Implications for Leadership

There are several implications for educational leaders, including principals, assistant principals, instructional coordinators, team leads, board officers, and superintendents related to daily practices that could be used to avoid exclusionary discipline for African American students in an urban public school. Knowing that there are effective practices to stem the tide of exclusionary discipline should motivate educational leaders, assistant principals, instructional coordinators, team leads, board officers, and superintendents to prioritize the implementation of these practices in their buildings. It is critical for leaders to embrace an inclusive culture where the focus is not punitive (Kaplan, 2020).

Asset-based sympathy and a sympathetic approach is a means by which the discipline gap and exclusionary discipline may be combatted (Liou & Liang, 2021). The study emphasized and the scholarship validated the importance of keeping African American students, who are often marginalized, in educational settings. Emphasis on professional development activities for staff to learn techniques employed by teachers who are effective in employing successful interventions to achieve this goal benefits the entire educational community and should be a priority of educational leaders. The study provided opportunities for school leaders to find ways to reduce the likelihood of African American students to be excluded. Gregory et al.'s (2016) teacher coaching study showed the effects of teacher training on reducing the discipline gap. The professional training of

teachers are effective interventional strategies in reducing disciplinary exclusion (Valdebenito, 2018).

What participants related about the importance of building relationships with students requires educational leaders to make this a priority in interaction with youth. Of all the methods to change these disproportionate rates of exclusion, the importance of forming bonds with students is at the forefront. This requires a knowledge base regarding the culture of students and a consideration of knowing the whole child. (Bottiani et al., 2017) wrote of the importance issues of cultural competence in his discussions of disproportional discipline. This may require educational leaders to be innovative in educating their staff in cultural competence to stem the tide of the predominance of African American student disciplinary exclusions. This is more critical than ever in post-COVID realities of decreased student enrollment and educational losses due to the pandemic. Students are now manifesting an array of problems that can present in disciplinary actions. A different approach which omits exclusion needs to be adopted.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study focused on finding interventions to stem the tide of excluding students form the educational environment, thereby lessening the discipline gap whereby African American students are excluded at a higher rate than that of their White peers. The study was chosen after first-hand observations of in-school suspension rooms reflecting an overabundance of African American students. Although data from this study were drawn from schools with an average of 90% or more African American students, this challenge exists in institutions where the ratio of Black to White students is closer to the midpoint. This was also observed in cases of student suspensions. To truly lessen this

disproportionality, it is necessary to thoroughly examine the reasons for this gap (DeMatthews, 2016). Future studies should more deeply explore the effects of teachers' cultural competence on relationship building in classrooms. Additionally, researchers could explore ways to foster community in classrooms and in school buildings.

Suggestions for further study call for examining the data in schools where the ratio to African American and White students is closer. Also, the participant number for this study was low, including just eight teachers and two administrators. A mixed method study with a larger sample size of teachers and administrators utilizing surveys and focus groups or interviews could add more context and help researchers further understand the disproportional exclusion of African American students. The interviews or focus group for this study could provide more context around the qualitative findings (Akyzyildiz & Ahmed, 2021). More information about effective interventions could be gathered by increasing the sample size. A quantitative study with a larger sample size of teachers and administrators could accomplish this. Also offering incentives to personnel for their participation may produce a greater number of volunteers. Examining the data from several schools could also inform practice to prevent harsh discipline of exclusion. If the age-old problem of disproportional discipline policies is to be eradicated, additional study of interventions aimed at eliminating the problem needs to be initiated. Future studies should more deeply explore the relationship of cultural competence in stemming disproportional discipline. An exploration of strategies used in classrooms and institutions which do not exclude this population of students should be explored more deeply.

Summary

The goal of this study was to discover the daily practices and interventions teachers and administrators use to avoid exclusionary discipline for African American students in educational settings. A plethora of scholarly articles documenting disproportional discipline focused on the disparity of greater numbers of African American students experiencing punitive exclusionary discipline measures when compared to their White peers (Cruz, 2021; Heilbrun, 2018; Muniz, 2021; Santiago-Rosario, et al., 2021). Also documented were the many negative effects of exclusion including an increased likelihood to drop out, additional probability of escalating delinquent behavior, and the establishment of the school to prison pipeline. In short, the researcher sought to determine what actions teachers and administrators could take to prevent the systematic practice of educational exclusion and to work toward closing the discipline gap.

The significance of the findings was demonstrated in both teachers and administrator responses which were focused on building relationships. For teachers, treating students as if they were their own child was a path to relationship-building way of relationship building, and for administrators the focus was on encouraging staff to establish positive relationships with students as well as within building relationship positive in the entire school campus.

The results of the study confirm what much of the literature attests, the greatest interventional measure teachers and administrators can undertake to close the discipline gap and stop the problem of exclusionary discipline resulting in the disproportion of African American students is to intentionally work toward building positive, caring,

personal, relationships with students (Skiba & Losen, 2016). This was achieved by, encouraging talk, employing restorative practices, getting to know student beyond academics and classroom settings, and by being empathic, warm, and welcoming in interactions. This was also reenforced by administrators who encouraged developing positive relationship by being proactive as opposed to reactive.

The punitive component of harsh exclusionary discipline should be replaced by improvements in and development of favorable student-teacher relationships. The findings of the study were insightful for me. As a school counselor having worked in many buildings in a school district, I had assumed exclusionary practices were the standards of teachers and administrators having observed voluminous numbers of Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs) and the lengthy list of in-school and out-of-school suspensions. The study revealed the opposite. All participants, teachers and administrators spoke of doing all they could to keep student in the building and in classrooms. The study's findings and the implementation of actions outlined in the themes can help to close the discipline gap and would work toward a reduction of disproportionate discipline that most effects African American students.

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Appendix A

Pilot Study Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about how discipline is handled here?

2. How often do you meet as a staff to discuss issues related to discipline?

3. What area of disciplinary measures do you see a need to be improved?

4. What interventions have been helpful in decreasing ODRs? In-school suspensions? Out-of-school suspensions?

5. District discipline data show your school having the lowest number of all schools in the district for in and out-of-school suspension. Can you tell me what interventions you employ to reduce the number of students excluded?

6. Can you think of incidence where a potential violation did not result in student being removed from the educational environment?

7. Tell me about any discussions you may have had about race and equity in disciplinary measures?

Appendix B

Screening Questionnaire
Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this study. Please complete the following short questionnaire.

1. What is your Race/Ethnicity?
    Ethnicity
     Hispanic
     Non-Hispanic
    Race
     African American
     White
     Native American
     Asian

2. How long have you been a teacher?
             _____ Years _____ Months

3. Are you regularly assigned teacher for the classes that you currently teach at the
    school you are employed?
            Yes
            No

4. How many disciplinary issues involving African American students have you
    experienced in the last academic school year?
             1
             2
             3
             4
             5 or more

Demographic Questionnaire

5. What is your age? __

6. What is your Race/Ethnicity?
        Ethnicity
         Hispanic
         Non-Hispanic
        Race
                7. African American
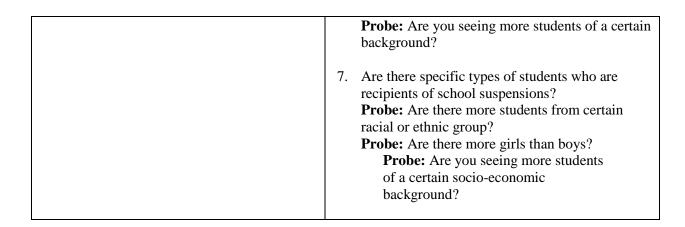   8. White

9. Native American
10. Asian

11. What is you gender?
Male
Female
Binary

12. What is your highest degree completed?
Bachelors
Masters
Doctorate
Other

13. How long have you been a teacher?
_____ Years and _____ Months

14. How long have you been a teacher at your current school?

_____ Years and _____ Months

Appendix C

Interview Questions and Probes

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1. How do teachers describe their intentional daily practices and interventions they follow to avoid exclusionary discipline for African American student in an urban public school in the Midwest?	1. How would you describe your classroom in terms of the characteristics of your students? **Probes:** How many students are you class? **Probe:** What is the racial composition of your class? **Probe:** What is the gender composition?
	2. What are some common or daily challenges that you have with students? **Probe:** Are there any behavioral issues that you experience? **Probe:** What are some specific behavioral issues that you experience? **Probe:** Are the behavioral issues mostly from any specific group of students (e.g., racial, gender, or other)?
	3. What are some specific practices that you engage in with your students to manage the behavioral challenges? **Probe:** Do you use any positive behavioral intervention? **Probe:** Do you use any restorative practice work well?
	4. How frequently have referred students to the principal's office? **Probe:** Do you do this every day? **Probe:** Do you do this weekly?
	5. Are there specific types of students that are referred to the principal's office? **Probe:** Do you refer students of specific racial group? **Probe:** Do you refer students of certain group? **Probe**: Do you refer students of certain socio-economic background?
	6. What are generally some of the reasons why you refer students to the principal's office?
	7. Are there more behavioral interruptions involving African American students?

	Probe: Why is there more behavioral interruptions involving African American students? **Probe:** Are the behavioral interruptions involving African American students different from other students? 8. What if anything do you do to specifically avoid excluding African American students from your classroom? 9. Have there been any discussions in team or staff meetings about race and equity in disciplinary measures? **Probe:** What are some of the things that are discussed? **Probe:** How helpful are those discussions?
2. How do administrators describe their intentional daily practices and policies they follow to avoid exclusionary discipline for African American student in an urban public school in the Midwest?	1. How would you describe your school in terms of the characteristics of the students? **Probes:** How many students attend this school? **Probe:** What is the racial composition of the school? **Probe:** What is the gender composition of the school? 2. What are some common or daily challenges that teachers have with students at this school? **Probe:** Are the behavioral issues mostly from any specific group of students (e.g., racial, gender, or other)? 3. What are some specific practices that you engage in with students and teachers to manage the behavioral challenges? **Probe:** How do these practices effect exclusionary practices at your school? 4. How frequently are office discipline referrals made to your office? **Probe:** Does this happen every day? **Probe:** Does this happen weekly? 5. What are generally some of the reasons why you students are referred to the principal's office? 6. Are there specific types of students who are referred for office discipline? **Probe:** Are there more students from certain racial or ethnic group? **Probe:** Are there more girls than boys?

	Probe: Are you seeing more students of a certain background?
	7. Are there specific types of students who are recipients of school suspensions? **Probe:** Are there more students from certain racial or ethnic group? **Probe:** Are there more girls than boys? **Probe:** Are you seeing more students of a certain socio-economic background?

Appendix D

Closing the Discipline Gap: Interventions to Combat
Disproportional Discipline

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Jan Jennings in Ashland University's Executive Doctoral Program is conducting a study to find interventions to prevent school exclusions of African American students. According to the Office of Public Records of the Columbus City Schools, your school historically experiences the lowest number of Office Discipline Referrals, in-school and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions than any high school in the district. By talking to teachers, the study attempts to determine what strategies and practices teachers use to avoid exclusionary discipline.

Data from the Office of Civil Rights documents African American students experience exclusionary discipline at 3 times the rate of their peers. Furthermore, this has been an ongoing problem first noted 20 years ago. The current study hopes to find remedies to lessen the number of African American students being excluded.

B. PROCEDURES
If you agree to the study, the following will occur:

1.You will be contacted by me, the researcher to determine an appropriate time for you to answer 5-8 interview questions.

2. The total time for you to invest in the interview should not exceed 45 minutes.

3. Interviews will be conducted via Zoom at a time convenient to you.

4. Responses to interview session will be recorded to allow the researcher to transcribe question and the answers.

C. RISKS/DISCOMPFORTS

1. Your responses to questions will be kept in the strictness of confidentiality. All participants will receive pseudo identifications such as "participant A, B, C, etc.

2. Some of the question may evoke feelings of discomfort in discussing matters of race, but you may decline to answer questions at any time.

3. Safeguards are provided as responses will be anonymous and identifiable data will not be shared to minimize risks.

D. BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide may help to rectify the ongoing problem of disproportional discipline as well as help to assure equity in matters of discipline. This could lead to more equitable and inclusive classrooms, a benefit to society in general.

E. COST

There will be no cost to you because of taking part in this study.

F. QUESTIONS

You have talked to Jan Jennings about this study and have had your questions answered. If you have further questions, you may call her at 614-893-3424. Additionally, Judy Alston, Advisor at Ashland University may also be contacted via email at jalston@ashland.edu.

If you have any comments or concerns about participation in this study, you should firs talk with the researcher. If for some reason you do not wish to do this, you may contact the Human Subjects Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the board office between 8:00 and 5:00, Monday through Friday, by calling or writing. Contact information for HSRB is as follows: Dr. Rick Breault, HSRB Chair rbreault@ashland.edu, (419) 289-5922.

H. CONSENT
You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in the study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as an employee of Columbus City School District.

If you agree to participate, you should sign below.

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       Date   Signature of Study Participant

_____ _____
   Date   Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Appendix E

IRB Approval Letter

August 19, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to verify that the study titled, "Closing the Discipline Gap: Interventions to Combat Disproportional Discipline", being conducted by Jan Jennings from has been reviewed by Ashland University's Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) and received full approval from the board. HSRB approval assures that the procedures to be used by the researcher have met the highest standards for the protection of the physical and emotional well-being of individual participants and the interests and obligations of the participating institutions.

Any questions or concerns should be directed to HSRB Chairperson, Dr. Rick Breault at either rbreault@ashland.edu or 419-289-5922.

Sincerely,

Dr. Rick Breault