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EXAMINING THE PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN
REGARDS TO DISCIPLINARY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A Dissertation Submitted
to the Graduate College
Arkansas Tech University

in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in School Leadership

in the Department of Teaching and Educational Leadership
of the College of Education and Health

January 2023

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to several people who influenced my decision to get my doctorate. First and foremost, I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful grandmother, Myrtle Bell Starkey-Taylor. She always made me feel as if I could do anything. She was not only my cheerleader, but she was also my comforter. When I experienced doubt and wanted to settle for a mediocre life, her wisdom gave me the strength to keep moving forward. Her words were always kind, her smile was always bright, and her heart was always filled with love toward me. She was gentle, firm, and compassionate. She taught me the importance of faith, family, and surrounding myself with good people. She taught me always to love myself and do my best, learn from my mistakes, leave those mistakes in my past, and keep my eyes on the prize. I was heartbroken when she passed, but her memory, words of wisdom, and love are forever with me. She provided me with a solid foundation to keep me centered in times of chaos.

In addition to my grandmother, my uncles, Robert and Mark Starkey, and my Aunt Mable also played a role in my success in receiving my doctorate. From the time I was a toddler, my uncles and aunt always spoke about the importance of getting an education. They pushed me when I thought failure would reign. They encouraged me when I did not have the strength to motivate myself. They did not allow me to become complacent about being average. I was to always reach for the stars. I had to do my best because they would not accept anything less. I am thankful that they remain a positive influence in my life. My uncles and aunt continue to see the best in me, constantly encouraging me to reach for the stars.

I spent many days hanging out with my Uncle Larry as a child. He also encouraged me to go to college. He would always tell me that I was smart and could be anything I wanted. He was also my comedian, who had a way of making me laugh. I miss our little talks. I wish he were here to see this accomplishment, but somehow I feel he knows what I have accomplished. I am sure he is very proud of me.

My mother instilled in me a strong work ethic. From her, I learned to persevere even in the darkest of hours. She and I endured tough times, but she always put my needs above hers. She always pushed me to be the best version of myself that I could become. She also had her own way of constantly reminding me that I was smart and could do anything I wanted. I am blessed to have her as my mother.

Equally important to my success are my four exceptional children, Gabrielle (Mixon), Emanuel, Victoria, and Xavier Grady. They gave me the strength to stay on my journey and complete the course. Not only did they provide words of encouragement that were like food to my soul, but they also proofread papers, listened to hours and hours of presentations, cooked, cleaned, and did anything that needed to be done to keep everything running smoothly. Their belief, love, and prayers for me carried me through days that seemed like the end would never come. They were my rock during this journey. I am thankful to each of them.

In conclusion, I am grateful for each person above. This dissertation is not only an accomplishment for me but for them as well. So instead of saying, I did it, I will proudly say, “We did it! We did it! This chapter is closed, and now we start our next adventure. Thank you, family! Thank you, friends! Thank you for your love and support.”

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Above all, I honor Jehovah Jireh, my provider, for surrounding me with love, peace, and joy. I thank him for my family. I thank him for a sound mind and a desire to pursue one of my goals. Without the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, this work would be incomplete or nonexistent. Jehovah gave me the knowledge, wisdom, skill, opportunity, and energy to pursue my goals by placing me in the right places at the right times with the right people. That said, building positive relationships with others was essential to my success. I am thankful for the coworkers placed in my life to encourage and assist me in my pursuit of receiving my doctorate. Robert McGhee, Dr. Tiffany Bone, and Sheena Earl are some of those individuals.

Mr. Robert McGhee served as my assistant principal at Southeast Middle School in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. He encouraged me to return to school and get a degree in leadership. He told me I would be a great principal or counselor. He also stated that I would be called Dr. Sylvia Grady one day. Every time he saw me, he had encouraging words for me. He would often stop by my classroom to chat about the next steps in my career. Those conversations lasted maybe 3 to 5 minutes, but they served their purpose. Because of him, I began thinking more and more about my future and my next steps. He watered the seed that was already within me. I will never forget his kindness toward me. May he rest in peace.

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longer talk. I was able to put action toward the dream. I was introduced to some wonderful people, such as Dr. Brenda Sellers and Dr. Christopher Trombly. The final person I would like to recognize is Ms. Sheena Earl. She has been my biggest fan since the day we met. I do not know the exact day we became friends. I know that I am blessed to have her as a friend. She has encouraged me from day one. She would always say, “Grady, you are almost there. You are so smart. You got this.” If I needed to vent, whine, or talk to someone about my assignment, she would be there to listen and encourage me. She would always call me at the right time. It was as if she knew I needed some encouraging words or someone to listen to my ideas about an assignment.

I would also like to thank Scipio Brown, Ashley Williams and Everlyn Bryant. Scipio Brown and Ashley Williams were my constant reminder to stay on track. Thank you for the push and the encouraging words. You don’t know how often your words ignited me to write another word, another sentence, and another paragraph until I finally completed a chapter. I cannot wait to see what we will pray for next. Ms. Everlyn Bryant, thank you for the support you provided to my children. I am forever grateful.

A special thanks to Dr. Bounds, my committee chair. I know I flooded you with a million and one calls and emails. Dr. Sellers, you have been with me since day one at Arkansas Tech, and I have nothing but respect for you. Thank you for being in my corner. Also, thank you for agreeing to serve on my committee and providing me with feedback. Dr. Freeman, thank you for the knowledge you imparted to me. All of you are truly appreciated.

Next, I would like to take this time to thank the participants for dedicating their time and energy to this research. I thank you for being honest and not holding anything

back. Also, thank you for trusting me to write your truth. I learned so much from each of you. Because of you, I am more aware of my actions as an educator.

As I come to a close, I want to give a special thank you to Ms. Cynthia Bell. Thank you for taking time out of your day to proof read this paper. I appreciate all that you do. As always, thanks to my family, friends, coworkers, and acquaintances for the prayers and encouragement. Writing a dissertation is not a one-man or woman show. It takes a community. I am thankful to everyone whom I have listed above. My success is your success. Thank you for being in my life.

Abstract

EXAMINING THE PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN REGARDS TO DISCIPLINARY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Sylvia A. Starkey-Grady

This qualitative study aimed to examine African American students' perceptions regarding their school's disciplinary policies and procedures. This study was an attempt to answer the following central questions: What are the perceptions of African American students regarding their high school's disciplinary policies and procedures? What is the experience of African American students suspended one or more times? Other questions to consider were: According to African American high school students, what conditions are perceived as barriers to effective discipline practices?

To find answers to the above questions, African American students who have been suspended or recommended for expulsion one or more times were asked to participate in an interview. From the dialog, five themes emerged. The themes were the excessive length of suspensions, the subjectivity of the discipline policy, the issue with teacher absenteeism, awareness of the discipline policy, intrinsic motivation, and cultural differences. In conducting this study, the researcher arrived at three conclusions. They included creating policies and procedures, culturally relevant training for teachers, and implementing alternative discipline practices.

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Chapter I: Introduction

It has been suggested that discipline in school shapes educational outcomes (Way, 2011). Tookes et al. (2020) argued that discipline and effective classroom management are critical to sustaining a school environment conducive to learning and achievement. Irby (2013) claims there is a consensus among researchers that positive behavioral and proactive approaches to discipline do more to foster student achievement than punitive discipline approaches. Unfortunately, school discipline, especially in urban schools, tends to increasingly utilize punitive measures such as school suspensions (Welch & Payne, 2010; Heilbrun et al., 2015). In fact, over the last three decades, schools have increased the number of out-of-school suspensions given to students (Fedders, 2018). Studies show that African American students tend to receive suspensions more than White students (Fedders, 2018). These suspensions serve as a means of disciplining students to manage misbehavior (Fedders, 2018). So, what is discipline? Martella et al. (2012) provide an overview of the definition of discipline, which is used to encourage students to act per a system of rules and regulations (Martella et al., 2012). In other words, discipline is about teaching students how to behave appropriately in different situations. While discipline may utilize punishment, it is not the same as punishment in that positive measures may be used to teach children how to behave appropriately.

One form of school discipline is exclusion from the regular school setting or out-of-school suspension (OSS). In 1974, approximately 3.7% of all students were suspended from school; in 2006, that number rose to more than 6.8% (Heilbrun et al., 2015). According to a study by Fedders (2018), nearly 7% of students enrolled in schools during the 2011-2012 school year received at least one out-of-school suspension and over

100,000 were expelled. Exclusion from the school setting rests on the notion that removal from school can deter future misbehavior by the offending student (Fedders, 2018).

Another form of discipline used by schools involves the removal of the student from the regular school setting to an alternative educational program (AEP) setting, either a short-term in-school suspension (ISS) or a longer-term alternative educational program. Fedders (2018) states that over 500,000 students attend an AEP each year. While AEPs supposedly provide an environment where students can be supported, Fedders (2018) argues that suspensions and AEPs have little proven educational benefit. Instead, students generally fall behind in their studies. Mendez et al. (2002) and Mendez & Knoff (2003) made the same argument years earlier. They argue that school suspension often is not successful in decreasing students' inappropriate behavior and, in fact, may exacerbate the issue.

Of particular concern is the fact that minorities, primarily Black students, tend to receive disciplinary actions, especially OSS, in greater proportions than do White students (Mendez & Knoff, 2003). In their research, Losen and Martinez (2020) show the number of days lost in instruction according to ethnicity. According to their findings, they uncovered the following information:

Less than 1 in 100 Latinx, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Asian American, and White secondary students attend school in a district where their racial/ethnic groups lost a year or more of instruction due to out-of-school suspensions. In contrast, approximately 1 in 7 Black secondary students attend a school where they lost at least a year per 100 students. For example, of the more than 3.5 million Black secondary students, 492,755 were enrolled in a district where

students were losing at least a year's worth of instruction for every 100 students.

In contrast, this was the experience of only approximately 1 in 500 White students and 2 in 500 Latinx students. (Losen & Martinez, 2020, p. 27)

The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, in 2008, noted that the overrepresentation in suspension and expulsion had been found consistently for African American students and less consistently for Latino students. They state that the disproportionality is not due entirely to economic disadvantage. They further say that no data support the assumption that African American students exhibit higher disruption rates than White students. Other researchers, such as Lee et al. (2011), have noted that Black students are more likely to be suspended than White students and that school suspensions are consistently associated with adverse academic outcomes.

Arkansas is not immune to the disproportionality of the use of discipline. Derlikowski (2013), citing a 2012 report, stated that Arkansas ranked 15th in the nation in the use of out-of-school suspensions for all students and 13th in the gap between Black and White students in out-of-school suspensions, suggesting that Black students receive OSS at a higher rate than the national average. The question is posed why Black students receive discipline more frequently than White students. It has been suggested that there may be a cultural divide between Black students and teachers who are predominantly White (Welch & Payne, 2010). Morrison and Vaandering (2012) propose using a restorative justice (RJ) framework to investigate the context of negative behavior by understanding why the behavior was identified, listening to students, and responding to students. As Way (2011) notes, knowing how students perceive and respond to

discipline within their schools is vital. Understanding students' responses to school authority is fundamental to understanding how school discipline affects student behavior.

American schools, especially those in urban areas, tend to use a more punitive approach when disciplining students (Welch & Payne, 2010). In fact, out of the 3.5 million students attending school during the 2011-2012 school year, 7% received at least one out-of-school suspension, and over 100,000 students were expelled (Fedders, 2018). It has also been noted that suspensions are not successful in changing student behavior, and they hurt a student's academic outcome such as failing grades and increasing the risk of a student dropping out of school (Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Lee et al., 2011; Fedders, 2018). According to several studies, African American students are more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts (Lee et al., 2011).

Arkansas ranks 15th in the nation with its usage of out-of-school suspension for all its students and 13th in the gap between Black and White students in out-of-school suspension (Derlikowski, 2013). Cross-cultural misunderstandings between a growing number of African American students and a growing number of White teachers might be the culprit for the increase of more punitive student discipline (Welch & Payne, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Students of color have been disproportionately subjected to exclusionary disciplinary actions for less severe and more subjective incidents. In addition, there has been a long history of disparities in behavioral outcomes in the United States based on a student's ethnic background (Bal et al., 2019). In addition, social scientists have documented that African American students receive more office referrals and

punishments due to subjective reasons such as disrespect, insubordination, or excessive noise (Bal et al., 2019; Monroe, 2006).

Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is the discipline gap between African American students and their White peers. This study examines African American students' perceptions of their school's disciplinary policies and procedures. This study will also document, analyze, and interpret the lived experience of African American students that have been suspended or expelled from school. Since little is known about African American students' perception of their schools' discipline policies/procedures, more research is needed. In addition, research is necessary to understand how this issue affects African American students academically, socially, and emotionally. In addition, administrators and teachers may benefit from the information obtained from this study.

Purpose of the Study

This phenomenological qualitative research study aims to identify and examine African American students' perceptions of discipline policies and procedures in their schools. This study also seeks to document, explore, and interpret the lived experience of African American students suspended one or more times.

This phenomenological study focused on the perceptions and experiences of African American students in grades 9-12 concerning their school's disciplinary policies and procedures, as well as, thoughts students may have in resolving discipline issues as we dive into their lived experiences concerning suspensions and expulsions. Hopefully, this research will cause discussions and a call to action to close the gap between students of color and White students regarding office referrals (Tobin et al., 2000).

Definition of Terms

In this study, discipline is defined as the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior, using punishment to correct disobedience.

(www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/discipline).

Behavior in this study refers to how one acts or conducts oneself, especially toward others. (www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/behavior).

An office/discipline referral in this study represents written documentation of a student's misbehavior on school grounds or at a school function.

Expulsion is defined as the removal of a student from school for a semester or up to one full school year (Fedders, 2018).

Out-of-School Suspension represents the temporary removal of a student from school grounds, usually for five or ten school calendar days (Fedders, 2018).

In-School Suspension represents the temporary removal of a student from their regular schedule. Students are assigned to one classroom. All classwork must be completed in this one room. Students may spend up to five days in this classroom. The classroom usually does not have a certified teacher (Fedders, 2018).

School climate can be defined as the quality of a school that creates a sense of belonging and healthy learning places, nurtures students' aspirations, and stimulates teachers' creativity and enthusiasm (Freiberg, 1999).

Research Question

School climate is vital to the student's learning environment and the teachers' working environment. It is a complex multidimensional concept encompassing a school's atmosphere, culture, ideals, resources, and social systems. It can be defined as the shared beliefs, morals, and attitudes that form relations between students, faculty, and staff and set the bounds of proper behavior and norms for the school (Gage et al., 2016). "School climate is based on patterns of student and teacher experiences of school life and reveals norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures of schools that support feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe in school" (Gage et al., 2016, p. 493). This study, therefore, seeks to answer the following central research question:

1. What are the perceptions of African American students regarding their high school's disciplinary policies and procedures?
2. What are the lived experiences of African American students who have been suspended one or more times?

Other questions to consider are:

3. According to African American high school students, what conditions are perceived as barriers to effective discipline practices?
4. According to African American high school students, what are the perceived factors contributing to African American students receiving a more significant number of disciplinary consequences than White students?

Significance of Study

According to Welsh and Little (2018), “In recent decades, K-12 school discipline policies and practices have garnered increasing attention among researchers, policymakers, and educators” (p. 752). “Disproportionalities in school discipline raise serious questions about educational equity” (Welsh & Little, 2018, p. 752). It is hoped that once educators are made aware of this issue, they may take steps to narrow the disciplinary gap between minority students and White students. This narrowing could be done by participating in professional development geared toward culturally responsive teaching and classroom management, and improving school climate by incorporating positive behavior interventions and support.

Assumptions

The researcher assumes that all participants will answer the interview questions and survey honestly. Another assumption is that this study will lead to deeper, more intense conversations at the building and district levels. These discussions will focus on solutions to closing the disproportionate gap between the number of minority students being prescribed expulsion, out-of-school, and in-school suspensions compared to their White counterparts.

Limitations

This study aimed to identify and examine students’ perceptions of discipline policies and procedures. This research will have limitations due to the fact the researcher is the tool being used to analyze the lived-in experience of the participants in the study. In

addition, the researcher focused on setting aside personal bias while conducting this phenomenological study.

Delimitations

Due to time constraints, the researcher asked for volunteers and teacher recommendations when searching for participants to conduct interviews. However, the number of participants being interviewed was limited to seven. This study was also delimited to high school students in one school district.

Summary

This study focused on the lived-in experiences of a limited number of African American students. The first chapter of this study served as an introduction to the issue of students being suspended at a disproportionately higher rate than their White counterparts. The second chapter focused on reviewing other literature with a similar focus to this research. Chapter 3 focused on the methodology used in the study. In the next chapter, the researcher presented the findings from the analysis. In the final chapter, the data was analyzed. The researcher also included recommendations based on the results presented in the research.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Data show that African American students experience suspensions more frequently than their White peers (Bottiani et al., 2017). To examine the perceptions of African American students that have been suspended or received an expulsion, the researcher sought to document, examine, and interpret their lived experience related to being suspended or expelled from school. The literature review is organized into four sections. The first section describes the historical experiences of African Americans and their journey with education in the United States. The second section depicts the discipline policies/practices that affect African American students. The third section discusses the disparities in discipline outcomes for African American students. The final section examines the theoretical frameworks that shape the study.

The African Americans' History of Education in the United States

In this section, the researcher discusses the plight of African Americans as they grasp the rights, privileges, and immunities of citizenship through education. The researcher began the journey in 1865 when African Americans were emancipated from chattel slavery. From emancipation, the researcher will discuss how segregation and the Civil Rights Movement impacted the education of African Americans. The famous case of *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka* is discussed because it influenced African Americans and education. This section ends with the impact of education as it is today.

Emancipated, Now What?

In 1865, America saw the ending of chattel slavery. During slavery, African Americans could not attain an education (Morris, 2016). Also, as emancipated men and

women, African Americans did not have the full rights, privileges, and immunities of citizenship (Hardin, 1997). Many African Americans pursued education to receive citizenship rights, privileges, and immunities (Hardin, 1997; Tyack & Lowe, 1986). Formerly enslaved people were the first to campaign for state-supported public education (Anderson, 1988). During their movement for universal schooling, the newly freed African Americans pursued the assistance of the Republican Party, Northern missionary groups, the Union army, and the Freedmen's Bureau. (Anderson, 1988). These organizations provided extensive resources that extended into the twentieth century (Hardin, 1997).

Although several organizations focused their efforts on educating freed Blacks, many supported the existing social order in which Blacks remained subordinate to Whites. Because slavery was considered brutal and dehumanizing, many Northern missionaries went south believing African Americans were uncivilized and needed to be taught the values and rules of society (Anderson, 1988). After the Civil War, African Americans gained a degree of political influence in Southern states. This emerging power was used first in a grassroots movement to build, fund, and staff schools (Tyack & Lowe, 1986).

The states and state constitutions regarding public education in most Northern states established a structure of finance and governances designed to persuade local communities to build schools and to encourage parents to enroll their children in public education (Tyack & Lowe, 1986). African Americans in Southern—and some Northern states—found that they were not included in this effort. Unfortunately, due to the

reestablishment of White supremacy, African Americans in the South were forced to attend ill-funded segregated schools (Tyack & Lowe, 1986).

Segregation and the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968)

Some African American and Latino parents believed that racial and socioeconomic integration was the only way their children would receive equal educational opportunities. In contrast, other parents questioned whether the benefits of integration overshadowed the racial aggression their children face daily (Bonasita, 2015). In fact, not until 100 years after emancipation would segregation be successfully confronted in most Southern communities. Education was not considered a fundamental civil right for African Americans in the south. Nor was it a guarantee of equal opportunity (Tyack & Lowe, 1986). Once Southern Whites reclaimed control of state governments, White supremacy became a leading principle of law (Tyack & Lowe, 1986). Due to the injustice that many African Americans faced, anger at the discriminatory practices in the South also broke out among African American students (Patterson, 2001; George, 2015). The youth council of the NAACP in Lumberton, North Carolina, protested against the inferior facilities in their schools in 1946 (Patterson, 2001). Even with the racially repressive character of the Southern legal system, African Americans turned to the courts to win the rights guaranteed by the constitution (Tyack & Lowe, 1986). African Americans won all cases protesting separate taxation but lost about two-thirds of cases dealing with unequal African American schools (Tyack & Lowe, 1986). As documented by Richard Kluger, “The NAACP launched an excellent series of lawsuits challenging educational segregation, starting at the graduate level and moving to

the public schools in the crucial case such as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*” (Tyack & Lowe, 1986).

Separate but not Equal/ Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka

The Court delivered three crucial rulings in 1950. First, two of the rulings attacked racial discrimination at the graduate level of education, while the third struck down racially separated dining facilities on interstate trains. During this time, Delaware was also forced to desegregate its university system due to a court case won by the team of Redding and Greenberg (Patterson, 2001). This ruling was the first time a White institution of higher education had been ordered by a court to accept African American students on its campus. This ruling provided hope that the public schools in Delaware may be desegregated under legal pressure (Patterson, 2001).

In Topeka, Kansas, the high school was the only school not segregated, although it did provide separate basketball, swimming, wrestling, golf, tennis, and cheerleading teams for its African American students (Patterson, 2001). African American students could not participate in the same extracurricular activities with White students. They were also discouraged, by faculty, from taking typing and stenography classes due to there being few jobs for them in such fields once they graduated (Patterson, 2001). The elementary schools in Topeka were segregated. According to Patterson (2001):

The local people who opposed the city’s segregated school system—mostly White and black leaders of the NAACP—agreed that school facilities were not the central issue. They did argue, however, that the system deprived some black children—those who lived (as Linda Brown did) in racially mixed neighborhoods—of access to schools near their homes. Linda, for instance, had to

leave home at 7:40 in the morning, walk through dangerous railroad switching yards, and cross Topeka's busiest commercial street to board a bus that took her to school that opened at 9:00 (p. 32).

To fight this system, the local activist of the NAACP turned to Oliver Brown and other African American parents to serve as plaintiffs. On February 28, 1951, the local NAACP filed suit in federal district court. June of 1951, Judge Walter Huxman found no violation of Plessy. This ruling meant that the attitude of separate-but-equal would remain in Topeka's public schools until the Supreme Court intervened. In December 1953, *Oliver Brown et al. vs. Board of Education of Topeka* had its day with the High Court. On May 15, Chief Justice Warren stated how important public education was in America. He proceeds by saying:

“In approaching this problem, we cannot turn the clock back to 1868 when the Amendment was adopted, or even to 1896 when *Plessy vs. Ferguson* was written. Education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments... It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race...deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does. To separate them [black children in grade and high schools] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone. We conclude unanimously that in the field of public education the doctrine of “separate-but-equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (Patterson, 2001, p.66).

Not only did his decision apply to all states, not just the districts involved in the cases, but it also provided the Court with a new constitutional position that equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment is for all (Patterson, 2001). As a result of court interventions, segregation was abolished, and African American students were integrated into predominantly White public schools. Unfortunately, decades of unequal educational treatment created a climate of distrust which resulted in fewer achievement gains for African American students. Despite the decision of *Brown v Board of Education*, African American students are still dealing with injustices and unfair treatment in many public school classrooms (Mickelson & Heath, 1999). Therefore, to close achievement gaps between African American and White students, attempts have been made to address the issue.

Modern Day Education

Acts such as No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeed were attempts by the government to help close student achievement gaps by holding states accountable for providing all students with a high-quality education. These acts were designed to help put a laser focus on subgroup populations such as English Language Learners (ELL), students in special education, and minority students.

The No Child Left Behind Act. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), was passed by Congress in 2001. President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law on January 8, 2002. This law was a demand for equality of opportunity in education. No Child Left Behind aimed to provide equality of outcomes (Abernathy, 2007). No Child Left Behind placed accountability on state educational agencies and

school districts to reach this goal. Accountability provided penalties for failing schools (Abernathy, 2007). The two goals that define the No Child Left Behind law were as follows:

1. Closing the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students, high and low-performing students, and students with disabilities compared to students without disabilities (Abernathy, 2007).
2. Holding states accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students by implementing consequences for states who fail to close the achievement gap (Abernathy, 2007).

Because the U. S. Constitution does not contain any provisions for or a guarantee of public education, the federal government uses money for leverage (Abernathy, 2007). Public schools receive about 7% to 8% of their funds from federal funding (Abernathy, 2007). Any state that opts out of NCLB stands to lose money, but if a state decides to take federal funds, it must implement an annual assessment of its students (Abernathy, 2007). “The results of these tests will have significant consequences for any school or district that does not meet the state’s standards of proficiency” (Abernathy, 2007, p. 4). Not only are students tested every year, but each district must issue a school report card that provides information about student performance in each school, graduation rates, and the professional qualifications of its teachers (Abernathy, 2007).

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The Every Student Succeed Act replaced the No Child Left Behind Act. ESSA was signed into law on December 10, 2015, by President Obama. Under this act, schools are urged to set high standards so that students are ready for college or a career when they graduate high school. The act

required accountability by guaranteeing that when students fell behind, resources were provided to help them improve. It also offered high-quality preschools to give all students a chance to a strong start in education. It empowered states to develop systems for school improvement instead of imposing a cookie-cutter federal solution (Konold et al., 2017).

No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeed Acts were put in place to ensure every student succeeded and no one was left behind based on a student's socio-economic status, language, culture, gender, or ethnicity.

Discipline Policies and Practices

In this section, the researcher discusses the different discipline policies and practices that have been or are currently in use in U. S. schools. The researcher begins the journey with the usage of corporal punishment. From corporal punishment, the researcher discusses the impact of policies and practices such as zero-tolerance, classroom management, positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), and culturally responsive teaching.

Coercive Disciplinary Tactic: Corporal Punishment

In the past, humiliation, straps, dunce caps and corporal punishment were used to control student misbehavior (Milne & Aurini, 2017). Among these tactics, corporal punishment is still in use. Corporal punishment is the use of physical force with the intent of causing a student physical pain to correct a student's negative behavior (Donnelly & Straus, 2005). In the 1977 Supreme Court ruling of *Ingraham v. Wright*, school corporal punishment was considered constitutional and allowed states to use corporal punishment to discipline students (Gershoff & Font, 2016). A total of 163,333 students were subjected to corporal punishment in the following states, Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona,

Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wyoming (Gershoff & Font, 2016). Each state varies in how they enforce corporal punishment. For example, the Texas code allows school personnel to hit students with objects and to use “any other physical force” to control students as long as it is in the name of discipline (Gershoff & Font, 2016). With this said, organizations such as The American Academy of Pediatrics encourage parents, educators, school administrators, and other stakeholders to seek to legally prohibit all states from using corporal punishment as a means of managing student behavior.

Zero Tolerance Policies/Approaches (1990s)

Over the past thirty years, the environment in which American students attend public schools has changed dramatically (Fahey, 2016). Students today attend schools in the shadow of school shootings, interactions with police officers patrolling their halls, and possible exposure to drugs and gang activity (Fahey, 2016). Various policies, such as Zero Tolerance, are significant changes affecting schools today (Fahey, 2016).

According to Fahey (2016):

A zero-tolerance policy is any law or regulation that “mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses.” Although the 1990s saw a decrease in overall school violence, zero-tolerance policies gained popularity, primarily in response to the spate of horrific school shootings that occurred during that period. In this regard, the policies were intended, ostensibly, as a student-safety mechanism, which would remove dangerous students from the environment as soon as the school became aware of the threat they posed (p. 788).

Zero-tolerance implies that all violators should be reprimanded similarly (Lorenz, 2010). Due to the U. S. policy, suspensions have become the typical response to student misbehavior (Butler-Barnes & Innis-Thompson, 2020). Data from the U. S. Department of Education show that during the 2015-2016 school year, approximately 2.7 million K-12 students received one or more out-of-school suspensions (Butler-Barnes & Innis-Thompson, 2020).

Beyond Just Weapons Violations. Due to horrific events such as the school shootings at Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas; Columbine High in Littleton, Colorado; and others, schools have begun to adopt zero-tolerance policies as a means of keeping students safe from gun violence while they were in school (Derlikowski, 2013; Fahey, 2016). Currently, zero-tolerance policies do not solely focus on gun violence in schools (Irby, 2013; Derlikowski, 2013; Hirschfield, 2008). In fact, “Zero tolerance policies in secondary schools now embrace an array of misbehaviors varying widely in seriousness” (Stinchcomb et al., 2006, p. 123). Due to its association with adverse outcomes for student success, zero tolerance as a disciplinary method in schools is very controversial (Heilbrun et al., 2015).

African American Students and the Zero Tolerance Policy. Minority students, especially African Americans, are removed from classroom instruction at a higher rate than White students (Derlikowski, 2013; Anderson et al., 2019; Martella et al., 2012; Vincent et al., 2012; Milner, 2007). Schools that issue fewer suspensions to students perform better on academic tests (Derlikowski, 2013). In other words, when students are not in class, they miss out on educational opportunities (Anderson et al., 2019; Irby, 2013; Martella et al., 2012). With that said, Zero Tolerance operates under two core

beliefs: 1) strict sanctions will discourage student misbehavior and 2) removing the most serious offenders from the school will improve the learning environment (Heilbrun et al., 2015). According to research conducted by the APA Task Force on Zero Tolerance (2008), it was concluded that there was no proof to support the effectiveness of Zero Tolerance as a disciplinary policy (Heilbrum et al., 2015). Furthermore, “Longitudinal studies showed that students who were suspended once were more likely to be suspended again, suggesting that first-time suspension is associated with continued misbehavior and further suspensions, with no evidence of a deterrent or remedial effect” (Heilbrum et al., 2015, p. 490).

According to a 2012 report by Losen and Gillespie, “In Arkansas, White students were suspended at a risk factor of 5.3%, while African American students were suspended at a risk factor of 18.5% with a gap of 13.2 percent” (Derlikowski, 2013). As a result, African American students were removed from classroom instruction almost 3.5 times as often as White students (Derlikowski, 2013). Research shows that African American students are overrepresented in lower educational track programs and suspensions (Parsons, 2017; Tookes et al., 2020). Some researchers believe academic inequity is due to social class and family background, while others dispute that inadequately managed schools bear most of the responsibility for low student achievement” (Beach, 2013).

Classroom Management (in General)

Managing student behavior in classrooms has been around as long as there have been schools (Martella et al., 2012). Behavior management is a chief concern of educators across the country (Martella et al., 2012). When discussing classroom

management or any school-related behavior management procedure, it is essential to implement consistency and fairness when disciplining students (Morrison, 2018; Hagenauer et al., 2015; Bal, 2019). Discipline should be proactive—as educators focus on preventing conflicts and disruptions (McLeod et al., 2003).

Frequently, when students disrupt the learning environment, they are removed from class, and valuable learning is robbed from all students (Martella et al., 2012). So how do we keep students in the classroom and ensure academic success? The key is establishing a positive classroom climate based on mutual respect and trust (McLeod et al., 2003). The heart and soul of any school is its essence of leading students, faculty, and staff members to love the school and to look forward to being there each school day (Freiberg, 1999). Efficiently managing students usually involves cultivating a learning environment in which students cooperate with their peers and teachers to pursue academic growth (Brown, 2004; McLeod et al., 2003). In other words, positive relationships make students like school better and have a higher academic achievement (McLeod et al., 2003).

According to Gregory & Weinstein (2008), little is known about why African American students are excluded from class or school. Furthermore, not much is known regarding teacher qualities that may elicit trust and cooperation in the classroom—such attributes may help to develop positive teacher-student relations while preventing adverse disciplinary outcomes (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). What we know is that there should not be one set of rules for one group of students and another for a different group of students (Morrison, 2018). With this said, the adults in the building must utilize the many essential research-based pedagogical processes when responding to behavior concerns in

the classroom and respond appropriately to the emotional, social, ethnic, cultural, and cognitive needs of students (Brown, 2004; Morrison, 2018). This multifaceted process involves social and pedagogical awareness (Brown, 2004). Most teachers are aware of this and try to establish a positive connection with their students (McLeod, 2003). In addition, managing student behavior while creating a classroom environment conducive to learning is as much of an art as a science (Brown, 2004).

Educators must understand teaching occurs in the context of school climate, and schools exist in the context of a community and society (Blitz et al., 2020). An educationalist must recognize that oppression and privilege are fundamentally embedded and affect everyone (Blitz et al., 2020).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

What is culturally responsive teaching? Culturally responsive teaching involves an educator using ethnically diverse students' cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives as channels for successfully teaching them (Gay, 2002). It is built on the notion that teaching should be relatable to students' lived experiences to make learning more meaningful (Gay, 2002; Brown et al., 2018)). In other words, the focus of educating students is placed on the whole child from every demographic, no matter the students' cultural characteristics, experiences, or ethical perspective (Gay, 2002; Brown, 2004).

During the opening session of the 2021 International Summit on the Teaching Profession, Secretary Cardona said that we need to focus on the child as a whole, provide whatever is necessary for students to have success, accelerate learning and build school communities where all students feel as if they belong (U. S. Department of Education, 2021). Educators need to know and relate with students better (Gay, 2002; Brown, 2004;

Welsh & Shafiqua, 2018). Not just those living in our neighborhoods (Gay, 2002; Brown, 2004).

Many educators agree that effective teaching requires mastery of pedagogical skills and content knowledge (Brown, 2004; Gay, 2002; Morrison, 2018). If a teacher does not know the content or how to teach it, students cannot learn the content being taught. Teaching strategies are essential to student learning (Gay, 2002). Teaching strategies that deepen relations with students and build on students' strengths and the strengths of their families and communities are crucial tenets of culturally responsive education (Blitz et al., 2020; Gay, 2014). Our cultures are echoed daily and are significant to our identities (Ashbrook, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to prepare teachers in the science of culturally responsive teaching (Blitz et al., 2020; Gay, 2014; Ashbrook, 2021). There are five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002). They include: responding to cultural diversity in the delivery of classroom instruction, forming learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, including ethnic and cultural diversity materials in the curriculum, and developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity (Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive pedagogy allows educators to understand the nature of social oppression and its impact on communities. It translates this understanding into teaching strategies that engage students in learning (Blitz et al., 2020). Culturally responsive teaching also allows educators to get to know students and build positive relationships (Ashbrook, 2021). In that culture influences the attitudes, values, and behaviors of students and teachers, it must be included in the instructional process (Gay, 2002).

Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports

First, what is positive behavior supports, and how did it begin? It is derived from the work of B. F. Skinner, a psychologist known for influencing behaviorism (Storey, 2012). Skinner advocated that education should focus on students' behavior (Storey, 2012). Second, PBIS applies a problem-solving approach within a three-tiered system of support that boosts teachers and administrators' capacity to address students' needs efficiently while providing a prevention-based continuum of practices for students (Flannery et al., 2009; Parsons, 2017; Storey, 2012; Johnson et al., 2018; Utley et al., 2012).

To combat disproportionality, which reflects discriminatory practices and ensure fairness and equity for all students, the federal government called for public school leaders to reevaluate their discipline policies and procedures (Parsons, 2017; Gregory & Fergus, 2017). The federal government wanted to endorse awareness and support discipline policies and practices that would engage students while holding them appropriately accountable for misbehaviors (Parson, 2017). In fact, school-wide positive behavior supports have been used increasingly in schools as a means to shift from reactive strategies, such as detention, suspension, and expulsion (Flannery et al., 2009). Approximately 26,000 schools across 49 states have executed the PBIS model in their classrooms, representing an 80% increase over the last decade (Gagnon et al., 2018). In addition, many school are taking action to implement non-exclusionary methods as a means of combating student misbehavior (Fedders, 2018).

Why PBIS? A better question may be, why not PBIS? PBIS is a framework that is used to keep students in the classroom. By keeping students in the classroom, they will

not miss valuable instruction and stay on task with assignments (Gregory et al., 2016). Educators significantly impact how students behave and learn in the classroom (Utley et al., 2002). In addition, instructors can work more successfully in urban environments if they develop a deep understanding of the cultural overlay of school discipline, both in theory and practice (Monroe, 2006).

In that most referrals originate from the classroom, a culturally responsive school-wide PBIS approach may increase instructional time and student achievement (Parsons, 2017).

Gaining Student Trust. Despite extensive research recording the consequences of suspension (e.g., school drop-out and delinquency), there has been limited research addressing the discipline gap related to a student's sense of belonging and equitable treatment at school (Bottiani et al., 2017). Research shows that a student's perception of classroom fairness is connected to their level of engagement, motivation for learning, and achievement (Rasooli et al., 2019; Bottianni et al., 2017). In contrast, views of classroom unfairness are linked with student absences, cheating, and undesirable behaviors (Rasooli et al., 2019). To make connections with students, educators must model the behavior that they want to see (McLeod, 2003). Students will tend to respect and trust those that respect and trust them (McLeod, 2003). Teachers with this quality are often called compassionate disciplinarians (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). With that said, teachers are less likely to fall prey to behavior stereotypes of students of color as aggressive or defiant (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008).

Disparities in Discipline Outcomes for African American Students

In 2006 more than 3.3 million students were suspended compared to 1.7 million in 1974 (Heilbrum et al., 2015). To improve urban education in the United States, various reform efforts were introduced (Golann, 2015; Spector, 2019). In 2014, a Dear Colleague letter was written by the U.S. Department of Justice and USDOE, Office for Civil Rights, to state departments of education and local school districts to address racial disparities in schools (Helibrum et al., 2015). The Dear Colleague letter was sent to advise that inequalities based on race in school discipline violated the federal anti-discrimination laws—and that schools must take action to prevent and reduce differential treatment by race (Helibrum et al., 2015). The letter further notified that discriminatory discipline practices based on race, color, or national origin might constitute a violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and urged schools to implement disciplinary policies/procedures that are not racially discriminatory (Helibrum et al., 2015).

Who is Suspended?

African American students entering middle or high school will have close to a one-in-four chance of being suspended or expelled (Black, 2016). While suspension rates for African American students in kindergarten through 12th grade have more than doubled, their White peers' suspensions have only increased by two percentage points (Helibrum et al.; Derlikowski, 2013; Tookes et al., 2020). Data shows that African American males are more likely to be suspended for relatively minor infractions and incur severe penalties for minor misbehaviors. (Helibrum et al., 2015). A study completed by Parsons' (2017) states that African American males are persistently burdened with referrals and suspensions in the U. S. public school system. Although educators may use many different strategies to address student misconduct, more and

more restrictive practices are being utilized, such as detention, suspensions, and expulsions (Welch & Payne, 2010). There is no doubt about the extent of racial and ethnic disparities in educational outcomes for individual students (Welch and Payne, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011; Helibrum et al., 2015; Bottiani et al., 2017).

Achievement and success are determined by how students feel about the climate of their schools (Bottiani et al., 2017). In other words, students are affected socially and emotionally by the discipline practices of their educational environment (Skiba et al., 2011). Bottiani et al. (2017) stated,

In schools that differentially suspended Black students, Black students reported less school belonging and equitable treatment, and more adjustment problems, relative to Black students in schools with lesser discipline disparities. These patterns of association were not found for White students. Study findings suggest that in addition to alternatives to suspension and equity-focused interventions to eliminate the gap, more immediate social, emotional, and psychological support for Black youth in schools with highly differential discipline practices may be needed (p. 532).

Does Bias Affect Racial Disparities in Exclusionary?

In the United States, research has acknowledged racial disparities in rates of exclusionary discipline between African American and White students (Smolkowski et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2011; Helibrum et al., 2015; Bottiani et al., 2017). An educator's bias can impact what type of punishment a student may receive (Smolkowski et al., 2016). According to research, there are two types of bias, explicit and implicit. (Smolkowski et al.; 2016). Explicit bias is conscious and exhibits beliefs that all African

Americans are lazy and do not want to work. In contrast, implicit bias is automatic and unconsciously impacts perceptions, judgments, decision-making, and behavior (Smolkowski et al., 2016). Bias is rooted in generalized associations formed from unique and limited experience or exposure (Smolkowski et al., 2016). For example, viewing African Americans as criminals, thugs, gang bangers, loud, hypersexual, “ratchet,” or disrespectful may lead people with egalitarian beliefs to assume that a racially unidentified carjacker is African American automatically (Smolkowski et al., 2016). From a behavioral perspective, implicit bias can be conceptualized as improper stimulus control over an individual’s responses to others’ behavior based on inapt features of the behavior, as opposed to an unbiased view of the behavior” (Smolkowski et al., 2016). Implicit bias in a school setting may be seen when a teacher sends an African American student to the office for a relatively minor incident (Smolkowski et al., 2016).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research is based on Vygotsky’s sociocultural learning theory. Within the last 20 years, the Vygotskian theoretical framework has expanded into several neighboring areas of research and practice, such as cultural diversity and multicultural education (Kozulin, 2003). For the sake of this paper, we will focus on two concepts of sociocultural theory. They are psychological tools and mediation. When looking at mediation, there are two types. One is human, and the other is symbolic. Approaches centering on the human mediator usually answers the question of what kind of involvement by the adult is effective in enhancing the student’s performance (Kozulin, 2003). While those individuals who focus on the symbolic aspect ask, what changes in the child’s behavior can be brought about by the introduction of

symbolic tools such as mediators? (Kozulin, 2003). According to Kozulin (2003), Vygotsky's theory defines the role of the human mediator through the notion that each psychological task appears twice in development, once in the form of actual contact between people and the second time as an internalized form of this function (Kozulin, 2003). Understanding human cognition and learning as social and cultural rather than individual phenomena is at the heart of Vygotsky's theory (Kozulin, 2003). Parents, teachers, peers, and the community play an essential role in shaping a child's development and learning (Kozulin, 2003). Nevertheless, most educators were unaware of this cultural element until they were confronted with the reality of multicultural classrooms (Kozulin, 2003). Within a monoculture classroom environment, culture remains primarily undetectable, and educators start paying attention to it only when two or more cultural patterns are present in the same classroom at the same time" (Kozulin, 2003).

In the past, students were considered vessels that needed to be filled with knowledge and skills by educators (Kozulin, 2003). Today, students are considered more than passive information recipients (Kozulin, 2003). That said, "Vygotskian theory specifies that the expansion of a student's higher mental processes hinge on the presence of mediating agents in the student's interaction with the environment" (Kozulin, 2003).

Conclusion

Upon an examination of the literature in this study, it is revealed that on a national level, there are disparities in suspensions between African American and White students. As a result of this disparity, there appears to be a correlation between exclusionary disciplinary practices and grim academic outcomes for African American students

(Derlikowski, 2013; Gregory et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2011; Losen & Martinez, 2020). These grim academic outcomes (decreased learning opportunities, high dropout rates, and negative feelings toward the school) are strongly correlated with African American students entering the juvenile justice system at a higher rate than other students (Pena-Shaff et al., 2019). Although researchers have focused on possible causes of why African American students receive a more significant number of exclusionary disciplinary practices, the present study was designed to identify and examine the perceptions of African American students regarding their high school's disciplinary policies/procedures. This study also dives into the lived experiences of African American students suspended or expelled from school to open communication between them and school staff members, provide opportunities for reflection, and possibly for students to collaborate on school and district-level policies that affect them.

Chapter III: Methodology

The main goal of research is to reach well-founded results based on the appropriate application of the scientific method (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). It is important to note that validity takes on many diverse forms, functions on a continuum, and theoretically can be regarded as multidimensional (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). This qualitative study aims to document, examine, and interpret the lived experience of African American students suspended or expelled from school. The researcher will also seek to determine the perceptions of African American students as it relates to their school's disciplinary policies and procedures. In addition, the researcher used a survey and observation and engaged in discourse with the study participants. Finally, this chapter presents the methods used to analyze the lived experience of African American students that have received a suspension or expulsion, as well as, their perceptions of their school's current discipline policies and practices.

Research Methodology

The researcher explored the ideologies and assumptions of students in the discourse about discipline and its effects on them. The intent is to learn the participants' thoughts about disciplinary policies and procedures at their school. The participants are the study's central focus, and the data is not quantifiable. The researcher thought using a qualitative design was the more appropriate methodology for this study. This perspective was chosen because it focuses on a phenomenological view in which reality exists essentially in individuals' perceptions. Research from this perspective concentrates on meaning and understanding and takes place in naturally occurring situations (Joyner et al., 2018).

Research Design

It has been noted that a researcher's training and experiences influence their choice of approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). With that said, the researcher analyzed the different ways to conduct qualitative studies (narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, and ethnography). In addition, the researcher focused on the phenomenological research design for this study. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018),

Phenomenological research is a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of the individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. This design has strong philosophical underpinnings and typically involves conducting interviews (p. 13).

The phenomenological research design of inquiry was selected because it portrayed the immediate lived experience of a group of individuals. This design or approach was born out of Edmond Husserl's philosophical position that the initial point for understanding was the self's experience of phenomena, such as one's conscious perceptions and sensations that arise from life experiences (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). From this attitude emerged the contemporary phenomenological approach to research to understand how people construct reality (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). Therefore, when interested in exploring the meaning, composition, and core of the lived experiences of a specific phenomenon, researchers use the phenomenological approach (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). By exploring the conscious experiences of an individual, the researcher attempts to get the essence of their experiences (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). Therefore,

this design is more associated with examining the causes for differences in discipline referrals based on the discourse between students, faculty, and staff members at the high school level. In addition, this design was the most appropriate approach to answering the research questions.

The researcher also incorporated an explanatory design in the study. This design accounts for some phenomena employing why something happened (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). The researcher also included the hermeneutic method. This design strongly emphasizes reflective interpretation and is based on the central theory that all forms of human awareness are interpretive.

Population and Sample Selection

The researcher used a single-stage sampling procedure in this study because the researcher had access to the names in the population and could sample the participants directly (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research involved two high schools within the same district. High School A served 2,005 students in grades 9-12. Based on ethnicity, 56.11% of the student population consisted of African Americans, 10.47% were Hispanic, 28.33% were White, and 3.04% identified with two or more races, while 2.05% consisted of other ethnicities. There were 131 classroom teachers in the building. The majority of the educators in the building are White. High School B served 325 students in grades 9-12. Based on ethnicity, 58.15% of the student population were African Americans, 16.31% were Hispanic, 20.62% were White, and 2.77% identified with two or more races, while 2.15% consisted of other ethnicities. There were 23 classroom teachers in the building. The majority of the educators in the building were White. Both of the district's high schools are located in the same building. High School A has one

principal, five assistant principals, six counselors, and a dean of students. High School B has one principal, an assistant principal, and a counselor. Fourteen campus security personnel and two resource officers were housed in the building.

Of the 1.2 million African American students suspended in the United States during the 2011-12 school year, 55% lived in 13 Southern states (Blad, 2015). As we look at Table 1 and Table 2, African American students receive the majority of suspensions involved in both School A and School B. Interview participants for this study was be selected from each school’s suspension list.

Table 1

Percentage of Suspensions by Ethnicities (August 1, 2021-December 8, 2021)

	School A	School B
Students suspended	237	31
African Americans	82.3%	77.4%
White	9.2%	9.7%
Hispanic	4.6%	3.2%
2 or more races	3.0%	9.7%

Table 2

Percentage of Suspensions by Ethnicities (August 1, 2022-December 8, 2022)

	School A	School B
Students suspended	259	37
African Americans	83%	86.5%
White	7%	8.1%
Hispanic	8%	5.4%
2 or more races	2%	0%

Before participants were selected for the study, the superintendent of the two schools selected was contacted via email to receive approval to conduct research. Once consent was provided, the participants were selected using the convenience sampling technique. To be included in this study, participants must be African American high

school students in grades 9-12 who received two or more days of suspension and recommendations for expulsion. The potential participants for the study were students housed in the same building as the researcher. The students were in grades 9-12. The researcher retrieved the master schedule from the counselor and sat with the administrative team to select potential participants.

Once students were selected, they were contacted via email or face-to-face. The researcher explained the study and provided the consent, assent, and parental permission forms for each participant involved in the study. The researcher also called the guardian of students under 18 for verbal consent. Participation was voluntary, and participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, data will be stored on a personal password-protected computer for one year. Any paper documents will be stored in a locked cabinet for one year. After one year, records will be shredded.

Data Collection

The researcher obtained permission from the district, building administration, and Arkansas Tech University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before collecting data. After approval from the IRB, the researcher invited students to be participants in the study using the method detailed previously.

Eligible individuals recommended to participate in the study received an invitation to participate in the study. Potential participants had ten days to accept or decline the invitation. If potential participants did not respond to the invite within four days, a reminder was sent via email on day five. Once participants accepted the invite, a thank you note was given to express the researcher's gratitude.

Once the participants received and signed the consent form, the researcher started collecting data on each participant via a survey. Surveys were given to African American students that had been suspended or expelled from school and returned the appropriate consent forms to participate in the study. In addition, the researcher interviewed seven student participants in grades 9-12. All interviews were scheduled during the day and conducted face-to-face, with each interview recorded and transcribed by using Google Meet.

Instrumentation

The researcher conducted observations, analyzed the discipline data, and interviewed participants using open-ended questions (See Appendix D). The researcher also administered surveys to participants. The surveys were delivered via Google Forms. Students received a link to the survey.

Ethical Protection

It has been stated that researchers are required to report on the ethical considerations of their research (Connelly, 2014). Therefore, researchers must anticipate ethical concerns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the past, humans have suffered from experiments that they were subjected to (Nappo et al., 2013). Due to this, there has been a development of mechanisms designed to help protect human subjects (Nappo et al., 2013). One of those mechanisms is informed consent. In fact, informed consent is crucial to the research process (Connelly, 2014). In this study, the superintendent and principals of both high schools in the district were contacted face-to-face to receive permission to conduct this research. In addition, an email was sent to the superintendent.

Role of the Researcher

This study is to maintain the integrity and credibility of the research by being transparent, monitoring and reducing bias, asking probing questions, actively listening, collecting and analyzing data, and presenting the study findings.

Credibility

In this study, the researcher offered credibility through converging information from different sources. For example, multiple methods of data collection took place. The researcher collected discipline data, observed participants during the school day, and conducted interviews and surveys. The researcher has been transparent within the final reporting of results obtained from the study.

Reflexivity

What is reflexivity? It is examining oneself as a researcher (Hsiung, 2010). As a fundamental human quality, reflexivity underlies various attempts to understand and intervene in human relationships (Holland, 1999). Qualitative research involves a continuous process of reflection (Hsiung, 2010).

I believe schools are important in developing students to become successful community citizens. My dissertation focuses on students' perceptions of discipline procedures/policies at the school level. This topic is significant to me. As a classroom teacher, I was able to handle discipline issues that occurred in my classroom. Therefore, I did not see student behavior as an issue. When I became an assistant principal, dealing with discipline was a significant aspect of my job. When looking at the discipline rubric at my school, I found it to be more of a punishment guide. Everything about the

discipline rubric was based on what reaction a disciplinarian should take to punish an offender. If students fought, they were sent home for 5 or 10 days. If students were sent out of the classroom, they would receive 3 to 5 days of In-School Suspension. If they skipped class, they would receive three days of In-School Suspension. If students got into an argument, they would receive 3 to 5 days of In-School Suspension or five days at home. Nothing was available to help restore peace, guide students in peacefully resolving conflict, or change behavior. The same students were constantly getting in trouble. There was and still is a high percentage of African American males and females being sent home, placed in in-school suspension, or recommended for alternative learning placement or expulsion. The solution that the disciplinary rubric provided kept students out of the classroom. Because of these discipline issue, students were getting further and further behind in their academics. Also, the discipline policy used in the building did not incorporate any input from the student body.

As I focused on doing my job as an assistant principal, which was to follow the discipline rubric, I also began having discussions with students to understand why they were genuinely sitting in front of me. As I talked with students, it was discovered that there was a flaw in the system. Students would often state that the system was designed to send them home. They would continue to express that the adults in the building are not listening. Instead, my dissertation is designed to give students a voice, hopefully create a more proactive discipline policy, while bringing light to a sensitive topic.

I believe the implication of my dissertation will limit the number of students being removed from physical instruction with a highly qualified instructor. When students are in the classroom with their teacher, they are more likely to learn more than

when they are at home or sitting in a room staring at four walls. Students would also learn how to resolve conflict positively. This resolution would not only be a benefit to schools but also benefit the community as a whole.

I planned on conversing with students about the discipline policy in the building. I spoke with students who had been suspended only once, more than once, or not at all. I wanted to know if suspensions help students deter negative behavior. I also wanted to know if students had thoughts about decreasing negative behavior in the building. Students should be heard. Too often, I have found that educators often leave this critical group of stakeholders out of the loop when developing disciplinary policies and procedures.

Data Analysis

Once the data was collected and participants had the opportunity to review the data and make edits to any errors made during transcription, the researcher organized and prepared the data for analysis. First, participants' names and the names of others were omitted from the interview transcription. Second, as the researcher, I began to look at all the data provided to reflect on the data's overall meaning and make sense of it. To do this, a constant comparative method was used to analyze the data. Third, common themes were developed based on discussions with the participants. As the researcher, I placed each piece of data on index cards to categorize the data in this study. The cards were sorted into stacks based on the similarity of ideas or thoughts. Once this task was complete, I began formulating an overarching concept or theme for each stack. As the researcher, I constantly returned to the data with new questions and ideas until a narrative emerged that described the essence of the experience for the study participants.

Differences or contrasting reports and overlaps in the themes were also searched. The themes and differences comprised the findings of the research study.

Chapter IV: Data Analysis

This phenomenological qualitative research study aimed to identify and examine African American students' perceptions of discipline policies and procedures in their school. This study was designed to document, examine, and interpret the lived experience of African American students suspended one or more times. It was hoped that the lived experience of the students would shed light on why African American students tend to receive more suspensions than other students.

The participants for this study consisted of seven high school African American students. They ranged in ages 15 to 18. A commonality among all participants is that they were raised in single-parent households for most of their life. The mother held the responsibility of being head of the family. Each student passionately discussed the concern they had with students receiving lengthy suspensions.

A demographic profile table (Table 2) has been provided. This table lists the students' pseudonyms, grade level, age, number of persons currently in the household, and the students' current grade point averages as of October 2022. A brief summative narrative of each participant follows after the demographic information. The demographic data and student grade point averages were collected from eSchool and Cognos reports.

Table 3

Study Participants' Demographic Profile

Name	Grade Level	Age	# of People Currently in Household	GPA
Tim	12 th	17	3	2.6053
Jason	11 th	16	3	1.5190
Jackie	12 th	17	4	1.8750
Tina	10 th	15	4	1.4167
Wade	11 th	17	3	1.9259
Lisa	11 th	17	2	1.3095
Kobe	12 th	18	2	3.4902

Summative Narratives of Participants

The narratives were collected using open-ended questions during the interview process. The researcher also used notes and survey questions. There were seven interviews. The interviews varied between 12 minutes and 25 minutes.

Tim is a 17-year-old male in grade 12 with a 2.6 grade point average. He is currently on schedule to graduate. He lives with his mother and little sister. Tim was identified as a possible participant for this research because he met the criteria for the study after reviewing discipline data with his counselor. After the student verbally agreed to participate in the study, contact was made with the parent for consent. Once the Consent, Assent, & Parental Permission for Participation in Research form was

completed by the student and guardian, the interview was scheduled for October 12, 2022, at 2:30 p.m.

Tim was very eager to interview with me. In fact, he thanked me for allowing him to participate in this study. When asked to describe himself, he was very excited. He has an after-school job and plans to attend college to become a lawyer. When discussing the school's climate, he stated, "Since I've been here since ninth grade, it has been, it's been kind of rocky, but at the same time, it has also been smooth. I don't know if that make sense. I only say it's rocky because of, you know, trying to get to know new people, you know, you have to interact with others. And realizing not everyone is for you. Or be on the same team, you know, same page that you're on. I had to let some people go because I was always getting in trouble, getting in some kind of trouble."

Jason is a 16-year-old male in grade 11 with a 1.5 grade point average. He is working very hard to get caught up and graduate on time. He is currently taking credit recovery classes. He lives with his mother and younger brother. He was identified as a possible participant for this research because he met the criteria for the study after reviewing discipline data with his assistant principal. After the student verbally agreed to participate in the study, contact was made with the parent for consent. Once the Consent, Assent, & Parental Permission for Participation in Research form was completed by the student and guardian, the interview was scheduled for June 30, 2022, at 2:00 p.m.

Jason was born and raised in Arkansas. He likes school, although he was required to go virtual due to being involved in a physical altercation at school. At the time of the interview, Jason was attending summer school to gain some of the credits he lost during the previous school year. Jason was a bit nervous when we sat down to talk, but he soon

relaxed. Jason scratched his head when asked to describe himself and told me that he loves his family and likes school. He also stated, “I stay to myself now. Trying to keep out of trouble so I can graduate.”

When asked about the climate of his school, Jason stated, “It's like, say, it's pretty nice. I'm glad I'm here instead of being virtual. The campus supervisors and the assistant principals care about us. It's pretty nice. There's a lot of kids here, so you know, like there is a lot drama and things like that, but you know it's pretty good around here.”

Jackie is a 17-year-old female in grade 12 with a 1.9 grade point average. She is taking credit recovery classes to regain appropriate amounts of credit to graduate with her peers. She lives with her mother and two sisters. She is the oldest of the three. She loves art and plans to major in art when she attends college. She was identified as a possible participant for this research because she met the criteria for the study after reviewing discipline data with an assistant principal. After the student verbally agreed to participate in the study, contact was made with the parent for consent. Once the Consent, Assent, & Parental Permission for Participation in Research form was completed by the student and guardian, the interview was scheduled for September 12, 2022, at 12:15 p.m.

Jackie's eyes lit up when asked to describe herself, and her voice became very soft as she talked about her passion for art. She stated, “I'm very interested in art. I want to do art for a living. I love drawing. It helps me focus and take my mind off things.” Once the interview was over, Jackie allowed me to peruse her sketchbook.

When asked to describe the school's climate, Jackie stated, “As a student here, I can say that it is high energy. The energy at the school is high. It's good energy on most days. We have good sportsmanship. We have a lot of, a lot of things that most schools

don't have. So to answer your question, the environment is really, it's really good." As she tilted her head, she ended with, "There is a lot of drama around the school, but you have to make a conscious decision to stay away from drama. It can be hard, but it takes maturity."

Tina is a 15-year-old female in grade 10 with a 1.4 grade point average. She is taking credit recovery classes to recoup lost credits. She lives with her mother, stepfather, and little brother. She was identified as a possible participant for this research because she met the criteria for the study after reviewing discipline data with counselors and assistant principals. After the student verbally agreed to participate in the study, contact was made with the parent for consent. Once the Consent, Assent, & Parental Permission for Participation in Research form was completed by the student and guardian, the interview was scheduled for September 12, 2022, at 12:30 p.m.

When Tina began the interview, she stated, "This is very different for me. I'm usually in the office because I got in trouble." I informed Tina that she was not in trouble and gave her a few moments to relax.

When I asked Tina to tell me about herself, she first said, "I'm a good kid." She seemed as if she wanted me to know she was not a bad person. She smiled and continued talking about her interests, such as "doing" hair and dancing. She continued by addressing her desire to be around younger people. She exclaimed, "I'm also good with kids. I don't, I don't really get along good with people that's my age and older. I'm usually good with kids that's younger than me."

When describing the school's climate, she talked passionately about one teacher who is like a mom. She said, “She is a mom, but like, she's one of those teachers you can, like, talk to but like don't play with her at the same time. Like, you know, when to be serious and when not to be serious. And stuff like like that, right? You just know they care.”

Wade is a 17-year-old male in grade 11 with a 1.9 grade point average taking credit recovery classes in hopes of graduating on time. He lives with his mother and older brother and is the youngest of eleven kids. He moved to Arkansas toward the end of his tenth-grade year. He was identified as a possible participant for this research because he met the criteria for the study after reviewing discipline data with an assistant principal. After the student verbally agreed to participate in the study, contact was made with the parent for consent. Once the Consent, Assent, & Parental Permission for Participation in Research form was completed by the student and guardian, the interview was scheduled for June 29, 2022, at 12:00 p.m.

Overall, Wade enjoys coming to school. He believes that his school has lots of opportunities. When asked to describe himself, Wade spoke about his love for video games and becoming a content creator. He was also adamant about graduating with his peers during the June 2022 graduation ceremony. His face went from calm and smiling to very serious as he exclaimed, “I will graduate this year.”

When asked about his school, Wade proclaimed it was overall a good place. He stated, “There’s lots of opportunity. We have sports. We got like that T. V. class. We have different clubs here. There’s just lots of things like that. Oh, and um, um, the military class, um, JROTC.”

Lisa is a 17-year-old female in grade 11 with a 1.3 grade point average. She is also taking credit recovery classes in hopes of graduating with her peers. She is the only child in the household. She enjoys being her mother's only child. She was identified as a possible participant for this research because she met the criteria for the study after reviewing discipline data with counselors and assistant principals. After the student verbally agreed to participate in the study, contact was made with the parent for consent. Once the Consent, Assent, & Parental Permission for Participation in Research form was completed by the student and guardian, the interview was scheduled for June 30, 2022, at 2:30 p.m.

Before Lisa came into the office for her interview, she greeted everyone in the waiting area with a smile and a hello. Once she reached the office door, she shook my hand and said, "I'm ready!" As we began, Lisa giggled and smiled as she described herself. She stated, "I'm overall, I'm just goofy, and I'm happy. I like to do stuff and have a good time." Her goal is to go to college and major in business. If she does not take the college route, she plans to have a military career.

Lisa describes her school as unorganized, but it's her school, and she likes it. She went further by stating, "There's some good people here. The campus supervisors are great this year. The principals are pretty good. My counselor, um, you know, he is really great. The kids are okay. You just got to find like the right people to be with."

Kobe is an 18-year-old male in grade 12 at the time of his interview. He is currently in summer school. He will be a summer graduate with a 3.5 grade point average. He was identified as a possible participant for this research because he met the criteria for the study after reviewing discipline data with counselors and assistant

principals. After the student verbally agreed to participate in the study, no other contact was made since the student was 18 years of age. Once the student completed the Consent, Assent, & Parental Permission for Participation in Research form, the interview was scheduled for June 29, 2022, at 2:00 p.m.

Kobe is not originally from Arkansas. He is from the Midwestern region of the United States. Kobe describes himself as laid back and loves to work out and play video games from time to time. He is proud of his family's military background and spoke highly of his grandfather, who served in Vietnam, and a brother that is a Navy SEAL.

When asked to describe the climate of his school, Kobe stated, "The climate of this school, well, uh, to be honest, the adjustment wasn't too bad for me because I was a tiger before I came here, so going from there to here, the aspects weren't too different when it came down to both schools. So, I say; honestly, this school is pretty good if I do say so myself. It's not perfect, but what place is? But like I said, it's pretty good."

Themes

Several themes arose from the student interviews. They include the excessive length of suspensions, the subjectivity of the discipline policy, the issue with teacher absenteeism, the awareness of the discipline policy, the intrinsic motivation, and the cultural differences. Each of the participants provided the researcher with engaging conversations. Based on that conversation, the themes were born.

Length of Suspensions

When student participants were asked what they disliked about their school policy, 100% of the students commented about the length of time they were away from class due to suspensions. The students stated that ten days was too long to be away from

the learning environment. Many of the incidents occur outside the classroom, yet students are removed from their learning environment due to something that may have happened in the cafeteria, hallway, or outside.

Jason stated, "I fought in the cafeteria and got ten days with a recommendation of expulsion. Instead of expelling me like they made me go virtual, but I got behind. Virtual didn't work for me." He continued, "It [the policy] just gets you off campus or out the classroom. You lose too many days of school. You get behind. It's hard to come back from that. Many times ain't really your fault. You trying to avoid a situation, but someone come at you, and you suppose to not do nothing. It's not realistic."

Tina was just as passionate as Jason when she spoke about her school's discipline policy. Her voice became loud, and she rolled her eyes a few times as she discussed her dislike for the lengthy home suspension students receive due to fighting. With her arms folded and her legs crossed, Tina also shared, "I also disagree with being sent home for ten days for fighting or arguing. If I'm getting sent home for ten days for arguing, I'm gone, go ahead and fight." In this situation, Tina did not believe she should have received ten days of suspension for disturbing the peace. Therefore in her mind, she was tempted to do the act that was worthy of a ten-day suspension.

Lisa stated her dislike for the lengthy suspension for fighting. She replies, "I don't like the one about fighting. So like its reasons on why people fight? It would be a fight because sometimes you may be getting picked with and like a student, they may have anger issues or something. They don't know how to control it, or they might be dealing with something at home. So it's like they [teachers and administrators] don't know why so they don't help us. Like, help with the anger issues we may have. Get both sides of

like the story. Don't be so quick to judge. Sending people home for ten days or them five days don't help the situation. They just getting rid of us instead of like helping."

Wade chimed in my saying, "I mean like suspensions, like, you know, like, you know, that one fight thing, you get suspended for ten days, that's two whole weeks, that's not necessary. If I had a say, I would make that change because it don't help kids." He let out a deep breath as he said, "I've been suspended once. I was new to this school and ended up getting suspended and going to virtual instead of being expelled."

Although Tim was more agreeable with his school's discipline policy and practice, he stated, "I'm gonna say everything is good. That is, mmm, when it comes down to um, like, let's just say fighting, for example, they like suspend or expel, and I feel like that's a good [thing]. As far as suspending, I think 10 days might be overboard. Kids get behind on work when they gone for long periods of time. And nothing changed after they been gone."

Jackie and Kobe were also against the ten days of suspension for fighting. Kobe did make note that his school should not give up suspensions entirely. Kobe states, "But yeah, honestly I do agree that sometimes things get pushed over the line a little bit. An individual that brings a firearm or or narcotics, anything such as that, yeah, that is suspension worthy."

As participants spoke about suspension in general, many concluded that the time away from school did not positively benefit the student receiving the suspension. Suspension was a temporary means to keep "chaos" off the campus or out of the classroom. Jackie stated, "I think suspending people only gives the teacher or principals a break, especially if you did something in the classroom or cafeteria. So, I guess they get

rid of the chaos for a minute, but the real issue isn't resolved. Some just learn to fight in the bathroom or somewhere else. That's how we solve issues because we haven't learned another way. Because go tell the teacher don't work these days."

Furthermore, their conclusion was the suspension only helped students get further behind. As students noted, time away from the classroom can be detrimental to learning. While some students believe their suspension did not benefit them, others, such as Kobe, stated, "Yes, ma'am, I've been suspended. To a certain extent, it did cause me to change my behavior. I just really learned how to be quiet, don't even bother that teacher. I didn't raise my hand to ask a question. I didn't say a word in that class. That's how it changed my behavior. I can't say I learned much from that class, but I didn't get in trouble from that class either."

Subjectivity of the Discipline Policy

The second theme that arose from the discourse with the students during the interview section of the research was the subjective nature of applying the discipline policy. For example, Tina recalled an encounter with a teacher that put her in SAC (in-school suspension). Tina stated, "I also think some of the teachers don't know how to deal with Black people. I can walk in class and be like, you know, hey everybody and the teacher get all mad because I'm being loud. Really. So, they want to come at me sideways because I didn't walk in quietly. I was just speaking. I mean for real. The tardy bell hadn't rung yet, but they being disrespectful. It's crazy." At this point, Tina's volume increases, her tone becomes more stern, and her hands begin to assist her as she says, "And you know, I'm not gonna let someone disrespect me. So, when the teacher yelled, I yelled back. I ended up getting put out of class, but you can't just talk to people

anyway. If they would have been nice, I would have been nice. The teacher disrespected me first, but no one wanted to hear that.” She ended her story by stating the teacher ruined her day because they wrote her up as disrespectful. In Tina’s mind, she was not rude; she was just speaking to everyone in her class before the tardy bell rang.

Kobe reiterated, “A student could be talking or get loud; the first thing should not be, you get out of my classroom. Or when they say come in, no talking, sit down and get to work. You may turn around and ask someone for a pencil, and the teacher starts yelling. Many Black kids are not going to let you talk to them any old way. You yell, they will yell. Respect goes both ways.” He continued, “For a teacher to say someone is insubordinate because their head is on the desk and write them up, that seems over the top to me. I didn’t realize that was 2 or 3 days in SAC [in-school suspension] because you were insubordinate.” Kobe did interject by stating, “Now don’t get me wrong, based off of the actions of a person, of course, those actions have consequences, but in some cases, the punishments may be a little too over the line in certain scenarios like I’ve honestly been sent out of class and went to ISS like for simply just having a good debate with the teacher. It would have been nice to settle that inside of class, and that would have never even had been taken down that whole nine yards.” Kobe ended that teachers and subs should try to build positive relationships with students.

Several participants discussed their concerns about students being sent home due to having a smell of marijuana on their clothes or body. Jackie interjected, “I also don’t like the one that states when a person smells like weed, they have to go home for ten days. What if it was their friend or a family member? They assuming someone is smoking. To get ten days for an assumption. They didn’t see the person smoking, but you

smell like it, go home. Or go take a drug test, and when you get the results and it's negative, you can come back before the ten days. What?"

Lisa added her concern by stating, "I mean, come on, why they walking up to people anyway talking about oh you smell suspicious you getting suspended. They don't know what kids go through in order to get here. What if you rode with someone to get here? You may be inhaling the weed because you in the car or house, and it's getting all on you. Secondhand smoke is real. And sometimes you got to ride with who you can ride with. It's not fair. It's stupid. People getting punished because of someone else. And you get so far behind in your work." Jason provides a personal account of being excused from smelling like marijuana. Jason stated, "Sending people home because they smell like weed is dumb. Kids can't help what go on at home. I've see when kids are like it's my jacket, it's not me, it's my jacket. They take off the jacket, and you barely smell the weed. They know it's because of what they had on. They still got the ten days. He was told he could go take a drug test, but he didn't have anyone to take him because you got to take the test the same day. His momma couldn't just take off of work. So he took them 10 days. I got sent home for ten days because when me and my friends were coming in the building, this person, since you said, don't say names, but anyways, this person said something about we smelled like weed. I know I didn't smoke anything, but I was like, you know, I might smell like it, and I know one of my partners was sent home because he smelled like weed, so me and the other guys just walked off campus. You know, we figured we might get some days for skipping or something, but when we came back to school, guess what? They gave all of us ten days. We all got ten days because we passed by someone, and they said we smelled like weed. You got more than one person walking.

You smell weed, but everyone get ten days, even when you didn't get a chance to sniff me personally. Because, like I said, we took off. We walked off the campus. I promise to God. That was the dumbest thing ever. I could see giving us some days in SAC, but we got ten days at the house." Although this incident has already occurred, Jason shook his head in disbelief as he kept repeating, "Crazy man, just crazy. Still, today it makes no sense. I lost 10 days." During our conversation, Jason was also reminded of a situation in one of his classes. He stated, "I was in class, and this Black girl had a short skirt on, but this White girl had a, these little Nike shorts where her shirt covered them up. The teacher sent the Black girl out but not the White girl. I'm not gonna say the teacher was well; I'm not gonna say it. I'm a say that because the Black girl is built a certain way like she was; she was nice, she got sent out and had to go to her principal. She wasn't happy about it and said some things, and the teacher said something about her being disrespectful or something like that. If the Black girl had to leave, the White girl should have left."

Overall the implementation of the policy may not always be consistent according to the students. For example, Tim concludes, "I feel like we have a good discipline policy. How it's implemented needs work to make it fair or the same..." For instance, "You have a lot of Black girls going to the office because of how they dress, but the White girls do the same thing but still sit in the class because the teacher didn't send them out."

Teacher Absenteeism

The next theme derived from the interviews dealt with teacher absenteeism. Students were asked to guess how many subs they may have had in the last six months. Most students stated that there was an issue with many substitute teachers in the building.

However, all students said that instruction is often hindered when the regular classroom teacher is absent.

For example, Tim discussed the importance of having a teacher in the classroom. He stated, “The behavior change so much because it’s like the things that they [students] don’t do while the teachers there, they think they can do when the sub is there.” He continues, “Most time, they [teachers] don’t leave anything, so there really isn’t much to do but talk or get on your phone.”

Wade concluded, “The kids run over the subs. Many of the subs can’t handle it. Some are cool. Some don’t care what you do as long as you leave them alone. Some come in mean, yelling and being disrespectful. That stuff don’t work because kids will match your energy. To get respect you gotta show it. Having certain subs can also mean it is a time where kids can get on the phone. Especially when the teacher didn’t leave any work.”

Lisa said, “It seems like every week there’s 5 or 7 subs. One day, all 4 of my teachers were subs. We even have subs in summer school. We not learning anything. Some of the subs are like sit down, shut up, don’t say nothing. Most of us just get on our phone. And they get on theirs. Some kids use that time to skip class because we know nothing is going on that day.”

Jason reiterated, “I can say like weekly maybe I could say about, ten or thirteen [substitutes]. Yeah, they [teachers] don’t come to work. It’s a problem when they don’t come, but most times, people [students] get on their phone or start doing work from like like their other classes. I have had it where all four of my teachers weren’t at work in one day. Some of them [teachers] leave a lot of work, and some don’t leave anything.”

Kobe, the oldest of the participants, informed me that he did not track the number of substitute teachers in the building. “Well, if I had to put a number to it,” he continued, “I guess maybe 15 to 20 subs, but we have a big school.” During his discussion, Kobe talked about the importance of substitute teachers having positive relationships with students. He stated, “Well, Miss G, for starters, it has a lot to do with like prior relationships because I've been in the classroom where students will know that substitute like throughout the year, and they wouldn't have any problem but if it were pertaining to like a new substitute, oh yeah, they are gonna get ran over, and nothing will get accomplished in the classroom. Let me add this, how subs treat the students is important also. You can't come in mean and acting like you don't care and getting an attitude with the students. There is a balance between being mean and being too friendly.” He said, “I think they [substitute teachers] need training in how to be a sub. It would also be good if they did more than just sit there and watch us. Shouldn't they be able to teach so we can still learn something? I honestly think they get paid to babysit. You know, make sure we don't kill each other or set the school on fire or something.”

Tina did not remember how many substitute teachers she had in the last six months. She did inform me that one of her classes has a substitute t every day. She concluded, “They haven't hired another teacher for that classroom. But other than that, I've had, like, seven subs in my other classes. I had one today, and then I probably will have one tomorrow. We didn't really do anything in class today; you know, the one with the sub. We had an assignment, but we finished it, and then some people got on they phone or whatever.”

Not all students in this study experienced a flux in substitute teachers in their classrooms. When Jackie was asked about the number of substitute teachers she has encountered in the last six months, she smiled as she proclaimed, “I’ve only seen one. My teachers have been here teaching. I think them [teachers] being here is one of the reasons why I am doing so well. I’m doing my work and staying focused. Usually, when I have a sub, I can get like, you know, I guess off task a little.”

Awareness of Policy

During the interview, students were asked if they knew their school’s discipline policy. Tina proclaimed she was not made aware of the discipline policy until she broke a rule. Her exact words were, “I don’t think they do good at giving us the policies, but you know, and my mama know, no more than I do. So, you know, if they did tell us they need to do it more than once, but I really don’t think they did. I do know we go over classroom rules and stuff like that at the beginning, but stuff like ten days for arguing, I know they didn’t tell that.”

Jackie stated she was aware of the discipline policy. She interjected, “I think with the kids, it is communicated well because it is a class rule. The cell phone is a big topic here. When we first came to the school, we would have a PowerPoint about the rules and stuff doing flex. Oh, and we also got a, we got a um packet that talked about the rules.”

Lisa reiterated that the rules are discussed at the beginning of the school year. She further stated, “I don’t think they tell us like what will happen if you break the rules. It’s like, don’t do this kind of thing. Like if you argue with someone in the hallway, you can get sent home for five days. It’s called disorderly something. Well, I didn’t know that. So,

yeah, like, um, they go over the rules, I guess, but they don't say like like, um, what the punishment is."

During his interview, Wade also felt he was not informed of the consequences of breaking a rule at his school. He stated, "When I came here, I had no idea that you could get expelled for fighting or get sent home for ten days. I might have tried harder to control myself if I knew I would get put out of school. You know, I might have made a better choice or not but, like, I'll never know. I do know that now, I stay to myself because I can't get kicked out again and do virtual for the rest of the school year. So now that I know, I'm doing better."

Jason did agree that someone went over the handbook at the beginning of the school year. He stated, "I think they should go over it more than once. You know, maybe like at the beginning of school, the middle, and at the end. Maybe every time report cards or something like that come out and talk about, you know, um, how, like, what will happen if you break the rules."

Intrinsic Motivation

Many students stated that the motivation to change and do well came from within. For example, Jackie has a strong desire to finish college. She said, "For one, um, my dad's side. Nobody has graduated. That was a big push for me. I want to graduate. I want to be one of the first to graduate on my dad's side. My brother, he graduated last year, and honestly, just the people around me telling me that I can really do it. My family really motivated me. Having a good environment is helpful. I kinda stop being around certain people because I was always getting in trouble. It's easy to get pulled in the drama. I had to decide to leave people alone."

Jason stated that his family is a significant motivating factor for him. He also said, “I guess I motivate myself. You know, like, I stopped hanging around certain people. I would go straight to class. I do what I need to do. I’m making better decisions. I want to graduate. That’s my focus. You know, it’s what I want to do. When I get like tempted, I think about my goal.”

Kobe spoke of 3 models he lives by to motivate himself. As he rubbed his hands together, he stated, “I tell myself every day that the grass is only greener wherever you water it. Another one is when you hit rock bottom, the only way up is elevation. That means the only way to go is up. And another one of my big motivation factors is I’m the baby of 17 siblings. And out of all of those 17 siblings, I actually want to be one of the ones to go to college. That’s like one of my biggest goals. So those are my main motivation factors.”

Tina stated, “But I guess if I’m honest. It’s all about me. I know I need to motivate me. I just got to keep in mind what I want. It’s hard sometimes. I know I’m behind. I want to graduate, but sometimes it’s like that’s too far away. So when people say like, you know you want to graduate on time, it’s like yeah, but I’m not thinking about that when somebody done made me mad. I guess right now, I’m motivated because I wanna do well. I have to tell myself keep walking, don’t say anything, and don’t look at nobody crazy, but that don’t always work for me. You push me. I push back. I know I shouldn’t be that way, you know, when I’m at school, but this is me twenty-four-seven.”

Lisa’s answer was short and to the point. She stated, “I motivate myself. I just had to tell myself, girl; you can’t keep doing this. You want to get away from here. My family

also motivates me and Mr. H. I can always talk to him. He is always encouraging me to do good.”

Wade confirmed his motivation was based on graduating and his love for his mom as well. He said, “Wanting to get out of school has been my motivation. I want to graduate. I had to start being to myself. I didn’t want trouble coming my way. My mom is my motivation too. Um, also, like freshman year because of covid and all that, like I was, um, I was virtual for like the past three years. So I wanted to be in school and do good in school. So that's what, that's what really made me want to do my work and stay out of trouble. And you know, my mom be on top of that too. So she wants me to graduate. I want her to be proud of me.”

To achieve a level of success, many of the participants discussed the importance of being around the right people. Tim stated, “I'm gonna say life, life, motivated me because I'm getting older, and I'm getting to the point where I'm about to be on my own, have my own house, you know, and I want to live a successful life. Looking back at everything that I used to do, that's not going to help me become who I want to be in life. So I just have to just step down and just just stay to myself. Sometimes you got to let some people go because everybody is not your friend. I had to learn that the hard way.”

Cultural Differences

Jason stated, “Some teachers treat us different. Um, some let them [White students] get away with stuff. Some some White kids know how to get away with what they do. Or they act like they haven’t done anything, or they cry and get out of it, but a Black person will own up to it like yeah, that’s what I said. And the White girls will cry or something and get out of it. And some teachers don’t know what to do. A Black kid

won't look weak in class. They not going to cry or beg, you know. They gone be solid. So if you raise your voice at a Black kid, we might raise our voice back or something. A White kid will act different. If we say something to the teacher, it's almost like we got to be extra friendly, or it's taken the wrong way. It's not all of the teachers, though."

When Tina was asked why she believed African American and Hispanic students received more suspensions than White students, she stated, "Favoritism. And then sometimes White people, they just they just, I don't know. They just different from us, like we're outgoing. They're quiet in their mess, but like they keep that on the down low. Literally, they do mean girl stuff, you know, that movie. They do stuff like that. And we like outgoing, like a lot of Black people are like me. We loud and don't care about what happens. We will just snap and let everyone know we mad. We don't hide our anger. And we got to work on it, like, because that's not cool. I also think some of the teachers don't know how to deal with Black people. I can walk in class and be like, you know, hey everybody, and the teacher get all mad and want to come sideways because I didn't say something like good day all in a quiet voice. It's crazy."

When Kobe was asked his thoughts regarding research that stated African Americans and Hispanic students have a high rate of suspensions compared to White students, he looked very serious. He said, "You know what, in the Black and Hispanic community, nine times out of 10, if you really think about it, in those areas, the crime rates are higher. With that being said, a lot of these kids have problems battling with their conscience. They don't want to become a product of their environment, but it's hard to stand out and do differently. And that's a big factor when it comes to school, too, because you have Black and Hispanic students who are actually trying, but some teachers look at

them like they are criminals, and it can make you not want to try anymore. You know, like, what's the point.”

Kobe begins to sit on the edge of his seat. He looks down at the floor and takes a deep breath, saying, “It's like we have to do more. Don't show that you are upset because it will be taken wrong. Many Black and Hispanic kids have adult responsibilities. So when you go to school, and people talk down to you or disrespect you, you can't let that go. There is so much pressure. We have to work twice as hard to qualify for any respect. A White kid can get out of pocket or come to class late, and nothing really happens. A Black kid can do the same thing, and before you know it, they are sent out of the class. Many Black kids are not going to let you talk to them any old way. You yell, they will yell. Respect goes both ways. Some teachers just don't relate to Blacks. They are in their own little White-class world. They don't have to try and understand.” He ended his statement with a smile by clarifying, “That's not every White teacher here, but it is too many because one would be too many, right Miss G.”

Summary

This chapter provides the reader with the goal and purpose of the chapter, followed by demographic information about the participants. The narrative of each participant's perception of their experience with their schools' disciplinary policy and practices is also included.

As the researcher, I analyzed the data, six common themes were discovered. The themes were as follows: the excessive length of suspensions, the subjectivity of the discipline policy, the issue with teacher absenteeism, the awareness of the discipline policy, the intrinsic motivation, and the cultural differences. These themes feature the

lived experiences of the study participants regarding their schools' disciplinary policies and practices as they moved about in their learning environment.

Additionally, it is important to note that the participants consciously decided to change their association with specific individuals while at school to avoid being involved in behaviors that resulted in disciplinary action. They, also, wanted to graduate from high school and lead successful lives.

Chapter V: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Chapter Five encapsulates this research study's findings about African American students' perceptions regarding their school's disciplinary policies and procedures. This phenomenological qualitative research study aimed to identify and examine African American students' perceptions of discipline policies and procedures in their school. This study also sought to document, explore, and interpret the lived experience of African American students suspended one or more times.

This phenomenological study focused on the perceptions and experiences of African American students in grades 9-12 concerning their school's disciplinary policies and procedures. It will also investigate students' thoughts on resolving discipline issues as we dive into their experiences regarding suspensions and expulsions. As the researcher, I provide an overview of the themes of the study and discusses the results and perceived thoughts the participants identified. Finally, the relationship between previous research and the findings of this study are explained and recommendations for future research are provided.

Summary

A qualitative design was utilized to investigate the perceived overarching factors impacting the disproportionate rate of suspensions between African American and European American students. During the study, seven African American high school students were allowed to speak candidly with the researcher about their thoughts regarding their school's discipline policies and procedures. Based on the information collected from the participants, six themes were identified. They included the excessive length of suspensions, the subjectivity of the discipline policy, the issue with teacher

absenteeism, awareness of the discipline policy, intrinsic motivation, and cultural differences.

Overview of Themes

In the theme entitled, excessive length of suspensions, participants discussed their concern with the number of days students receive for disorderly conduct, fighting, and being under the influence of drugs. Students may receive 5 or 10 days of out-of-school suspension for "causing a scene" or fighting. Students are also given ten days of suspension for selling, buying, or giving drugs to another individual. Students may also receive ten days of out-of-school suspension if they appear to be under the influence of marijuana or any other drug. Currently, neither school provides drug testing on its site. Therefore, if a student has an odor of marijuana, they are given a ten-day out-of-school suspension. Students are informed that they may go to an outside agency and take a drug test the same day they receive the suspension. If the drug test returns negative, students are not required to finish the 10-day out-of-school suspension. The suspension is removed from the student's record and replaced with excused absences for the days the student was not in attendance. While speaking to the seven participants of the study, they all reiterated that time away from school did not benefit them. The participants stated that time away from school caused them to get further and further behind in their assignments.

The subjectivity of the discipline policy is the second theme. This theme was developed as students discussed their concerns about being called disrespectful or insubordinate. Many students claimed they were never disrespectful to their teacher;

others claimed they did not become disrespectful until the adult in the building became disrespectful.

Teacher absenteeism was another theme derived from speaking with the seven participants. Students discussed the lack of teaching and learning when a substitute teacher was present in their learning environment versus their regular classroom teacher. According to the participants, students were more apt to skip class when they knew their regular teacher was not present. It was also stated that classrooms were often more out of control when the regular classroom teacher was absent from the learning environment.

The next theme focused on the student's awareness of the discipline policy. During the students' conversation with the researcher, many stated they knew nothing of the policy until they broke it. Others said they knew of the policy but did not know of the consequences, such as possibly receiving an out-of-school suspension, recommendation of expulsion, or getting placed in virtual school for the remainder of the school year.

The next theme, intrinsic motivation, was based on asking the students, "What has motivated or discouraged you from performing well in school?" All students stated their motivation was more so internal. According to many of the participants, they had the desire to do better. To improve, they needed to change their relationships with certain people. Due to their suspensions, many had their sights on recouping credits lost during the previous school year. As a result, they did not want to receive another suspension.

The last theme focused on cultural differences between teachers and students. During the interview, participants were allowed to share their views on why African Americans receive more suspensions than European American students. Participants

provided many answers to this question. During this time, some students informed the researcher of their concern about not being understood by their teacher. Finally, participants were asked to share possible solutions to help close the discipline gap between African American and European American students.

Implication

In the United States, it appears as if African American students are subjected to disciplinary actions at greater rates than their European American counterparts. This study focused on four questions to close the disciplinary gap between African American and White students and contribute positively to social change. This change will be evident when policies and procedures are written to include alternative methods of discipline, such as restorative practices, which focus on resolving conflict and promoting healing.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of African American students regarding their high school's disciplinary policies and procedures?
2. What are the lived experiences of African American students who have been suspended one or more times?
3. According to African American high school students, what conditions are perceived as barriers to effective discipline practices?

4. According to African American high school students, what are the perceived factors contributing to African American students receiving a more significant number of disciplinary consequences than White students?

The first two research questions aimed to identify African American students' perceptions of the disciplinary practices in their school. The researcher wanted to show how a school's discipline practices affect students' that are recipients of said practices. Questions three and four were asked to allow students to state what may be wrong or right with their school's policy and provide an opportunity to input any changes they would like to see within their school's policy.

Based on the one-on-one in-depth conversations held by the researcher and participants, all students believed their school should take action on student behavior that may endanger safety or be disruptive to the learning environment. Participants appeared to understand the importance of having policies and procedures in place. Their concern focused on the penalties for fighting, smelling like marijuana, cell phone usage, and dress code. It was the participants' perception that a 10-day suspension from school was extreme, and each of them asked if the number of days could be decreased or provide students with an alternative that would still allow them to engage in learning.

For example, Tina stated, "If I go home for ten days, I'm not gonna do any work. So, I'm just gonna get behind. I'm already taking credit recovery. I mean ten days is a long time. Like, help people with they problems instead of giving them something else to deal with. We could get maybe two days and speak with the counselor. You know, have the people you upset with in there with you. You know, try to work on what the problem is." Wade stated, "If the school want us to do well, why are we getting sent home? We

can't learn if we at the house. I mean, I didn't fight in class. But I can't come to class because I was fighting. I just think something could have been done other than sending me home. I mean, if we had something after school that I could go to and listen to the teacher, it would have been better than being suspended from school." Jason stated, "But honestly, what do the ten days do for us? We not learning anything. Counseling not offered to us. Y'all just don't have to see us. That's the only thing. You get a break. I could kinda see if like I fought in a classroom. I could see saying like I can't come to that class, but ten days for fighting or smelling like weed. Cause I've been sent home for that too. It didn't help me at all. That is one rule that need to change. If y'all want us to graduate, I don't know; I really don't. I mean, something different need to be done. Because there were times when I was like, y'all don't care about us. I know it's not like that. Some of y'all care. I know that. But when you have stuff like this happening, it feels like no one is in your corner."

Research question two 2 was meant to focus on the lived experience of the participants as they dealt with their suspensions from school. All of the students stated the suspension was not beneficial to them academically. One student said that he focused on staying out of trouble when returning to school. Kobe explained, "When you get sent out from class and get suspended, you learn to walk a little differently in that teacher's class. You don't trust them. You go to class and keep your mouth closed. You don't say anything. You don't look their way. That's how I was in the class I was written up in. Now, Ms. G, I know people that will walk in that classroom and do the opposite. They will look at the teacher crazy. I mean you know the student don't like the teacher. It's all in their body language. You don't learn much when you in a class like that. Your focus is

staying out of trouble because you feel like any little thing you do they are out to get you. That might not be true, but sometimes it feels like that." Many students stated that it was difficult to trust their teacher after receiving a write-up, especially if they felt it was unwarranted or the teacher never told them they were receiving an office referral. For example, Tim stated, "I did learn from it [suspension]. I learned that people don't always have your best interest in mind. It's like they're waiting for you to do something wrong. They want you to mess up. You can't trust people that's not for you." Jason added, "I got written up one time for talking in class. I promise the teacher never said anything to me about not talking. The next day I'm in one of my classes, and I get called out to go to the office. This teacher wrote me up for I don't remember the word, but it's like when the teacher asks you to do something, and you don't do it. So I'm sitting in the office looking crazy because I know this teacher never told me to stop talking. It's hard to trust people when they lie on you. It makes you feel some type of way."

Not only did students express trust issues, but the loss of credits was a huge concern. The study participants took credit recovery classes this year or in previous years to reach the number of credits needed for graduation. Students also stated that they felt they had to work two to three times harder to reach their goal of graduating with their peers. Jason explained it best when he said, "Really getting suspended gets you behind. You got to work so much harder to try and catch up. You can't get your work done when you suspended because you need help, and you got no help because people in your house don't know how to do the work. So with me, my grades went down. I didn't get credit. Now I'm working really hard to catch up. Sometimes it feel like I'm having to put in 200, 300%. It's hard, though. I mean, I see why people drop out because it's hard trying to

catch up. I mean, it don't seem fair. I got in a fight and was suspended until the end of the school year. I was already struggling, but putting me in virtual didn't help. I needed to be here so I could ask questions, focus. I just hope that all the work I'm doing now and here on out will be enough for me to cross the stage." Jackie added, "Suspending us don't help. We get behind. I'm taking credit recovery classes now. This is my senior year. I'm still trying to catch up. There are so many other things I should have my mind on. I just don't want to get to the end and hear someone say; I can't walk because I don't have enough credits. That happened to someone I know. Me and this other girl have been put in SAC or sent home. She was supposed to graduate in May, but it didn't happen. Her family was disappointed. I don't want that for me. I don't think I could deal with that."

Research question three asked the participants to identify what they thought were the barriers to effective discipline practices in their school. The participants had plenty to say on this subject. During the interview, students discussed the following barriers: favoritism in the classroom, inconsistency with rules and procedures, adults showing respect to students, and providing engaging assignments during the 80-minute block.

One student, Wade, stated, "I really don't know. I think the teachers may like the White kids better. I don't think I have a solution. Maybe if teachers showed respect and not act mean, it might help. I mean, no cap. You respect me, and I respect you back, but if you act hard with me, yelling, and getting in my face, I'm gone give you the same energy. So I guess be respectful. Don't be quick to think certain students are doing wrong. Don't treat some kids nice and others like you can't stand them. You know what I mean. Oh, oh, also like, you know, like I've been sitting in classes and I'm done with the work in 30 or 40 minutes, you know, something like that. There's nothing to do but talk, put your

head down, get on your phone, or tell the teacher you got to go to the restroom and just, you know, walk the halls because nothing is going on in the class. You know, people just trying to wake up." Jason had similar thoughts when he stated, "I think if we had more fun stuff to do in class, we might not have so many issues. I mean, some days you just sitting in class because you finished the work before the bell rings. You know, and you got nothing to do. I mean, like, you know, some people get on they phone. The teacher will tell them to get off it, and they do, you know, get off the phone, but they get back on it. Well, now you get kicked out the class because you not doing what the teacher told you. But that's not fair. We not doing anything. Why can't we talk or get on the phone or something." Lastly, Tim stated, "Mmm, okay, so you said, what's a solution to the discipline issue? So okay, I would say be fair and consistent. Treat everybody the same. Oh yeah, and just because a kid did something bad the last time you saw them don't mean they are going to do it again. Don't treat him like he's bad, you know, like a criminal. It's a different day. And I guess, don't enforce the rule one day and not the next, or let's say let somebody slide because you like them."

Research question four asked the participants for their views concerning the factors contributing to African American students receiving a more significant number of disciplinary consequences than European American students. When asked this question, many of the students eluded to their teachers not understanding them. Some students also said they did not believe many teachers understood African Americans. For example, Lisa stated, "I have teachers that would call my mom because of something I did. You know, at first, you thinking, why she snitching on me? But you know they care. You don't mind someone telling you right, but they got to be respectful when they do it."

Because if the teacher get out of pocket, we gone do the same and take it to another level. I don't think the White teachers get that about us. Show respect and get respect." Wade chimed in with, "You know, they don't understand us. Like, for real, I'm sitting in this class, and the teacher trying, I guess, to make the class understand whatever it was we were talking about in class, you know, and she start talking about a bidet. I'm not sure if I'm saying it right, but we had no idea what she was talking about. We just sat there. Because you can ask a question, and they think you joking or playing around, but sometimes we don't know what they talking about. So if I don't know what you talking about, I'm not understanding the lesson. Some kids, when they don't understand, will sit there and act like they paying attention, and some will put their head down, get on their phone, talk, or find a way to leave out the class. So we get written up and put in SAC [in school suspension] for for stupid stuff like being on your phone or having your head down on the desk. I mean, three days of SAC [in-school suspension] for that is crazy to me. Most of the things we do is because we don't get what they talking about in class. But like I said, they don't get us so we end up getting put out of class."

The researcher interviewed seven African American students to discover their perceived thoughts about their school's disciplinary practices and the effect of such practices. As the researcher conducted interviews, several themes arose from the participants.

Length of Suspensions. The first theme discussed was the lengthiness of suspensions students received for offenses such as fighting, smelling like marijuana, and disorderly conduct. During the interviews, students stated they were often forced to take exams in which they did not possess adequate knowledge of the information because they

were not present in their learning environment due to their suspension. Therefore, they would score poorly on exams and make-up assignments. With that said, according to the literature, when students are not in class, they miss out on educational opportunities (Anderson et al., 2019; Irby, 2013; Martella et al., 2012). This study seems to confirm previous studies' findings regarding students' missing out on educational opportunities. Lisa stated, "Think about it, sending us home don't help nobody. We not at school, so we not learning. And even if the teacher has the assignments in um Google Classroom, we still not there to hear how to do the work. So, if I turn it in, I'm getting a bad grade. Sometimes you just don't get it, so it don't get done. Then we get back from suspension, and there's all this work that you really don't know how to do. Some of the teachers give us time to do it, but I don't know, it just take a lot. You get, um, what's the word, um, discouraged." All the students involved in the study agreed that lengthy suspensions made it almost impossible to get back on track. Tina stated, "If I go home for ten days, I'm not gonna do any work. So, I'm just gonna get behind. I'm already talking credit recovery. I mean, ten days is a long time."

Subjectivity of the Discipline Policy. There are more suspensions in classrooms with poor classroom management (Kunijufu, 2013). According to the literature, when discussing any school-related behavior management procedure, it is important to implement consistency and fairness when disciplining students (Morrison, 2018; Hagenauer et al., 2015; Bal, 2019). Students know when they are being treated differently. Tina stated, "They [teachers] not always fair. I mean some of them. I was in one of my classes, and the teacher wrote me up for being late. I ended up getting detention. But this girl walked in after me, and the teacher said nothing to her. I mean

nothing at all. I just looked at her [the teacher] crazy because if I would have said something she would have said I was being disrespectful. Then I would have gotten disrespectful."

Intrinsic Motivation. According to the literature for this study, there is a shift from schools implementing non-exclusionary methods of discipline such as detentions, suspensions, and expulsions to more school-wide positive behavior support (Flannery et al., 2009). These school-wide positive behavior supports are a means to combat student misbehavior (Fedders, 2018). It is a means to motivate students to behave and stay on task (Utley et al., 2002). Although most students stated they were intrinsically motivated, they all agreed it would be nice to have incentives as a reminder to do well. For example, when Jason was asked about his motivation and his school providing incentives. He stated, "Like I said, I am my own motivation. I realized I needed to make a change. If I didn't make that change, I might not, um, graduate. I had to make the decision to let some people go. Nobody else could do that. It would have been nice if we had incentives to help us act right, but it would really need to be like something like maybe, um, something big. I don't know, something like a block party. Maybe take us on a trip, like let us go do something fun. I don't know; I'm just throwing stuff out. But you know, whatever, um, you do, y'all have to keep it like on our minds because we we got a lot of stuff going on for real. At least I do..." Wade was unsure if incentives would stop misbehaviors from occurring, but they may still have value. He stated, "Um, well, like I said, it would be good to have incentives. I don't know if it would stop people from fighting or something like that, but I do think maybe people would think about their actions more. Like if you a senior and you know can't go to the prom if you act a fool or something. You know, as a

senior, you will try your best not to fight because you wanna go to your prom. So like, the incentive would have to be big enough to make you think, you know, um, I don't want to miss out. You know, something that gives us like, um, you know, an opportunity, yeah, um, for us to be with our friends or something."

Teacher Absenteeism. When comparing teacher absences to other occupations, teacher absences are almost twice as frequent (Shapira-Lishchinsky & Ishan, 2013). More than half of all school staff is composed of teachers, and their presence in the classroom is vital to the normal operation of a school day (Foldesy & Foster, 1989). According to the participants, when teachers are not at school, students tend to misbehave significantly. Lisa stated, "Sometimes, when we have subs, it can get crazy. Kids will skip class, and skipping gets you SAC [in-school suspension]. But kids will skip or get on the phone. There's lots of talking. Sometimes the subs will put you out. Sometimes we end up going to SAC. [In-school suspension]. Well, not me because I don't do that. At least not anymore. I'm trying to get my credits so I can graduate, but kids do things they shouldn't when the teacher not there." Tim stated, "The the behavior change so much because it's like the things that they don't do while the teachers there, they think they can do when the sub is there. They might get in trouble that day or whenever the teacher get back. But no doubt, you getting in trouble. You're going to at least get SAC. It just depends on what you did because you could get more." With that said, teacher absenteeism has a negative effect on both student achievement and student attendance (Shapira-Lishchinsky & Ishan, 2013).

Awareness of Policy. According to the participants of this study, they were not provided with the consequences for breaking the rules. Many stated if they knew they

would lose credit or get kicked out of school, they might have reacted differently. Discipline should be proactive (McLeod et al., 2003). Students need to have all the facts. Jason stated, "When they go over the handbook and tell us what not to do, I think maybe they should add the punishment. Tell us, hey, you do this, you'll get suspended. Like tell us that and say what that mean. When I had my meeting about being expelled, I didn't know what that meant." Jason looks down and starts to smile as he says, "I might have took them punches and not fought back. But for real, thinking you might be gone for one or two days is different from, hey, you might be gone for 5 or 10 days or more. You might not come back until next year. I think knowing that might make a person think twice. So they need to do a better job of getting that information out to us. You know, make sure we understand. Don't just read the stuff to us, but like I, um, said, make sure we got it, make sure we really understand. And go over it more than once. Keep it on our minds."

Cultural Differences. According to the literature, culturally responsive teaching is when an educator uses the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as channels for teaching them successfully (Gay, 2002). It is based on the premise that teaching should relate to students' lived experiences to make learning more meaningful (Gay, 2002). While speaking with the study participants, Lisa stated, "Mm, I also think maybe some teachers have trouble relating to us." When I asked her to expound, she stated, "Okay, so you said not to use names, so um, I have a teacher who will start explaining stuff, but we have no idea about what she is talking about. We looking around like 'what.' I mean, she really be up there thinking she really teaching. Like this one time she was trying to explain something, I don't even remember what it

was about, but she said something like, um what was it, um, oh yeah, something about when you go mountain climbing..." At this point, Lisa begins to laugh. She continued, "You have to make sure, and she said something, but we over here looking at each other like what is she talking about? And this one boy said, "We don't have mountains in the hood." Everybody started laughing. And, um, this teacher, Miss Grady, she got mad. She start talking about we were being disrespectful. I mean, it was funny. We weren't being disrespectful, but that's how she saw it, I guess." Wade added, "Um, let the teachers know, just because they see a group of us together, it don't mean we getting ready to fight. We like to talk to our friends, and I know we can get a little loud, but we like to express ourselves. Sometimes, three or four Black dudes can walk down the hall or in the class, and they think we about to fight. It's the same thing with the girls. I mean, stop thinking we always about that life, you know. We like to laugh and have a good time."

Conclusions

The disproportionate number of suspensions and expulsions of African American students compared to European American students has been a subject of discussion for years among educators, politicians, and the media. Despite nationwide recognition of this issue, the efficacy of alternative methods to suspending and expelling students has not been widely executed with students in grades nine through twelve. In conducting this study, the researcher arrived at three conclusions. They are 1) Inclusion in the Creation of Policies and Procedures, 2) Culturally Relevant Training for Teachers, and 3) Implementation of Alternative Discipline Practices.

Inclusion in the Creation and Distribution of Discipline Policies and Procedures

According to Jason, bringing students to the table when discussing school policies and practices regarding discipline may positively influence the school climate. He stated, "No, they don't ask our thoughts about discipline. It would be, I guess, show that they want to solve the issues and not just give up and send us out of class or home when a rule is broken. If we were included and really listened to, we might actually do better." When asked about student involvement in creating his school's disciplinary policy, Wade stated, "Um, No. We don't have a say. We have nothing to do with it, you know, as far as I know. They tell us what to do, and that's how it is. If we don't do it, we get in trouble. You know SAC [in-school suspension] or sent home. Um. If we had a say in it, the rules would be better. People wouldn't get in trouble for wearing a hat. I mean, kids can walk around and feel good because no one wants someone yelling at them about taking a hat off. It just has a way of ruining your day when people are constantly fussing about things that don't really matter." Another participant, Lisa, stated, "Oh no, we don't get that. We don't get to say nothing. Someone put it together, and that's that. You basically, just like, if you do something, it's like, oh well, take this consequence. I feel like sometimes, like we have reasons on why we do stuff, so I feel like we should get to at least explain why we have done what we did. But it's more of let's pull the cameras. We don't care why. This is the consequence. But maybe if we help with putting it [the policy] together, we can include listening to us and maybe doing something to help deal with the cause because some people fight, get sent home, and come after the suspension and end up fighting again. So having something in our policy to help get to why we did what we did may help keep us from getting kicked out of school. But it would be good to have

students help with putting the policy together." As Lisa continued, she brought up an essential point of ensuring all students were included in creating the discipline policy. She stated, "And don't just use the smart people. Include kids like the ones that have been in trouble. We're important, and we got ideas. Just no one ask us for what we think."

Based on the information obtained from the study participants, students do not have an opportunity to develop or review discipline policies at their school. A solution to this problem would be to create a school-wide discipline policy committee that had student representation from all ethnic and economic backgrounds. In addition, the student representatives would meet annually with faculty and administrators to develop and review discipline policies and practices at their school.

Culturally Relevant Training for Teachers

First, let us begin by discussing what culturally relevant teaching involves. Culturally relevant teaching encompasses using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of culturally diverse students to make learning relevant to students (Gay, 2000). Schools that have positive school culture have educators that are problem solvers (Kunjufu, 2013). Districts and preservice teaching programs must equip teachers with the tools to educate all students. A great teacher has mastered the art and skill of teaching content in a way so that every child in their classroom comprehends and learns (McLeod, 2017). In other words, culturally relevant teachers can integrate life skills into their lessons that speak to their students' experiences (Ellis, 2021). These teachers take the time to make their content relevant by listening and learning about their student's interests and values (Ellis, 2021). This inclusion means they have a way of creating meaningful, fun, and engaging bell-to-bell

lessons which integrate their students' interests and values into the curriculum (Ellis, 2021).

When teachers incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy in their lessons, students are empowered to examine what they are learning. They create and construct meaningful conversations in classroom discussions and see their culture in curriculum and instruction; so they may understand how their culture contributed to society (Milner, 2010). John stated, "I also think we get in trouble because we don't know what they are talking about, and we get bored. I mean, sometimes I think they are talking to themselves. So I just try to finish my work the best I can." He continued, "I finish my work, and there's nothing else to do. I want to put my head on my desk. But you can get sent out for that. You know if the teacher has to keep telling you to sit up. So I try not to. But you know what, kids usually get sent out when they finish working and got nothing to do." Lisa stated, "I remember, like when I was little, we did different things in class. It was fun. You know, like, um, the teachers didn't just sit at the desk and have us copy notes from the board or work a bunch of problems in IXL or something. I feel like back then, I was actually learning something. Now, I'm just trying to get a good grade so I can graduate. This stuff means nothing to me. It's not like I'm going to use it once I leave here." Tina complimented one of her teachers by stating, "[She] helps us understand the lesson. She talks about things we know about. It makes understanding math easy. She break it down so I can understand it. I never ever get in trouble in her class. I like going to her class. I actually learn from her." Also, Lisa stated, "I do have a teacher that is good. She teaches, and if you still don't get it, she teach it a different way. She, um, breaks it down. She do different things to help you get it." When asked for more detail, Lisa stated,

"It could be something like talking about a rapper or something. It's like something I know about. I don't know. She just know how to teach. I can't really explain it. I just know she helps me understand the work."

A solution to this concern might include providing ongoing professional development opportunities regarding culturally relevant teaching. This PD may allow teachers to look at their own biases. Teachers should also utilize opportunities to interact positively with students from different cultures. This interaction may include attending sporting events and parades or participating in events within the community. Although this will provide opportunities for teachers to educate themselves and build stronger cross-cultural relationships, it is essential to ensure teachers do not appropriate the culture. As with all students, when staff members take the time to get to know students by intentionally pronouncing their names correctly, smiling while greetings, and asking a question will assist in building positive cross-cultural relationships with all students.

Implementation of Alternative Discipline Practices

African American students are removed from class instruction more often than European American students (Derlikowski, 2013; Anderson, et al., 2019; Martella et al., 2012; Vincent et al., 2012). It is a known fact that schools that issue fewer suspensions to students perform better on academic tests (Derlikowski, 2013). Therefore, implementing alternative discipline practices such as restorative justice and positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) may decrease the rate at which African American students are issued suspensions. According to research, both restorative justice and PBIS are considered to be two of the best practices.

Restorative Justice. Restorative justice is a community-building process that aims to heal broken relationships between the offender and the victim. During the interview process of this study, Tina stated, "I can't be disrespected. It shows weakness. If you show you weak, people will keep coming for you. So I gots to be like this. I've asked if I could talk with people that I'm about to fight. But they, like, no, we can't do that. They want to talk to us separate, you know. I guess they think we gone start fighting. I guess. I don't know. But I've asked to talk to try and get things handled before I start fighting, no caps. But like I said, they can't make it stop, so you know, I'm gonna do me and handle it my way. I don't care." Hearing this statement from Tina and similar comments from other participants in the study shows a need to provide students with opportunities to discuss the problem they are having with someone and help them develop solutions to the issue.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports provides a proactive approach to discipline, helps set clear behavior expectations, and rewards students who exhibit appropriate behavior. When talking with participants, many stated that they did not clearly understand the school's expectations and the consequences that may occur due to not meeting the expected expectations. Lisa stated, "Everybody does something different around here. Like I said before, I can get kicked out of one class for talking but not another. Or like, um, I can go to this class and get on my phone, and the teacher don't say nothing, but some days later, she fussing about get off the phone. So you know it's like how you gone let me get on my phone one time, but I can't get on it today. Now, I'm getting written up, but a few days ago, nothing was said. That makes no sense whatsoever." With that said, implementing PBIS may be

beneficial at the secondary level because one of its focuses is setting clear behavior expectations school-wide.

Restructuring In School Suspension. Many students stated they did not learn anything while in SAC (In-school suspension). A few participants complained about needing help understanding assignments sent to them while they were in SAC or only receiving busy work such as word puzzles. Others stated they never received work while they were in SAC. Lisa stated, "It's as if you are forgotten. You just sit there. You can't do the work, or you finish the work and have nothing to do. You can't put your head down. You can't talk. You can't get on your phone. It's like you're in a cell. A little tiny cell, like, um, prison. Nobody cares if you don't have any work. Just sit there and do your time. Don't say a word. If you break a rule, they add more days to your sentence or send you to the house." Jason stated, "Like, why put people in SAC and don't give them work to do so they don't get behind? If you sat in a room all day with nothing to do, you will get tired. You start to fall asleep. It's not like you're trying to. So they add more days or send you home. Now two days can be three or four days. I don't get it. I mean, I know it's a, um, punishment, and they don't want us to, like, have fun or anything, but we should still learn something. Why can't a real teacher come in SAC with us and help us with our work? I mean, we suppose to be in school to learn, right? But when you in SAC, you not learning nothing." So, with that said, why not have quality instruction occurring in the in-school suspension classroom?

For example, teachers could record their lessons and upload them to their Google Classroom. Recording classes would allow students who missed class to engage in learning by clicking their teachers' Google links. Another idea to consider is live-

streaming classroom instruction into the SAC room. This live stream would allow the SAC students to hear and see what is taught in the classroom. Streaming would also benefit students who are quarantined or absent due to other issues such as a death in the family, sickness, etc. Teachers could volunteer to rotate in and out of the SAC room during their 80-minute prep period. Teachers could teach a 15 to 20-minute mini-lesson or use the time to answer any student concerns or questions from a prerecorded lesson.

Saturday School. Instead of missing classroom instruction by getting SAC, students could receive Saturday School. During this time, students complete assignments and receive tutoring. Students could also communicate one to one with a counselor or therapist. Counselors could engage students in techniques to help them deal with anger issues and build character. During this time, counselors could also incorporate conflict resolution techniques among students having issues with each other.

Behavior Intervention Room. A behavior intervention room is a room that serves as a support for students. Students may go to the intervention room when they feel overwhelmed or may have been disruptive to the learning environment. The interventionist would spend time communicating with the student regarding their issue. This time of communication would be a time for students to reflect on their actions and discuss alternative means that could have taken place in the classroom. The behavioral interventionist would use this time to assist students in building positive relationships with their peers, teachers, and other staff members. The intervention room would also have supplies and resources to help students relax. For example, students may use this time to cool down as they engage in painting, drawing, reading, writing, or yoga. In addition, students would spend up to one class period in the intervention room.

Utilizing Teen Court (Community Service.) Another means of keeping students in their learning environment would be using the school's teen court program. The teen court would benefit the teen defendants and the peer jurors. Teen defendants are given real-life exposure to the court process. They may learn from their courtroom experience and make decisions to avoid later exposure to the judicial system.

Most importantly, the teen defendant does not miss time from engaging in classroom instruction. The peer jurors also receive real-life experiences as they learn about the legal system. They get to see a courtroom and receive exposure to formal courtroom procedures. As they receive training, peer jurors learn to think critically and analytically.

Finally, it has been shown that in-school and out-of-school suspensions cause students to lose valuable time in their learning environment. If educating students is our top goal, we must teach more than reading, writing, and arithmetic. We must also teach students social skills. We should also take the time to encourage students to do well even after they have made a mistake. One mistake should not determine a student's worth. When students return from a suspension, there should be a plan of action to help the student get on the right track and become productive members of the school community. Tina stated, "I also disagree with being sent home for ten days for fighting or arguing. If I'm getting sent home for ten days for arguing, I'm gone, go ahead and fight." That statement stayed with me for many days. As educators, when correcting misbehavior, it is vital to ensure the punishment fits the misconduct. If this is not done, when punishment is greater than the actual act of the student, it could cause the student to raise their action to the level of the punishment. Therefore we must build positive relationships with students,

become strategic in dealing with misbehaving students and find alternatives to giving students in-school or out-of-school for minor offenses. Just like a doctor cannot prescribe the same treatment to every patient, the same punishment cannot be prescribed to every student for every situation. Exclusionary penalties such as out-of-school suspensions and expulsion should exist for major offenses. Such offenses might be bringing or using weapons at school, selling or being under the influence of narcotics, engaging in gang violence, or inflicting physical harm to a student, faculty, or staff member, to name a few.

Recommendations for Future Research

The overall attempt of this study was to bring the human element to the research that shows African American students receive more suspensions than other ethnic groups. To do this, the researcher focused on the lived experiences of African American students that received one or more days of in-school or out-of-school suspension. This research could be extended to include the following:

1. What are school administrators' perceptions of disciplinary practices to address student misbehavior?
2. What are parents' perceptions of disciplinary practices at their child's school?
3. What are teachers' perceptions of disciplinary practices to address student misbehavior?
4. What are the students that have not been suspended perceptions of disciplinary practices to address student misbehavior? (Gender, Ethnicity, and Grade Level)
5. Determine if there is a relationship between the number of referrals written and teaching experience.

Closing Remarks

From the beginning, I knew this dissertation would focus on discipline practices in a high school setting. I was unsure if I would focus on teachers' or students' perceptions regarding the discipline practices at their high school. The deciding factor came at the beginning of the 2021 school year when an African American student approached me and wanted to talk. As we entered my office, the young lady was visibly upset. Her friend was sent home for five days due to having a verbal altercation with another student. In her mind, the punishment did not fit the misconduct. She was convinced that the adults in the building did not care about specific students. From the discourse with this particular student, I knew this study needed to inquire about the perceptions of students recommended for expulsion or suspension one or more days within a school year. I hoped to gain insight from those that were affected the most by exclusionary discipline practices. With this newfound insight, it is expected that actions would take place to engage in conversations to determine alternative ways to help students remain in their learning environment. Finally, the efforts should assist in developing students with much-needed skills to function productively in an ever-changing world.

The voices of our students must be heard. Discipline must be approached, not punitively but with the mindset to positively change behavior and teach skills to help students cope in everyday circumstances. I am grateful for my candid conversations with participants during the one-to-one interviews. They shared their hopes, their dreams, and their concerns. Because of said conversations with participants of this study, I could see the adverse effects of exclusionary practices of the discipline. I was able to see the human

behind the punishment. Because of this, I am more determined to advocate for alternative methods of discipline within secondary schools. School is not a pipeline to the prison system. Instead, it is a conduit to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all students.

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APPENDIX A

Request to Conduct Research

February 14, 2022

██████████ School District
Attention: ██████████, Superintendent of Schools
██████████, Arkansas 72114

Re: Seeking Permission to Conduct Research

Greetings ██████████,

I am Sylvia Grady. I am a doctoral student at Arkansas Tech University. I also serve as an assistant principal in our district. Currently, I am in the preliminary stages of studying the disproportionate rate of discipline referrals and suspensions among African American students.

Although I have spoken briefly with you concerning conducting my study, I wanted to reach out to you formally. At this time I am seeking permission to conduct my research. During the study, I would collect archived data, conduct surveys, and interview educators and students that are housed at the high school and ██████████. By conducting this study, I hope to bring to the forefront the perceived causes that may contribute to the high number of suspensions among African American students.

Once the study is approved by you, I would not begin recruiting participants until my proposal is approved by Arkansas Tech University's Institutional Review Board. In addition, all participants' identities would be kept confidential, and the identity of our district would be concealed.

In conclusion, any support you can provide would be greatly appreciated. If you authorize me to move forward with my request to conduct my research, I would appreciate confirmation. Please confirm by responding to this email. If there is further information needed to make your decision, please let me know. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

In kindest regards,

Sylvia Grady

APPENDIX B

Request for an Interview and/or Completion of Survey

February 25, 2022

Dear _____,

I am a doctoral student at Arkansas Tech University in the department of Educational Leadership. Currently, I am in the preliminary stages of studying the disproportionate rate of discipline referrals and suspensions among African American students. For this study, I would like to get your insight on the perceived causes that may contribute to the high number of suspensions among African American students.

The interview will consist of open-ended questions. The interview and/survey should take less than an hour. The interview and survey responses are completely confidential. I will be the only one to have access to the confidential raw data. If you agree to participate in the study, please place an X next to the instrument you wish to participate in and sign the attached consent form.

In kindest regards,

Sylvia Grady

_____ Interview Only

_____ Survey Only

_____ Both Interview and Survey

APPENDIX C

Consent, Assent, & Parental Permission for Participation in Research

This research examines the perceived causes that may contribute to the high number of suspensions among African American students. Participants will be asked to complete a survey, participate in an interview and/or focus groups. Teen participants are asked to participate in an interview with the researcher.

RISKS

There are no risks to answering interview questions and/or completing a survey. Your responses are completely confidential.

BENEFITS

Although the results of this study may benefit others in the future, there is no direct benefit to you by participating in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESPONSES

Your responses are strictly confidential. Only the primary researcher will have access to the confidential raw data.

Note: For focus groups, the researcher will keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, it is possible that other people may become aware of your participation in this study. For example, since one of the elements of this study is a focus group, other people in the focus group will be aware of what is shared in the group. Each individual in the focus group is asked not to share the discussions of the group outside of the group, but the researcher(s) cannot guarantee confidentiality in that setting.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW OR DECLINE TO PARTICIPATE

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. If you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, you may discontinue your participation at any time.

POTENTIAL TEEN PARTICIPANTS

This form also serves as an assent form. That means that if you choose to take part in this study, you would sign this form to confirm your choice. Your parent or guardian would also need to give their permission and sign this form for you to participate in the study.

PARENTS/GUARDIANS

This form also serves as a parental permission form. If you decide that your child can take part in this study, you would sign this form to confirm your decision. If you sign this form, you will receive a signed copy for your records.

I attest that I have read and understand the above description, including potential risks and benefits, and my rights as a participant. I hereby give my informed consent to participate in this research study.

Participant's Signature

_____ Date _____

Parent Signature (if participant minor)

_____ Date _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions for Students

1. As a student, how would you describe the climate of your school? Please elaborate.
2. Do students have a say in defining the discipline policy/practices at your school? How does that make you feel? Please elaborate.
3. What are the existing discipline practices in your school that you agree and disagree with? Please explain why.
4. How has your school communicated its discipline policy/practices to you and your guardian?
5. What additions or deletions would you like to take place with the current discipline policy/practice at your school?
6. Tell me about a time when instructional/teaching time was hindered due to discipline issues in the classroom? Please elaborate.
7. In the last 6 months how many substitute teachers have you had? How was the overall behavior of the students in those classes? Please elaborate.
8. According to research, African-American and Hispanic students have a high rate of suspensions in comparison to White students. What do you believe are the causes for the disproportion and what are some possible solutions?
9. Have you ever received a suspension? If yes, did receiving the suspension (out-of-school or in-school) change your behavior? If so, how? If not, why?
10. What has motivated or discouraged you from performing well in school?

11. What incentives are in place to encourage positive behavior in the building and what incentives would you like to see in the building to encourage positive behavior? Please elaborate.
12. Do you enjoy coming to school? Why or Why not.
13. What support systems do you have at school (if any)? If none, what supports would you like to have when you are at school?
14. Do you have anything you would like to add?

Thank you for taking time out of your schedule to visit with me. I hope you have a wonderful day. Good-bye.

APPENDIX H

Student Survey Questions

(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

1. I feel safe at school.

(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5)

Strongly Agree

2. At my school, the adults are respectful to the students in the building.

(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5)

Strongly Agree

3. At my school students are respectful to the adults in the building.

(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5)

Strongly Agree

4. There is an adult at [REDACTED] that I feel comfortable going to if I need assistance.

(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5)

Strongly Agree

5. I believe students misbehave in class because they are bored.

(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5)

Strongly Agree

6. I believe students misbehave in class because they are distracted by events occurring on social media sites and/or using their cell phones during class.

(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5)
Strongly Agree

7. Suspensions are harmful because suspended students fall behind in their classwork.

(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5)
Strongly Agree

8. Suspensions are used too much at my school. (This includes in-school suspension (SAC) and out-of-school suspensions).

(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5)
Strongly Agree

9. Suspended students come back to school with a positive attitude and a willingness to change their behavior.

(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5)
Strongly Agree