

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Doctor of Education Dissertations

School of Education

Fall 2020

Principal Perceptions: The Impact of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports on Discipline Disproportionality

Courtney K. Johnson

Gardner-Webb University, ckjohnson2791@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education-dissertations>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Johnson, Courtney K., "Principal Perceptions: The Impact of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports on Discipline Disproportionality" (2020). *Doctor of Education Dissertations*. 22.
<https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education-dissertations/22>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Education Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. For more information, please see [Copyright and Publishing Info](#).

PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS: THE IMPACT OF POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL
INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS ON DISCIPLINE DISPROPORTIONALITY

By
Courtney K. Johnson

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2020

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Courtney K. Johnson under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

Stephen Laws, EdD
Committee Chair

Date

Steve Stone, EdD
Committee Member

Date

Larry Putnam, EdD
Committee Member

Date

Prince Bull, PhD
Dean of the School of Education

Date

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to take this time to honor my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who has sustained, guided, and granted me the strength to accomplish such a task as this. I am grateful for the Spirit of Christ that comforted me and gave me the wisdom to write this dissertation. Second, I am grateful for my husband Joshua who stood by me. I am appreciative of his patience, support, prayers, and unconditional love. Being newlyweds during this process required a lot of understanding; and when I had to take time away from “us” to write, he never complained. Thank you for being my safe place, my biggest supporter, my covering, and my unending inspiration.

I am eternally grateful for my family for encouraging me to do this and for cheering me on these last few years. I would like to thank my parents whose love and guidance are always consistent; thank you for being my motivation. To my siblings who continued giving me hope and the encouragement I needed. To my grandfather, Apostle Fred Graham, for covering me and praying for me to achieve all that God has put inside of me. I will take your words with me always: “God has something great for you to do baby.”

I am appreciative to those with whom I have had the pleasure to work during this journey. To each member of my dissertation committee, thank you for your guidance and expertise. To the great Dr. Steven Laws, my dissertation chair, I cannot say thank you enough. Your support, mentorship, and genuine belief in my ability has meant more than I could ever articulate. To my assistant principal, thank you for all of the help throughout this process. Thank you for putting me in contact with district participants and showing me how things are done in the division.

Abstract

PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS: THE IMPACT OF POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS ON DISCIPLINE DISPROPORTIONALITY.

Johnson, Courtney K., 2020: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

This study explored the impact of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework on discipline disproportionality in an Eastern Virginia school division. Nationally, African American students are suspended and expelled at a much higher rate than their peers (Skiba et al., 2016). This study explored the impact PBIS had on this rate. The work is valuable to those interested in introducing the PBIS framework in their school division or school. A phenomenological, qualitative study was conducted with the first research question using discipline data from the division to track trends. The second research question was answered by interviewing principals within the division. The results of this study showed that PBIS did not impact the rate of disproportionality in the schools in this study; however, principals perceived that PBIS did have a positive impact on student behavior, school culture, and the overall discipline program of their school. This work adds to the body of research that PBIS does have a positive impact on school culture and school discipline. On the other hand, PBIS will require a more concerted focus on equity in order to make strides against impacting discipline disproportionality.

Keywords: positive behavioral interventions and supports, disproportionality, discipline, principal perceptions, PBIS

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Statement of Purpose	7
Research Questions.....	9
Significance of the Study	9
Theoretical Framework.....	10
Keywords Defined	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review	14
Introduction.....	14
CRT.....	14
History of Discipline.....	19
Disproportionality in Behavior Expectations.....	22
Corporal Punishment	23
Exclusionary Discipline	27
Zero Tolerance Policies	31
The Impact of the Principal.....	33
Principal Perspectives on Discipline and Disproportionality	35
Culturally Responsive School Leaders	38
PBIS	42
Tiers of PBIS.....	44
Cultural Responsiveness Within PBIS.....	47
Principal Perspectives on PBIS.....	49
Summary	52
Chapter 3: Methodology	55
Purpose	55
Research Method	55
Study Participants	56
Research Design.....	58
Instrumentation Validity	61
Interview Questions	62
Ethical Considerations	63
The Researcher.....	64
Summary	64
Chapter 4: Results	66
Sample	66
Data Collection	67
Data and Analysis	68
School Enrollment Data.....	69
Research Question 1: How has the implementation of PBIS Impacted the Number and Percentage of African American Students Being Suspended?	78
Discipline Data Summary	88
Research Question 2: What Are the Perceptions of Principals Regarding the Impact of the PBIS Framework on School Discipline, Student Behavior, and Disproportionality?	89

Principal Experience	89
Principals Define Disproportionality	90
Principal Perceptions: PBIS and School Culture	91
Principal Perceptions: PBIS and Student Behavior	94
Principal Perceptions: PBIS and School Discipline Program.....	96
Principal Perceptions: Student Discipline and Their Peers.....	99
Principal Perceptions: PBIS and Disproportionality.....	100
Principal Perceptions: PBIS Enhancement	101
Principal Remarks.....	102
Summary of Results.....	104
Chapter 5: Discussion	106
Interpretation of Findings	107
Disproportionality Data	107
Analysis of Findings for Research Question 1: How Has the Implementation of PBIS Impacted the Number and Percentage of African American Students Being Suspended?	108
Analysis of Findings for Research Question 2: What Are the Perceptions of Principals Regarding the Impact of the PBIS Framework on School Discipline, Student Behavior, and Disproportionality?	110
Principals Define Disproportionality	110
Principal Perceptions: PBIS and School Culture	111
Principal Perceptions: PBIS and Student Behavior	113
Principal Perceptions: PBIS and School Discipline Program.....	114
Principal Perceptions: Student Discipline and Their Peers.....	117
Principal Perceptions: PBIS and Disproportionality.....	118
Principal Perceptions: PBIS Enhancement	119
Principal Remarks.....	120
Implications for Theory and Research.....	122
Implications for Practice	125
Recommendations for Further Research.....	127
Limitations/Delimitations of the Study.....	128
Conclusion	130
References	131
Appendices	
A Division Approval to Conduct Study.....	150
B Email of Invitation to Principals	152
C Informed Consent Form.....	154
D Interview Protocol.....	157
Tables	
1 Participant Demographics.....	89
2 Disproportionality Data	107
Figures	
1 Nationwide Student Demographics	4
2 Corporal Punishment in Schools.....	26
3 The PBIS Triangle	47
4 School A Enrollment.....	69

5	School B Enrollment.....	70
6	School C Enrollment.....	71
7	School D Enrollment.....	72
8	School E Enrollment.....	73
9	School F Enrollment.....	74
10	School G Enrollment.....	75
11	School H Enrollment.....	76
12	School I Enrollment.....	77
13	School J Enrollment.....	78
14	School A Discipline Data.....	79
15	School B Discipline Data.....	80
16	School C Discipline Data.....	81
17	School D Discipline Data.....	82
18	School E Discipline Data.....	83
19	School F Discipline Data.....	84
20	School G Discipline Data.....	85
21	School H Discipline Data.....	86
22	School I Discipline Data.....	87
23	School J Discipline Data.....	88

Chapter 1: Introduction

Principals are a vital part of ensuring student success. The actions of a principal help maintain a positive school climate, motivate school staff, and enhance teacher practice regularly. The way discipline is handled in a school impacts every individual in the school, the division, and community at large. Equity in discipline is a need, not a mere desire. The growing change in responsibilities that principals have can help or hurt the time spent on handling discipline issues the best way possible. Students need principals who believe in their potential and are willing to establish a culture that supports positive behavior choices rather than consistently utilizing reactive punishments. Ultimately, school leadership has significant implications for student experiences and accomplishments (Levin & Bradley, 2019).

Discipline is a common word in the field of education. There are new discipline policies, initiatives, and concerns every year. The Office of Civil Rights requires school divisions across the United States to submit their discipline data annually, and each year the conclusion is similar. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), minority students are disciplined at disproportionate rates, and the reason remains unclear. More specifically, African American students are more likely to receive disciplinary actions than other student groups (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016). This conclusion is not new to America; it has been a documented issue since 1975, yet no true changes are being made. Although history documents the existence of racial disparities in school discipline data, there has been little systemic exploration of possible explanations (Skiba et al., 2002). The numbers are still growing, the rates of disproportionality are still rising, and we are seemingly collecting data

without a purpose. According to former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, positive discipline policies can help create safer learning environments without relying heavily on suspensions and expulsions (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Education Secretary Arne Duncan and then-Attorney General Eric Holder unveiled the first-ever set of national school discipline guidelines, calling on school divisions to rethink their policies. This birthed a robust agreement in favor of exploring less punitive and more restorative disciplinary practices (Cohen, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

Coates (2015) penned these words:

I came to see the streets and the schools as arms of the same beast. One enjoyed the official power of the state while the other enjoyed its implicit sanction. But fear and violence were the weaponry of both. Fail in the streets and the crews would catch you slipping and take your body. Fail in the schools and you would be suspended and sent back to those same streets, where they would take your body. And I began to see these two arms in relation—those who failed in the schools justified their destruction in the streets. The society could say, "He should have stayed in school," and then wash its hands of him. (p. 33)

Coates poetically recounted his childhood in Baltimore, Maryland in his book and described the role of schools in disenfranchising young people of color, specifically through the practice of suspension. The quoted portion of page 33 provides an eye-opening revelation of what many students of color in the United States face. Coates's stories bring to light the inner workings of the pipeline that leads from school to prison, or death (Ford, 2016).

Students of color, especially Black males, are at higher risk for office referrals, suspension, and expulsion. African American students continue to be more likely than White students to be disciplined and expelled from school (Skiba et al., 2016). Every school receives a discipline referral data review at the culmination of every fiscal year; and the results are consistent across the nation. American Indian, Black, and Hispanic students experience suspensions more frequently than their White peers (Burke & Nishioka, 2014). “Minority overrepresentation in school punishment is by no means a new issue. Extensive investigations of school punishments have been consistent in raising questions concerning socioeconomic and racial disproportionality in the administration of school discipline” (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 318).

The discipline gap between children of color (African American, Hispanic/Latinx, and other minority groups) and Whites has been well documented in a range of exclusionary discipline practices including office disciplinary referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and corporal punishment (Skiba et al., 2011). Disproportionality in this review refers to the overrepresentation of minority students in suspensions and discipline referrals (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016).

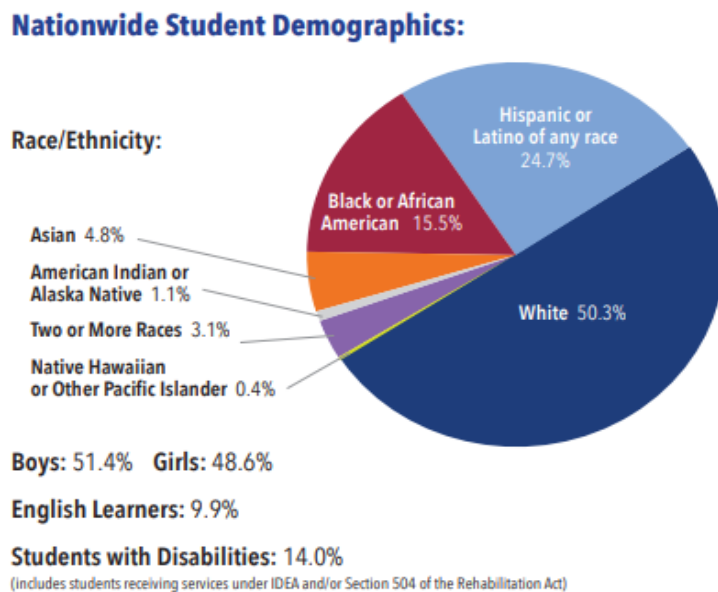
Emerging trends show an increase in the disproportionate rates of student discipline between Whites and Latinxs as they age, especially in California’s ten largest school districts and there is growing concern that the disproportionality in student discipline outcomes is a result of conscious or unconscious racial and gender biases at the school level. (Losen & Skiba, 2010, p. 8)

According to the 2013-2014 Office of Civil Rights Report, there were 49,917,157 students enrolled in public schools across the United States of America (U.S. Department

of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016). In that breakdown, roughly 16% of those students were African American and over 50% were Caucasian American (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016). According to these statistics, the majority of students in the United States are White, yet African Americans receive the most discipline referrals and suspensions overall. Black students are suspended and expelled three times more often than White students. Figure 1 gives a visual display of the racial/ethnic breakdown of students in the United States of America during the 2013-2014 school year.

Figure 1

Nationwide Student Demographics



Note. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the race/ethnicity makeup of the United States of America during 2013-2014. In addition to race and ethnicity, there is a breakdown of the sex and educational status of the students in the U.S. during the 2013-2014 school year (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016).

On average, 5% of White students are suspended, compared to 16% of Black

students (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Other minority groups (American Indian and Native-Alaskan) are also disproportionately suspended and expelled (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Civil Rights Data Collection also states that students of certain racial or ethnic groups are disciplined at far higher rates than their peers even beginning in preschool (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016). This is causing certain groups of students to lose important instructional time due to the use of exclusionary discipline (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Students of color (African American, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native American students specifically) are more likely than White students to face exclusionary discipline (Skiba et al., 2014). Black students are significantly more likely to be suspended for subjective offenses such as disrespect, insubordination, and disruption than their White peers (Heilbrun et al., 2015).

This has been on the radar since 1975 when the Children's Defense Fund's survey data suggested that racial disproportionality was particularly problematic in secondary schools as the suspension rates for African American students were significantly higher than their peers. National, state, and local data show obvious patterns of African American disproportionality in school discipline over the past 40 years (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

The Office of Civil Rights data shows that while the majority of suspended students were White (471,948 of the 927,729 suspended students whose ethnicity was identified), the suspension rates for Blacks were much higher. In elementary school, Blacks were suspended three times as often as Whites (1.5 versus 0.5) In secondary school, Blacks were almost twice as likely than Whites to be suspended

(11.8 versus 6.0). (Children's Defense Fund, 1975, p. 74)

The discipline gaps between children of color (African American, Hispanic/Latinx, and other minority groups) and Whites have been well documented in a range of exclusionary discipline practices including office disciplinary referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and corporal punishment (Skiba et al., 2011).

Fabelo et al. (2011) conducted a study of all seventh-grade students in Texas over the course of approximately 6 years. The researchers controlled for 83 different variables (i.e., differences in student behavior, school discipline policies, socioeconomic class, language proficiency, attendance, teacher experience/qualifications, and school resources/per-pupil expenditures) allowing them to focus on the effect of race alone on disciplinary actions. The study found that African American students were 31% more likely to receive disciplinary action compared to otherwise identical White and Latinx students (Fabelo et al., 2011). Skiba et al. (2011) studied 364 elementary and middle schools during the 2005-2006 school year. This study found that Black elementary students were 2.19% and Black middle school students were 3.78% times more likely to be referred to the office as their White peers (Skiba et al., 2011). While these results raise concern, the recognition that they closely mimic the results from 4 decades prior demonstrates that racial/ethnic disparities in school discipline have remained virtually unchanged (Triplett, 2018). Decades later, research is still trying to explore explanations for continuous gaps in discipline. The need to further explore the perceptions of principals is necessary.

Students who are suspended are more likely to repeat a grade or drop out (Nelson & Lind, 2015). Increased suspensions and expulsions of minorities have been linked to

increased referrals to the juvenile justice system (Fenning & Rose, 2007). There is a growing rate of minorities entering juvenile justice systems, and it mirrors their experiences with school discipline disparities (Skiba et al., 2014). Pettit and Western (2004) provided data that showed juveniles who have experienced incarceration are likely to have been suspended or expelled from school at least once. A Texas study found that those students who had been suspended or expelled were twice as likely to drop out compared to students who had not been suspended (Nelson & Lind, 2015). This Texas study also found that of students disciplined in middle or high school, 23% of them ended up in contact with the juvenile probation system (Nelson & Lind, 2015). Suspension often leads to a chain of events that include short-and long-term consequences which include academic disengagement, decreased academic achievement, and dropping out of school (Skiba et al., 2016).

Statement of Purpose

There is an overwhelming need to focus on lessening the disproportioned application of disciplinary rules, because these might create a negative impact on the educational path of students (Wooten, 2015). The need for a more holistic and theory-based comprehension of the factors and influences related to disproportionate discipline is needed to improve the fairness of the punishment of disciplinary violations in schools all over this country (Wooten, 2015). The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) has on disproportionality in one Eastern Virginia school division. Additionally, the purpose was to gain insight from the perceptions of principals and the wide range of variables that may play a role in the disparate rates of discipline among minorities. The study sought to find if principals

see a decrease in disproportionality after implementing the PBIS framework. Although the implementation of PBIS has been used to decrease suspension in schools, there is limited available research on how principals perceive the disciplinary practices and policies they have at their disposal to use when addressing student behavior, particularly the use of the PBIS framework. Since principals are the ones primarily responsible for handling discipline, their opinion matters. Psychological research such as the critical race theory (CRT) was further explored to see if race and identity are the main factors in disproportionality.

This study sought to compare the discipline data before and after the implementation of PBIS in their schools. All schools in the division have implemented PBIS; however, each school is at a different stage of implementation. The study seeks to explore if the use of PBIS has aided in decreasing the rates of disproportionality in discipline among minorities in an Eastern Virginia school division. This framework provides each troubled student with a team of adults who support, coach, and mentor them into turning around those negative behaviors.

The hope is that the implementation of PBIS, a proactive approach to discipline, will decrease the rate of disproportionality. The typical punitive processes like suspension, corporal punishment, and expulsions have yet to eliminate unwanted behaviors in public schools. Studies have shown that utilizing these methods can lead to repeat offenses (Martinez, 2009). Despite these findings, the most commonly practiced form of discipline in American public schools is exclusionary discipline (Skiba et al., 2006). Current ineffective discipline strategies need to be replaced and updated with a more proactive approach (Cohen, 2016).

Research Questions

1. How has the implementation of PBIS impacted the number and percentage of African American students being suspended?
2. What are the perceptions of principals regarding the impact of the PBIS framework on school discipline, student behavior, and disproportionality?

Significance of the Study

The U.S. Department of Education (2014) recommended discipline that is developmentally appropriate, proportional to the misbehavior, and focused on teaching children how to learn from their mistakes. Disciplinary approaches with these characteristics, such as school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010) and social-emotional learning (Durlak et al., 2011), are effective at reducing problem behavior and creating a positive learning environment for students. (Gershoff & Font, 2016, Conclusion)

The findings of this study are significant to principals and school division office personnel as they focus on positively impacting the students they serve as well as creating responsible citizens for the future. At each level in the school division, the findings of this study could be useful. At the individual school level, the findings could be used to restructure disciplinary procedures and refresh the school climate; which would aid in providing the best possible education to all students including those with discipline issues. At the central office, the findings have the potential to encourage policy makers to create new policies and initiatives that meet the behavioral and academic needs of the students in this division. This study could also provide valuable research that has the potential to assist those in charge of PBIS for the division. These data could aid the PBIS

coordinators in creating tailored professional development for particular schools, funding decisions, and resource allocation. The school division will also be able to provide more accurate feedback regarding implementation and the effectiveness of PBIS on reducing disproportionate rates of discipline among minority students within the division. If this study was able to provide evidence that PBIS is effective in decreasing disproportionality in discipline, it could have assisted policy makers and superintendents all over this country to make research-supported decisions for their students.

Theoretical Framework

CRT

CRT emerged from legal scholarship in the 1970s as a critique of the ways the legal system contributes to the oppression of students of color and has since spread to other disciplines, including education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) can be credited with bringing CRT to education. CRT was initially developed from the work of legal scholars Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT focuses on the effects of race and racism while addressing the White dominance in our society in the areas of economics as well as in the legal and educational institutions (Parker & Lynn, 2002). It is defined as a collection of activists and scholars who share an interest in studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power. This theory considers many of the same issues from the civil rights movement but attempts to place them in a broader perspective. CRT questions the very foundations of liberal order (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Scholars of CRT reject implications that there is race neutrality or colorblindness in school discipline policies and practice (Gibson et al., 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate,

1995). CRT supports the belief that there are social institutions, like school discipline policies, that systematically oppress students of color. The main goal of CRT is to eliminate poverty, racism, and sexism and empower racial minorities (Bell, 2018).

The current disproportionate rates of discipline in schools are small issues that rest inside of a much larger social issue. CRT is being used to frame the historical context of the topic of racial issues in society. It also helps to provide a framework for exploring questions surrounding social justice. This framework emphasizes the impact and use of school discipline to maintain the institutional, social, and cultural White dominance.

Keywords Defined

CRT

Focuses on the effects of race and racism while addressing the White dominance in our society in the areas of economics as well as in the legal and educational institutions (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership (CRIL)

Promotes quality educational opportunities for all students at high levels through knowing, valuing, and utilizing students' cultural backgrounds, languages, and learning styles to provide a quality learning experience (Terrell & Lindsay, 2009).

Disproportionality

Overrepresentation of minority students in suspensions and discipline referrals (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2016).

Exclusionary Discipline

Removing students from their classroom setting for a specific period of time utilizing in-school suspension (ISS), out-of-school suspension (OSS), or expulsion

(Marchbanks et al., 2014, p. 3).

Expulsion

The long-term, permanent removal of a student from school because of a serious violation of school policy (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010).

ISS

This usually involves removing a student to an alternate location within the school for a specified period of time. This alternate location (ISS) is often isolated from the general student body, and the student is expected to sit or study quietly for the duration of the punishment (Theriot & Dupper, 2010).

Latinx

This is the widely accepted term to mean both Latino (male) and Latina (female); gender-neutral or non-binary term inclusive of all genders (American Psychological Association, 2020, p. 145).

Minority

Used interchangeably with “people of color” to refer to students who are not White.

Office of Civil Rights

Subagency of the U.S. Department of Education that is primarily focused on enforcing civil rights laws prohibiting schools from engaging in discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or membership in patriotic youth organizations (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016).

OSS

The removal of a student from the school for a short-term period, generally 10

days or less (Meek, 2010).

PBIS

An “implementation framework for maximizing the selection and use of evidence-based prevention and intervention practices along a multi-tiered continuum that supports the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral competence of all students” (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017, p. 1).

Public Schools

A school children attend based on residence; this school is supported by the local taxes and controlled by local school boards (Dauber, 2013).

School Administrators

Administration is the management of schools and districts and usually includes principals, assistant principals, superintendents, and department leaders (Renner, 2019). In this study, an administrator is considered a leader of a public school: assistant principal or principal.

School Discipline

School discipline refers to the combination of rules, strategies, and practices used in schools to manage student behavior schoolwide and in classrooms as well as to address the needs of individual students through prevention and intervention (American Institutes of Research, 2018).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

A review of prominent literature provides evidence for informing readers on the topic of discipline disproportionality among minority race groups. With such a plethora of literature surrounding the topic of disproportionality in school discipline of African-American students (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Fabelo et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2014), a traditional review is the best process to manage the diversity of knowledge and assess the quality of the research studies (Transfield et al., 2003). Within this review of literature is a discussion of CRT in education, the long-standing trend of disproportionality of African-American students with suspensions and discipline referrals, the impact of disproportionality, the history of discipline and impacts of current practices, culturally responsive leadership, the impact of principals, and the role PBIS can play in this equation.

CRT

CRT emerged during a time when the progression of the civil rights movement was at a low point (Ellis, 2016). The basis of CRT concludes that racism has become a normalized practice within our society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This has become true for people of color and individuals who possess a lower economic status (Capper & Young, 2015). This theory has been and will continue to be used to provide a lens for finding the inequities that have haunted the experiences of people of color in this country (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Although it began as a movement in the field of law, it has spread beyond that discipline. Many in the field of education consider themselves critical race theorists who use CRT's ideas to understand the issue of disproportionality with

school discipline (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In the field of education, the use of CRT takes into consideration the perspectives of people of color to provide a counter-story to that of the majority viewpoint (Capper & Young, 2015). CRT regarding school discipline implies that the institution of school discipline policies may exemplify racism (Ellis, 2016). Attempting to dive deeper into disproportionality in school discipline, there must first be an understanding of race in the United States. CRT is used to focus on the effects of race and racism while addressing the White dominance in our educational institutions (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Five main tenets make up CRT: the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, counter-storytelling, the critique of liberalism, and interest convergence. These tenets help to narrow the focus on particular structures within our society (Bell, 2018).

CRT defines racism as a pervasive ideology in control of political, economic, and social structures in American society (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT asserts racism is ordinary, the usual way society does business, and the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country. The fact that it is “ordinary,” means racism is difficult to address or cure because it is simply not acknowledged. This ideology bestows privileges upon White people in nearly all areas of life, including the American educational system (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Color-blind, or “formal,” conceptions of equality, expressed in rules that insist only on treatment that is the same across the board, can thus remedy only the most blatant forms of discrimination, such as mortgage redlining, an immigration dragnet in a food-processing plant that targets Latinx workers, or the refusal to hire a Black Ph.D. rather than a White college dropout, that do stand out and

attract our attention. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 8)

Scholars investigate the structural effect of race in education like the school to prison pipeline. These structures criminalize racial minorities by predominately White teaching forces and can be deemed institutional racism (Wright, 2015). This framework is useful when exploring racial inequality in school discipline because it will help to conceptualize the power and racial issues embedded in our education system (Bell, 2018).

The second tenet of CRT explores the socio-historical context that shaped racism in America and explains the development of Whiteness as property (Bell, 2018). Due to the permanence of racism, CRT argues that Whiteness can be considered the ultimate property (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Africans were considered property during slavery and were unable to own property or even themselves. This belief of Whiteness as property has been considered an asset that only Whites are privy to have. This same mindset has continued long after slavery; the belief that Whiteness is the ultimate property to possess due to their previous privileges (Bell, 2018). Scholars assert the value of Whiteness has been situated in unequivocal access to social institutions, civil rights, and the right to exclude others (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). In the field of education, Whiteness as a property has been utilized to explain how Advanced Placement courses have been implemented to perpetuate privilege and exclude those from minority backgrounds (Pollack & Zirkel, 2013). Ladson-Billings (1998) explained how African American history is often omitted and overlooked in the school curriculum, resulting in a false representation of true events that alienates the significance of African American figures who have made contributions to our society. Schools also implement rules that prohibit students from wearing clothing that represents minority cultures. “Thus, the nature of

racism in America constructed Whiteness as the ultimate property to possess due to the privileges bestowed to Whites” (Bell, 2018, p. 5).

CRT’s third tenet focuses on the critique of liberalism. There was a movement known as the critical legal studies that challenged the neutrality of the law. Critical legal studies supported the belief that every case had one correct outcome. This tenet produces the idea that race is a “social construction” and is a product of social thought or relations and corresponds to no biological or genetic reality. This thesis states that society frequently chooses to ignore scientific truths, creates race, and endows them with pseudo-permanent characteristics. These scientific truths are that people with common origins share certain traits, skin color being one of them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). According to CRT scholars, ignoring the role of race in social outcomes ensures the continuation of racial injustices in our society. Legal and social institutions continue to defend their claims of objectivity, color-blindness, meritocracy, and race neutrality. CRT argues these claims are nothing more than a way to hide the power held by Whites (Bell, 2018). CRT scholars argue liberalism has failed to address racial inequality because Whites have gained the most from liberal reform (Bell, 2018).

Additional developments have drawn attention to how Whites racialize different minority groups at different times based on convenience. For example, society may have had little use for Blacks at one time but much use for Mexican or Japanese agricultural workers to benefit society. At another time, the Japanese may have been unfavored and removed to war relocation camps, while society cultivated other groups of color for jobs in the war industry or front-line positions. Stereotypes of several minority groups shift over time, and this continues to add to racial inequality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Educators who fail to recognize race and ethnicity are “unconscious about the ways schools are not racially neutral but reflect White culture” (Capper & Young, 2015, p. 817).

The fourth tenet, interest convergence, sometimes called material determinism, states that change is intentionally slow; moves at the pace Whites deem appropriate; and when the interests of Black people are in opposition to those of Whites, it becomes very difficult to achieve racial equity (Milner, 2008). Because racism benefits all groups of Whites (elites and working-class), society has little incentive to eradicate it. CRT scholars view racial integration into the education system and affirmative action as interest convergence because both were achieved in a way that benefitted Whites (Bell, 2018). For example, Derrick Bell proposed that the infamous *Brown v. Board of Education* was considered a triumph for civil rights only due to the self-interest of elite Whites more so than a true desire to help Blacks (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Counter-storytelling, the final tenet of CRT, allows minorities to discuss their experiences while challenging the narrative conveyed by those in power (Bell, 2018). Counter-storytelling, or the voice of color thesis, holds that due to different histories and experiences with oppression, minority group members may be able to communicate to their White counterparts matters that the Whites are otherwise unlikely to know. Counter-storytelling urges writers of color to share their experiences of racism to apply their unique perspective to these one-side narratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This could be done in numerous ways, including students sharing their experiences about the American educational system. CRT has been and will continue to be useful in exploring the experiences of minorities in the education setting and could be beneficial when used

in a study that explores disparities in school discipline (Bell, 2018).

In this study, the focus is on the permanence of racism which could potentially explain how the disproportional discipline of Blacks is embedded in school discipline practices and appears to be “normal” (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The second tenet of focus in this study is counter-storytelling which “aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths especially those held by the majority” (Capper & Young, 2015, p. 795). This tenet gives principals a chance to speak their truth by sharing their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions. This study sought to explore and share those beliefs and perceptions utilizing CRT as a framework. Utilizing CRT includes much more than the identification of race and racism. CRT emphasizes the significance of observing and trying to understand the socio-cultural entity that shapes how we view, experience, and respond to racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

History of Discipline

The history of the discipline in this country is difficult to compile for various reasons (Butchart & McEwan, 1998); however, research does allow us to trace the overall paths that discipline has taken over time in this country. Cameron (2006) defined school discipline as,

School policies and actions were taken by school personnel with students to prevent or intervene with unwanted behaviors, primarily focusing on school conduct codes and security methods, suspension from school, corporal punishment, and teachers’ methods of managing students’ actions in class. (p. 219)

Inevitably, students will misbehave and bend the rules. These actions have caused

educators to implement punishments and consequences for those who refuse to follow the rules and procedures. The historical intent of discipline in education was to discourage inappropriate behavior through various punishments. According to Morris and Howard (2003), students have exhibited inappropriate behaviors since the beginning of public school history. Where there are people of any age, problems will eventually enter the equation. Discipline policies are currently implemented with hopes of preventing certain behaviors rather than punishing for behaviors.

Just like everything else, discipline practices have evolved. How modern school systems respond to disciplinary problems can be described as falling under four main categories: administering office discipline referral; corporal punishment; suspension in school, out of school, or alternate site; and expulsion in school, out of school, or alternate site (Cameron, 2006). Each of the aforementioned examples has been under scrutiny at some point or another in the history of public school education. In a study by McCann (2017), the data showed that detention takes away from a child's social time during lunch; an important time to develop relationships with their peers. Corporal punishment has, and will always be, a controversial topic, especially concerning the use of it within public schools. Suspensions remove students from the very place they need to be to learn, grow, and thrive; yet, it is the most common discipline tactic used in the United States of America. The question was raised by the Washington Research Project in 1975, "Are suspensions helping children?" To this day, that question remains.

Zero tolerance policies entered schools during the 1980's drug problems. Zero tolerance policies placed strict punishments on perpetrators to send a message to the rest of the students (Skiba, 2014). This term was born in the United States Navy when the

Navy reassigned 40 submarine crewmembers for suspected drug use in 1983 (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). It was later adopted by a few school districts in the western part of the country; and not long after, it had spread over the entire country at large.

Tracing the path that discipline practices have taken in this country shows the progression, or lack thereof, of the public education system. Many practices currently utilized in schools across the country have been in place from the beginning. The increased reliance upon more severe school consequences has resulted in increased referrals to the juvenile system (Wald & Losen, 2003). These are the questions each division, school, and principal must determine before implementation. Discipline policies within schools hold the potential to make or break a student. It takes courage for educational leaders to turn away from tradition and explore new discipline approaches. Once a leader embodies the courage to move towards a more progressive style of discipline, it will make room for more discretion and consideration of the circumstances at hand (Christy, 2018). Principals will take a deeper look at the infraction and respond with options that are appropriate, just, and equitable (Christy, 2018).

Twenty-first century alternative strategies have attempted to transform discipline strategies and policies throughout the country.

A number of universal, school-wide interventions have been found effective in improving school discipline or climate and have the potential to reduce discipline disparities based on race. These strategies include, but are not limited to:

relationship building, social-emotional learning, and structural interventions like

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. (Skiba & Losen, 2016, p. 6)

Interventions that focus on strengthening teacher-student relationships can reduce the use

of exclusionary discipline, particularly for Black students. Alternative approaches currently include PBIS and alternative learning centers. PBIS institutes tiered systems of rewards for students exhibiting desirable behaviors to prevent negative behaviors from developing or replacing negative behaviors with positive ones (McNeill et al., 2016). Alternative learning centers that provide behavioral support and smaller learning environments have been found to successfully retain students and transition them back to traditional schools (Henderson & Barnes, 2016). Alternative learning centers can provide more positive interactions with adults to transform the negative experience of expulsion or long-term suspension into an opportunity for improvement of self-concept, internalized locus of control, social skills, and independent decision-making (Coleman, 2015). Recent school discipline reform efforts have promoted innovative strategies that seek to reduce dependency on exclusionary discipline by addressing the underlying causes of problematic behavior (Flannery et al., 2014).

Disproportionality in Behavior Expectations

There continues to be minority disproportionality in school discipline outcomes that have troubled scholars (Sullivan et al., 2014). Dr. Elizabeth Gershoff stated, “The extent of the disparities by gender, race, and disability status were quite surprising and very troubling” (Walker, 2016, para. 13). Racial disparities have been perceived to be the strongest indicator of the level of punishment a student receives because even the principals have their preconceived biases towards the students (Skiba et al., 2014). Implicit and explicit bias of teachers and principals poses a risk to minority students and should be eliminated because it disenfranchises and disengages students (Staats, 2014; Wooten, 2015). These perceptions speak to teacher lack of cultural competence and

cultural mismatch that also trigger racially biased practices (Staats, 2014). A study was conducted that tested the effects of ethnicity on the disciplinary punishments given to students and found that punishments imposed on students of color are more severe than those imposed on Caucasian students (Gregory et al., 2014). Scholars (Vavrus & Cole, 2002) found that when African American students violated White middle-class rules of interaction, such as speaking louder or questioning class rules or teacher authority, they were referred to the principal's office more often than White students. Punishment seems to be mediated by both teacher perceptions and classroom management skills (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Minority students, like Blacks and Latinxs, are more likely to be suspended for subjective offenses like disrespect, insubordination, defiance, and disruption than their White peers (Heilbrun et al., 2015).

In addition to validating the role of implicit racial biases in discipline decision-making, Smolkowski et al. (2016) identified specific decision points at which biases are more likely to influence disciplinary decisions. Particularly during the first 90 minutes of the school day has been a time when teachers will immediately refer minority and marginalized students to the office but hold off on referring majority students (Smolkowski et al., 2016).

Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment is not a new form of punishment. Corporal punishment is defined as the use of physical force to cause a child to experience pain to correct their misbehavior (Straus, 2001). It is a biblical principle and the Bible openly authorizes corporal punishment (Imbrogno, 2000). Since the United States of America was founded on biblical principles, corporal punishment has been accepted in society (Imbrogno,

2000). The Puritans felt that children were creatures of sin and needed to be corrected. They were followers of the Bible and used scriptures as shown above to support their child-rearing choices (DiPietro, 2003). The Anglo-Saxon immigrants brought the corporal punishment tradition over to America with them (Imbrogno, 2000). During these times, children were mostly homeschooled, and corporal punishment took place in the home by parents.

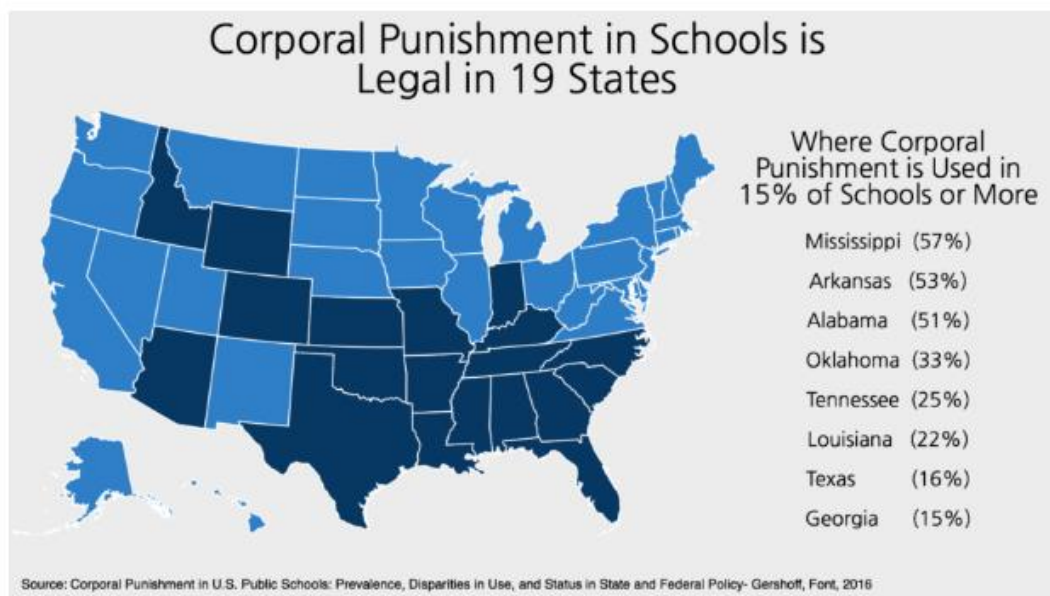
At the end of the 19th century, schools moved from being held in the home to locations set aside for learning (Imbrogno, 2000). After much work and planning, all states had systems of publicly financed schools by 1918 (Garrison, 2001). This transition from homeschool to “traditional” school required parents to entrust their children in the hands of the certified teachers. This level of trust between parent and school officials (teachers) was termed *in loco parentis*. *Loco parentis* meant that teachers were given the right to act as parents, specifically in regard to discipline, in the absence of the parent (Conte, 2000). This doctrine, *loco parentis*, came from the English law and was created to protect American teachers who felt that corporal punishment was necessary for disciplining certain student behaviors (Conte, 2000). As the 20th century crept in, all schoolteachers were expected to administer corporal punishment to students to maintain discipline (Gershoff & Font, 2016). Spanking became one of the most popular forms of punishment in schools, and students could receive spankings for something as severe as fighting or something as minor as forgetting to complete homework assignments (Gershoff & Font, 2016). The various rationales in using corporal punishment caused some differences in beliefs of corporal punishment, and change began to happen.

As corporal punishment found its way into the 21st century, it became more of a

legal issue. The *Ingraham v. Wright* (1977) decision was critical in the corporal punishment realm during earlier times.

In 1977, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in its *Ingraham v. Wright* decision that school corporal punishment was constitutional, leaving it as a state decision. As stated in Gershoff and Font (2016), 19 U.S. states allow public school personnel to use corporal punishment to discipline children. These states are Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wyoming (Center for Effective Discipline, 2015, as cited in Gershoff & Font, 2016).

Corporal punishment in schools has declined dramatically over the last few decades. It is concentrated in southern states and a few western states. Nineteen states continue to utilize corporal punishment, and there are certain regions within these states that use it more frequently than others. More than half of the school districts in Alabama, Arkansas, and Mississippi use corporal punishment. Figure 2 provides a visual display of the 19 states that legally allow corporal punishment in schools.

Figure 2*Corporal Punishment in Schools*

Note. Figure 2 shows that Mississippi, Arkansas, and Alabama are the top three states that use corporal punishment in over 50% of schools. It shows the southern and midwestern states are highly concentrated in utilizing corporal punishment (Gershoff & Font, 2016).

There are blaring racial disparities in how this form of punishment is meted out. Students of color, predominantly African American boys, are on the receiving end of corporal punishment more often than their White counterparts (Gershoff & Font, 2016). Particularly, Black students in Mississippi and Alabama are 51% more likely to receive corporal punishment than White students in more than half of those state's districts (Walker, 2016). Disparities in the use of corporal punishment, injury, and increased psychological research have caused a great concern towards the use of corporal punishment in schools. Disparities in race, gender, and disability and the statistics

surrounding corporal punishment status have caused alarming data to be publicized and brought to the attention of the United States. Although it is legal in 19 states in the United States of America, those states and districts that choose not to involve themselves in corporal punishment have serious concerns (Gershoff & Font, 2016).

Among the list of concerns presented when utilizing corporal punishment, you will find mental health. There is evidence that corporal punishment is associated with an increased risk of cognitive problems, lower academic achievement, mental health disorders, and even abusive behavior in the future (Sege & Siegel, 2018). Other concerns with corporal punishment are its legality. Schools are one of the last legal facilities to remove corporal punishment. As cited in Gershoff and Font (2016), Bitensky found that in most states, it is also banned in childcare centers, residential treatment facilities, and juvenile detention facilities. Many consider it to be a violation of a child's human rights (Bitensky, 2006). If schools, families, or advocates seek the abolition of school corporal punishment, federal legislation may be necessary in drafting the remaining states that allow corporal punishment to join the majority of states that do not (Gershoff & Font, 2016).

Exclusionary Discipline

Another common form of discipline is coined "exclusionary discipline." Exclusionary discipline refers to disciplinary methods that intentionally remove students from the classroom for a set period of time, such as ISS, OSS, and placement in alternative schools (Lewallen, 2019). There are four primary types of exclusionary discipline: expulsion; alternative school; OSS; and in some cases, ISS (Evans, 2011). Suspension can be defined as "a disciplinary action that is administered as a consequence

of a student's inappropriate behavior, [which] requires that a student absent him/herself from the classroom or from the school for a specified period of time" (Morrison et al., 2001, p. 174). OSS refers to the removal of a student from the school for a short-term period, generally 10 days or less (Meek, 2010). Expulsion, a more life-altering consequence, refers to the removal of a student from their home school placement, either permanently or for an extended period of time (Brown, 2007). According to Theriot and Dupper (2010), ISS

usually involves removing a student to an alternate location within the school for a specified period of time. This alternate location (ISS) is often isolated from the general student body and the student is expected to sit or study quietly for the duration of the punishment. (p. 209)

These types of discipline strategies that exclude the student from the academic setting are utilized to have them reflect upon their actions to eliminate a recurrence. Exclusionary discipline forces students to be separated from their peers. Public education provides students the benefit of an education in exchange for obeying established rules and directions given to them by the adults in the school setting. However, we know that there are many students who are unsuccessful in school, which leads to disruptive behaviors (Lewallen, 2019). Research has shown that exclusionary discipline is the least effective for changing student behavior, yet these methods continue to persist in our country (Fabelo et al., 2011). The overuse of exclusionary discipline has negatively impacted academic disengagement, failure, dropout, delinquency, graduation rates, and other postsecondary outcomes (Gregory et al., 2014).

African Americans are consistently overrepresented in exclusionary discipline

data (Cholewa et al., 2017; Van Dyke, 2016). Several studies have looked at the relationship between race, behavior, and suspension; and there is no proof that Black students misbehave at a higher rate (Nelson, 2016). While racial/ethnic differences in the use of suspension and expulsion are not due to poverty or different rates of misbehavior (Skiba et al., 2014), majority minority schools also tend to rely more heavily on exclusionary discipline practices (Roch & Edwards, 2017). This racial disparity begins in preschool, where 48% of preschool children suspended more than once are Black students. Students with disabilities are also suspended more frequently than those without, and this could have a racial component as well (Nelson, 2016). A study on the use of exclusionary discipline in Massachusetts schools found that while Black and White students were similarly involved in fights, Black students received exclusionary discipline 25% of the time compared to 15% of the time for White students (Gastic, 2017). There is no research to support the assumption that students of color engage in significantly higher rates of disruptive behaviors from others that would justify these higher rates of punishment (Skiba et al., 2014).

On a national level, 1.2 million Black students were suspended from K-12 public schools in 1 academic year; and 55% of those suspensions occurred in 13 southern states. “Districts in the South also were responsible for 50% of Black student expulsions from public schools in the United States” (Smith & Harper, 2015, p. 3). In 132 southern school districts, Blacks were suspended at disproportioned rates around five times or higher than their representation in the student population. In 84 of those districts, Blacks were 100% of the students suspended from public schools; and Blacks were 75% or more of the students suspended in 346 districts. In 743 districts, Blacks were 50% or more of the

students suspended. Blacks comprised 74% of suspensions in Mississippi, which was the highest among the southern states. Florida schools also suspended the highest numbers of Black students (Smith & Harper, 2015).

A 2018 Michigan study by Charles Bell presented information on how Black students feel when they are suspended unjustly for minor offenses. Sandra, a 10th-grade student from a middle-class background, was suspended for what was perceived as a “threat” by her principal. Here is her story:

Oh ok so that time I was in class and we were going over some math work and it was these two girls, they was about to fight, so one of them was, well she wasn't like my friend but I was cool with her and she was arguing with three other girls so I was like uhhhh calm down cause if you argue with one of them they all going to jump in and my principal thought that was like a threat, I don't see how that was a threat to her cause I was trying to help her but I guess my principal thought I wasn't her friend and saying I was going to help them jump her. I think that's what she saw it as, but I was actually trying to help her. (Bell, 2018, p. 45)

This instance suggests that Black girls can be marginalized by principals and are not given the opportunity to explain their behaviors or share their side of the story. A middle class, Black female was suspended for a nonviolent offense (Bell, 2018). Another student in Bell's (2018) study was a male student named Willie. Willie was a ninth-grade student from a low socioeconomic background. Here is Willie's story:

Every time it was a fight and they held the kids in there for like a couple hours so like me and a couple of people snuck out, we was actually standing outside of our teachers class but they took it as skipping so I just say skipping cause they say I

wasn't supposed to walk out the lunch room. (Bell, 2018, p. 46)

Willie's instance suggests that Black boys from low socioeconomic backgrounds receive suspensions for nonviolent offenses. In this study, nine boys and seven girls received at least one OSS for nonviolent infractions like dress code, tardiness, skipping, and insubordination (Bell, 2018).

Zero Tolerance Policies

Racial disproportionality in the use of exclusionary discipline, suspensions, and expulsions, has grown since the adoption of zero tolerance school discipline policies throughout the United States following several high profile school shootings in the 1990s (Curran, 2016). The term *zero tolerance* was not initially a term that belonged to the field of education. It was born in the law enforcement field. This term came into use in public education largely due to the passage by Congress of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, which mandated harsher penalties for firearms brought into schools, including a mandatory minimum 1-year expulsion for any student caught with a gun at school (Lewallen, 2019). The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994's hardline approach to gun violations was quickly expanded to address all students who violated local or state rules of conduct, especially those who disrupted the educational process for other students (Lewallen, 2019). Following the severity of the Gun-Free Schools Act, many other school systems in the United States expanded that same type of severity in punishment for other behaviors such as drugs, alcohol, and aggressive behaviors (Fabelo et al., 2011). There are two core assumptions that lead the zero tolerance philosophy: harsh sanctions will deter student misconduct, and removal of the worst offenders from school will improve the overall school climate (Skiba et al., 2014).

The implementation of “uniform procedural and disciplinary guidelines” (Hirschfield, 2008, p. 82) transfers decision-making about student behavior from the discretion of teachers to “disciplinary codes that stipulate exclusionary punishments” (Hirschfield, 2008, p. 82), ultimately increasing the number of suspensions and expulsions (Hirschfield, 2008). In the years following the enactment of the Gun-Free Schools Act, the rate of suspensions increased nationally from 3.7% of students to almost 7% (Hirschfield, 2008). The Gun-Free Schools Act actually caused an historical spike in discipline records across the country. There is also no evidence that zero tolerance policies increase school safety or improve student behavior, but there is substantial evidence that these policies have had unintended negative consequences, most notably a national increase in school suspensions (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). While the public accepted these policies and believed they were cost effective, the social and economic impacts have outweighed the benefits (Marchbanks et al., 2014) and disproportionately affect racial minorities (Van Dyke, 2016). Moreover, zero tolerance policies may negatively affect the relationship of education with juvenile justice and appear to conflict to some degree with current best knowledge concerning adolescent development (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Zero tolerance policies put a large number of children out of the school system and into the juvenile justice system (Browne, 2003; Christy, 2018).

“With students of color being disproportionately affected by this mandate, it has been said that racism lies just beneath the surface of many decisions based on zero tolerance philosophy” (Butler, 2011, p. 9). Zero tolerance policies are notorious for

rendering strict punishments for criminal offenses and are often considered racially biased. When they were incorporated into the K-12 education system, similar racial disparities were documented (Bell, 2018). According to a 2015 Civil Rights report, school districts in Michigan had the fourth largest disparity in school suspension rates between Black and White students due to zero tolerance policies (Losen et al., 2015). Thousands of Black students in Michigan are suspended and expelled from school every year due to zero tolerance policies (Bell, 2018). “Michigan’s strict zero tolerance policies exacerbated existing inequities in school discipline and removed many students from the academic environment altogether” (Bell, 2018, p. 22).

In Texas, there are also rates of disparity in the use of zero tolerance policies. Black students comprised 13% of the student population in 2017-2018 but represented 33% of all OSS and 25% of all ISS. This overrepresentation of Black students in discipline is also seen in referrals to law enforcement and arrests. Black students represent 31% of students referred to law enforcement for arrest even though they only represent 15% of the national student enrollment (Castillo et al., 2020).

The Impact of the Principal

Principals are considered to be the cornerstone of the schools and essential in determining their effectiveness (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Principals have the role of establishing the culture of the school to which they are assigned (Nelson, 2016). The role and expectations of the principal have changed over the years (McHatton et al., 2010). Initially, principals were considered to be a manager of their buildings with discipline being one of their main areas of focus (McHatton et al., 2010). The role of the principal has now shifted to an instructional leader and is instrumental in the “teaching, learning

and implementation process” (McHatton et al., 2010, p. 3). A summary of a principal’s responsibilities would be to reduce discipline problems, improve the overall school climate, reduce teacher burnout, increase student achievement, and advance the teaching and learning processes in their buildings. Research also indicates that training for principals has not kept up with the additional responsibilities, thereby leaving many ill equipped (McHatton et al., 2010).

Principals must act as both supervisors and administrators. Administration typically includes financial, human resource, office, and overall school management (Rebolledo, 2019). Supervision, on the other hand, can be defined as the foreseeing and directing of people who are being managed (Renner, 2019). Unlike administration, the role of supervision is strictly communicating and interacting with teachers, classroom assistants, and others who are being managed. Although different in definition, both are critical in the operation and management of schools. In order for schools to be effective, principals are juggling roles both as administrator and supervisor (Rebolledo, 2019). Schools with a strong learning climate impact student achievement (Allensworth & Hart, 2018). Principals do not just create a positive environment; they distribute and share leadership. They also ensure the leadership is operating correctly and monitor the systems to ensure they are working effectively, making changes when necessary (Rebolledo, 2019).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015-2016) National Teacher and Principal Survey, approximately 78% of all public school principals are Caucasian. African Americans represent 11% of all public school principals, and Hispanic principals represent 8.2 %. We need to consider the impact school leadership

has on minority groups of students in regard to school discipline. Principals are often judged in the area of discipline in order to see if they administer it fairly. They are often criticized for not being consistent in their discipline practices.

Principal Perspectives on Discipline and Disproportionality

There is growing concern surrounding the inconsistent and excessive use of exclusionary discipline that disproportionately impacts certain groups of students. Principals have different leadership styles. In 2012, Booth et al. also looked at the disparities among subgroups in the area of discipline and found that differences among principal attitudes and discipline strategies were the major reasons for the disproportionality among the subgroups. The research conducted by Losen et al. (2015) suggested that when principals have a positive perception of exclusionary discipline, there is an increase in the use of exclusionary discipline, which ultimately leads to a negative school environment and negative outcomes. When principals have a negative perception of exclusionary discipline, there is a decrease in the use of exclusionary discipline, which ultimately leads to the use of positive behavioral supports that lead to a positive school environment and better academic performance (Losen et al., 2015).

“Research has shown that administrators differ in their fundamental beliefs regarding the student discipline process” (Smith, 2019, p.14). Smith and Haines (2012) completed a qualitative case study of assistant principals at five different schools. The study focused on the discipline philosophy. After reviewing handbooks, referrals, and interviews with the principals, Smith and Haines found a myriad of differences in the beliefs and practices for student discipline based on the personal and professional backgrounds of the principal. They also found a difference in the way the principals

interpreted school rules, which led to a difference in the application of those rules. Principals who believed in traditional discipline were among the top supporters of exclusionary discipline practices. Principals in Smith's (2019) study revealed that factors such as previous experience and personal beliefs helped to establish their own personal administrative philosophy. For example, two principals in the study, Mr. Smith and Mrs. Martinez, highlighted their humanitarian beliefs influenced their discipline practices with students and expectations from teachers. Other principals in the study believed more in supporting school policy and aligning punishments to misconduct. These particular principals valued the enforcement of school policy over student relationships; these are the types of principals who utilize exclusionary discipline more often (Smith & Haines, 2012). This study is significant because it points to a theoretical and philosophical foundation that principals rely on for decision-making, even if they do not recognize it. It also highlights the existence of differences in the philosophies, opinions, and attitudes among principals when considering student discipline (Smith, 2019).

“The majority of school leaders share the perceptions that all students should be treated with respect and diversity should be embraced from a culturally responsive approach” (Harper, 2017, p. 127). Principals believe that a way to curtail suspension is to build relationships with staff, parents, and students and show them how to engage with others in a professional manner. The various ways a principal handles discipline depends on their leadership style, background, and experiences. Several leaders even stated that background and experience were the top two factors that influenced their leadership styles, vision, and mission (Harper, 2017).

In the Harper (2017) study, several principals with low rates of OSS and

expulsion were asked how this was achieved. They responded by stating, “OSS and expulsions were a last resort when handling discipline” (Harper, 2017, p. 122). This conclusion shows that each individual principal’s perception of exclusionary discipline influences how often they use it in their building (Harper, 2017). Catizone’s (2016) study supported this belief as well. Catizone found that schools with principals who endorsed a preventative approach to discipline had significantly lower rates of OSS and expulsion and were less likely to suspend students for nonviolent offenses. It was also found that principal endorsement of zero tolerance was positively associated with suspension rates (Catizone, 2016). If a principal supported the use of a zero tolerance policy as a form of discipline, they had higher suspension rates and vice versa (Catizone, 2016).

Principals must utilize current data on a frequent basis in order to combat behavior issues in their schools. One principal stated that having a weekly meeting with his fellow administrators to discuss discipline helped to drive his role as a principal (Harper, 2017). He stated that reviewing discipline on a weekly basis helped his administrative team identify trends in the discipline that allowed them to implement strategies to alleviate those issues (Harper, 2017). They were noticing fights breaking out in a particular area of the school at a particular time, and they began to investigate. The investigation led to the discovery of members of the football team hanging out in this area of the school around the same time each day which was leading to fights. Instead of suspending the students (exclusionary discipline), they had a talk (alternative discipline) with those students and the coaches (Harper, 2017). The use of alternative discipline in this study worked, and the fights in that area of the school slowed down tremendously (Harper, 2017).

Principals also recognize the need for parent involvement and support. Parents play an integral role in the discipline process. Harper's (2017) study clearly described how school leaders felt about parent indolence and its role in discipline:

Any kid who does not have a significant adult role model to advocate for them when things go wrong it's easier to punish that child. If you have a parent that is going to question you about what you are doing with their kid, you are going to make sure you did your investigation to the fullest extent that you can. If you have a kid with no adult role model or significant figure in their life, and you are going to suspend them; no one was going to say anything than it is easier to do that. We have to think in the role of advocacy for kids to make sure that doesn't take place. It is important that every child is given the same due diligent when dealing with their situation. (p. 145)

Culturally Responsive School Leaders

Educational reformers have long claimed school leadership is a crucial component to any reform of education, secondary only to the very act of teaching (Leithwood et al., 2004). If school leadership is such a crucial component of reform, why can there not be a microscopic lens placed on ensuring culturally responsive school leaders in every building, especially those with high disproportionate discipline rates? It is evident that school leaders directly impact teachers and their ability or inability to serve the student population at large. Researchers have found that principals can influence teacher learning and instruction and, ultimately, student achievement (Branch et al., 2013). Research shows that principals also impact the culture of a building at large. Principals can serve as transformational leaders, wherein they promote school environments with strong

relationships of trust, vision, goals, and culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). These strong relationships are not limited to the adults in the building but extend to the students in the building as well as the parents outside of the building. The relationships do not stop there; they spill over into the feeder schools as well as the community. The principal is an advocate. The themes discussed may be found in curriculum and pedagogical work involving slightly different twists. Again, the focus is normally on the instructional and academic pieces, but placing the focus on leadership helps to develop a culture that can decrease disproportionality.

CRSL ensures that the right principal for the job is placed in that building. There is a need for preparedness and experience when dealing with matters of diversity. Young and Rouse (2010) indicated principals in their study were not prepared to lead in diverse schools and implement policy that would respond to diversity issues, and they could not even articulate meaningful discourse around diversity. Culturally responsive school leaders are responsible for promoting a school climate inclusive of minoritized students, particularly those marginalized within most school contexts. Such leaders also maintain a presence in and relationships with community members they serve (Khalifa et al., 2016). Because minoritized students have been disadvantaged by historically oppressive structures and because educators and schools have been—intentionally or unintentionally—complicit in reproducing this oppression, culturally responsive school leaders have a principled, moral responsibility to counter this oppression (Khalifa et al., 2016). These oppressive systems like deficient-oriented views and perceptions of minority children stay in the way of equity (Flessa, 2009). Stereotypes, blaming children of color for the problems in education, and implicit bias are other structures that

minoritized students face in public schools (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Khalifa et al. (2016) identified four major strands that describe CRSL discussed in the leadership. Those areas include critical self-awareness, culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparedness, culturally responsive and inclusive school environments, and engaging students and parents in community contexts.

Critical self-awareness, also known as critical consciousness, is the first major area in CRSL. This step precedes any other area of leadership. This area suggests that a great leader will have an awareness of self and his/her values, beliefs, and/or dispositions when it comes to serving poor children of color (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). This understanding of self will be the guiding light to his/her leadership. This is not something that necessarily has to be innate; it can be developed through training and experience. Leaders must be able to self-reflect in order to better serve their children, especially those of minority backgrounds. Gay and Kirkland (2003) stressed the importance of teachers knowing their students and seeing them as people while intentionally questioning their own knowledge base and teaching practices. So it is in the classroom, so it is in the office. Leaders must also be able to see the students as people and understand their points of view, while creating an environment that is both safe, inclusive, and fair.

The second area is that of curricula and teacher preparedness, the area most studied and focused on for school improvement. Curriculum loses its power to students continuously suspended and removed from the environment. This is why the teacher preparedness is essential, so the curriculum can have its positive impact. A culturally responsive leader will ensure that their staff is also culturally responsive and will make sure the training does not stop at the primary stage. These are skills that must be

developed and improved over time. The entire building should be culturally responsive in order for the change to take place. Culturally responsive teacher education preparation—no matter the training format—is necessary, even when teachers are from the same cultural, racial, and socioeconomic background of students (Gay, 2002, 2010). It is not assumed that the principal will be solely responsible for providing the training, but we do expect that they will challenge behaviors from staff who oppose cultural responsiveness. This includes encouraging staff to open up to uncomfortable conversations and areas of necessary change, identify biases, and even counsel teachers in opposition to the expectations (Khalifa, 2013).

Culturally responsive and inclusive school environments challenge school leaders to continuously promote inclusivity in their building. This area calls for the leader to leverage resources when necessary, examine discipline data and suspension gaps, and challenge teachers who marginalize students. In this area of CRSL, critical consciousness as well as ability to have courageous conversations about inequities is crucial (Singleton, 2012) in changing the culture of the school. Inclusiveness and exclusiveness are at the center of culturally relevant teaching; culturally responsive teachers not only center student cultural norms but also their very beings, proclivities, languages, understandings, interests, families, and spaces (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). A true leader will stand in the face of adversity and not bow or turn a blind eye. This step requires consistency, strength, and confidence—all leadership qualities that are too often overlooked by degrees and certifications.

The final major area of CRSL is a leader's ability to engage students and parents in community contexts. Leaders, especially those in underserved communities, must have

the ability to understand, address, and even advocate for community-based issues (Khalifa, 2012). Going the extra mile and advocating for community partnerships and programs to aid in protecting the youth of the area is one way to fulfill this area. Creating safe spaces for both parents and students by accommodating those with language barriers and or handicaps is another way to engage parents and students.

There is a need for leadership programs all over to include culturally responsive leadership as a required area of study prior to certification. In this society, it is necessary that all leaders understand these principles. It is not just for those working in high minority schools but also for minority leaders working in high majority buildings. It is for all leaders. Touré (2008) associated poor leadership programs in leadership training institutions with limited culturally responsive leadership knowledge among school leaders. Good leadership starts with understanding the group of people you lead; it is imperative.

PBIS

One popular alternative intervention is PBIS. As of 2014, there were over 20,000 schools nationwide utilizing the PBIS framework (Sugai & Horner, 2014). PBIS is a framework that is implemented in schools to help educators become proactive versus reactive when they counter many undesired emotional, behavioral, and social issues among the students (Affigne, 2013). It is a systems approach that provides a schoolwide framework to implement research-based intervention practices that can improve the overall school climate (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019). These approaches are addressed and implemented across the entire school instead of certain individual students (OSEP Technical

Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019). Rather than focus primarily on reducing problem behaviors, PBIS enhances student academic engagement and achievement by preventing problem behavior, actively teaching desired behaviors, and responding quickly to patterns of problem behavior (Sugai & Horner, 2014). These systematic changes can be community partnerships, increased social relationships, improved home life, and personal satisfaction. PBIS aims to enhance the entire school environment through systems and rewards. These areas of focus were used in the past with individual students, but the PBIS framework applies it to the entire study body (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019). When used correctly, schools teach students appropriate behavioral actions and observe and praise behavioral actions seen (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019).

PBIS has also been found to decrease the number of office discipline referrals in schools that implement it with fidelity (Flannery et al., 2014). Hawken et al. (2007) noted that behavioral interventions must be efficient and cost effective for schools to consistently use them to enhance students in social outcomes, and PBIS has proven to be both efficient and cost effective. The motto of PBIS is, “Be Responsible, Be Respectful, Be Safe” (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019, Getting Started section). “The broad purpose of PBIS is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of schools and other agencies. PBIS improves social, emotional and academic outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities and students from underrepresented groups” (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019, Who Are We section).

PBIS emerged during the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) on June 4, 1997 (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). The roots of PBIS go as far back as the 1980s when it was developed to be used for students with serious behavior disorders engaged in self-harm, and/or were driven by unhealthy aggressions. During this time, the University of Oregon led the developing studies, evaluations, and applied demonstrations meant to find more effective behavioral interventions for students with behavior disabilities. Based on the research performed in the decade prior, the University of Oregon was afforded the opportunity to develop and manage the PBIS Center (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012).

Tiers of PBIS

There are three tiers in the PBIS structure: Tier 1 focuses on decreasing schoolwide problematic behaviors; Tier 2 offers targeted interventions for at-risk students; and Tier 3 provides individualized, intensive services for students (Horner & Sugai, 2005). Tier 1 systems impact everyone in the entire school building. It is where the foundation is established for regular routines, expectations, and support to prevent unwanted behaviors. Tier 1 emphasizes social skills and the acknowledgment of appropriate school behavior by teachers. In this tier, the teachers and administrators are laying the foundation, modeling expected behavior, and collecting data on areas of concern. During this phase, it is important that administrative teams, data tracking, consistent policies, professional development, and evaluations are in place. Those areas of concern will receive extra support during the PBIS process (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019). The core principles of Tier 1 include the understanding that all stakeholders can effectively teach

appropriate behavior to all children; intervene early before unwanted behaviors worsen; use research-based, scientifically validated interventions often; monitor student progress; and use data to make further decisions (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019). Before a school starts to implement Tier 2 and Tier 3 practices, Tier 1 practices must be in place with at least 90% of school implementation (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019).

Tier 2 is the next level of support that can be put into place for students who are struggling with Tier 1 processes. The focus at this level is to focus on students who are heading down the wrong path and put additional supports into place before it goes downhill. These interventions include social skills groups, self-management strategies, and academic support (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019). Data are continuously collected throughout the process to ensure that the focus remains on specified areas and students of concern. In addition to the supports provided in Tier 1, the key practices of Tier 2 supports are (a) increased instruction and practice of self-regulation and social skills to aid student(s) in regulating their own behavior; (b) increased positive and proactive adult supervision with simple rearrangements across the school environment; (c) more opportunities for positive reinforcement and feedback with teachers or intervention team; (d) increased precorrections that allow students to be reminded of expectations through gestures or verbal statements; (e) teachers gaining an understanding of the triggers and motivation behind the unwanted behaviors; and (f) more access to academic support to give students additional help with their school work (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive

Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019).

Tier 3 is the final level in this framework. Few students make it to Tier 3; at most schools, only 1-5% of students require this level of support. At Tier 3, students receive more individualized support to make improvements to their behavior and academics. The student will have a team of supporters including an administrator and coach/mentor, and the strategies used are tailor-made for the student. Because this tier is more intensive, there are only a few key practices added to those already provided in Tier 1 and Tier 2. The key practice of Tier 3 are (a) function-based assessments which formally identify which interventions are more likely to be useful for the student; (b) wraparound supports which include research-based services and supports provided by friends, family, and other people drawn to the student; and (c) cultural and contextual fit which considers the student's environment, personal characteristic, experiences, and language. The Tier 3 leadership team will be different at every school because this tier is so individualized there is a need for those most experienced in the particular behaviors shown. The goal is always to transition the student to fewer intensive supports as efficiently as possible (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019).

Figure 3 is called the PBIS triangle. This triangle provides a visual representation of the three tiers of this framework. The tiers shown in Figure 2 refer to the levels of support students can receive through PBIS, not the students themselves.

Figure 3*The PBIS Triangle*

(OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019)

Note. The PBIS Triangle provides visual representation to show the level of supports students may need. This triangle may also predict the number of students in your program who may require support from the individual tiers. The bottom portion of the triangle says “all” because all students receive Tier 1 supports. Tier 1 is the universal prevention. The middle layer of the triangle says “some” because only some students receive Tier 2 supports. Tier 2 is more targeted for specific skills. And the top layer of the triangle says “few” because statistically very few students require the intensive, individualize preventions of Tier 3 (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019).

Cultural Responsiveness Within PBIS

Although PBIS is a practice intended to produce positive outcomes for all students, it seems less effective for some students due to its race-neutral principles

(Vincent et al., 2011). Initially, culturally appropriate interventions were indirectly emphasized through PBIS (Sugai et al., 2000). However, too often teachers may ignore the racial, ethnic, and/or cultural identity of their students which could lead to misinterpretation of student behavior (Green et al., 2015). McIntosh et al. (2014) worked to address issues of disproportionality and culturally responsiveness within the PBIS framework to ensure schools understand the complexities of these issues to ensure equity for all students. The goal of cultural responsiveness within the PBIS framework is to use the PBIS principles to change school cultures and systems to reflect educational equity. Teams may begin implementing PBIS with a culturally responsive lens from the beginning or examine their practice after their initial start and then weave cultural responsiveness into the framework. “PBIS is not fully implemented until it is culturally responsive. Culturally responsive PBIS should include: (1) Identity, (2) Voice, (3) Supportive Environment, (4) Situational Appropriateness, and (5) Data for Equity” (Levenson et al., 2019, p. 2).

Culturally responsive PBIS programs see diverse perspectives, goals, and certain lived experiences as assets rather than deficits. This perspective promotes inclusive decision-making when preparing students to be responsible citizens (Levenson et al., 2019). In order to make systems more culturally responsive, school staff need an awareness and understanding of their personal values and cultures. They also need to be aware of how those cultures and values impact their classroom or school environment. Identity awareness takes many forms, including understanding one’s identity as a practitioner, assisting students in their own personal awareness, and understanding the community identity. In order to build a more culturally responsive PBIS practice,

practitioners need to examine and be able to explain the backgrounds from which they develop and apply their expectations and practices. It is imperative that staff examine their beliefs and behavior expectations that they consider to be normal or appropriate because these expectations are culturally defined and can vary greatly from student to student. Culturally defined expectations that are not culturally appropriate provide the basis for disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline. School teams can foster identify awareness by embedding a focus on identity awareness and culturally responsive practices into the day-to-day practices and procedures (Levenson et al., 2019).

Principal Perspectives on PBIS

Principals and school leaders play a critical role in promoting positive school climates; and these school leaders should model, encourage, and provide trainings for the implementation of PBIS. In Harper's (2017) study, there were several major themes identified by principals as necessary pieces of a positive PBIS implementation. Among those themes were training and implementation, hiring practices and leadership, relationships, data, and parent involvement. In a study on principal perspectives on PBIS, it was found that four of five principals shared a similar belief that effective implementation of PBIS starts with hiring the right people for your school. Of the 10 themes in this study, hiring practices was the single most shared perspective. School principals made comments like, "Look for people with the right spirit, demeanor. Look for how they will interact with your kids more than content." Another stated, "I hired administrators who reflect the student body. I went out of my way to hire two Hispanic administrators: I do the same with teachers." These types of comments support the belief that who you hire to work in your schools plays a role in whether or not PBIS will be

effective in your building (Harper, 2017, p. 104).

School leader perceptions of the importance of hiring a diverse and culturally fit staff supports the research on culturally responsive school leaders. Cultural mismatch has been found to be a contributing factor to the disproportionality of school discipline with African Americans (Skiba et al., 2011). “The school leaders’ perceptions indicated that race plays a role in PBIS implementation; further research is needed to explore the extent of that role” (Harper, 2017, p. 132). One principal in Wooten’s (2015) study explained that PBIS works only as well as the teachers and staff who make use of it. This supports the aforementioned conclusions that hiring the right people can make or break your program.

When asked, “What is your role or responsibilities for implementing PBIS at your school,” many principals responded saying leading by example, communicating the vision, monitoring implementation, keeping it in the forefront, and continuous staff development. This shows that principals who are invested in the PBIS process understand the value in being the key “ringleader” of the framework (Harper, 2017). Being the key ringleader includes training the staff and appropriately planning the implementation. The suggested steps of an appropriate implementation are (a) develop a long-term implementation plan for annual trainings to include all stakeholders; (b) create a data-driven PBIS team that meets at least monthly; (c) assign an administrator liaison to provide administrator support and accountability; (d) establish campus guidelines for success; and (e) conduct an annual evaluation and assessment of the PBIS plan (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019).

In a study on principal perceptions of PBIS in middle schools (Wooten, 2015),

four middle school principals were interviewed. When asked what groups of students are more disciplined than others, Principals A and B answered African American males. According to this study, PBIS implementation supports keeping kids in school, high attendance, and building positive relationships with families and students. Principal A in the study stated that PBIS gives a sense of unity and common language that can be used with all school personnel. The example provided was that if there is an assembly, administration can ask teachers to review a particular section of the PBIS matrix with students and every teacher and student will know the exact expectations. Principal B explained that providing incentives for positive behavior improved their attendance rates, because students wanted to receive prizes. All of the principals in the study unanimously agreed that students need to be in school in order to learn and that PBIS works for the majority of students. In the realm of repeat offenders, the principals in this study concluded that the implementation was more difficult. Principal B even stated, “The ones already well-behaved benefit. Trouble kids still see PBIS as punitive” (Wooten, 2015, p. 80). The study showed that principals were concerned about how to reach the at-risk populations, because they typically do not respond to Tier 1 interventions and challenge the program. One principal concluded that the at-risk population still could be appropriately supported in Tier 2 or Tier 3 supports, because Tiers 2 and 3 provide more targeted interventions and individualized support tailored to the needs of those students (Wooten, 2015).

Wooten’s (2015) study also discussed the importance of consistency in structures and process. The necessary factors that must remain consistent are supervision, incentives, reinforcements, procedures, rules, and consequence. Principals stated that

consistency in teacher practices, classroom management, and communication of behavior and expectations are essential in improving PBIS implementation. “When school staff is consistent, it can improve learning and discourage inappropriate and disruptive behaviors” (Wooten, 2015, p. 84). Principals also discussed the need to train teachers on referable versus non-referable offenses, cultural competence, and effective teaching practice. When there is a lack of understanding in those areas, it can increase the number of suspensions and negate the PBIS framework. Overall, this study showed that these principals agree that utilizing the PBIS framework aids in a more positive school culture as long as it is implemented with consistency and authority (Wooten, 2015).

Harper’s (2017) study weaved CRIL and PBIS together to see how principals perceived disproportionality in school discipline. Race is a factor that should be considered when implementing PBIS and CRIL. School leader responses suggest that race does matter when implementing CRIL and PBIS. “The findings suggest that these school leaders in this study were aware of their own cultural backgrounds and recognized the impact it had on their leadership” (Harper, 2017, p. 132). Harper’s study showed that principals and school leaders play a critical role in promoting positive school climates. There was also some evidence from the findings of Harper’s study that supported school leader perceptions that PBIS implementation and CRIL contributed to the lowering rates of exclusionary discipline for African American students. “The leaders should model, encourage, provide training and reinforcements as supports for PBIS with CRIL” (Harper, 2017, p. 141).

Summary

Educational systems cannot be effective until they are beneficial for all student

groups. In this study, the focus was ensuring that discipline strategies and practices are effective for all student groups. If discipline practices are effective for all student groups, we will see lower rates of disproportionality in discipline data. The framework that PBIS provides can allow principals another set of strategies with which to work.

PBIS provides an ideal framework for increasing equity in student outcomes.

Research shows that schools implementing PBIS with fidelity have greater equity in school discipline, specifically for African American students. However, PBIS teams may need to include equity-focused strategies in their action plans to achieve equitable outcomes for all student groups. (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019, Equity section)

One of the goals of PBIS is to reduce the risk of exclusionary discipline based on individual characteristics like race or another demographic identifier. PBIS teams are more likely to increase equity in school discipline when they are explicit about cultural responsiveness. Including explicit equity goals into their action plans is a dynamic way to make PBIS merge with cultural responsiveness. If the school team embeds equity approaches within their existing PBIS system, it is not an extra initiative. The PBIS framework supports the teaching of strategies for neutralizing bias in discipline decisions. Equity in discipline is a Tier 1 issue. “Teams cannot address inequitable student outcomes by providing Tier 2 and 3 supports to students from groups who receive disproportionate rates of referrals and suspensions” (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019, Equity in a Tiered Framework section).

The issue of disproportionality in school discipline is multifaceted, and there may

not be one easy solution. However, direct efforts in policy are necessary to reduce common racial and ethnic disparities (Skiba et al., 2011). Using the PBIS framework, policy makers at the division and school levels can adopt or revise policies to address many of the factors contributing to disproportionate rates of exclusionary discipline among students of color.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Purpose

Due to the well-documented, historical rate of disproportionality in discipline and the trend that African American students are three times more likely than White students to receive exclusion discipline, there is a need for more research-proven strategies to address this continuous problem (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016). The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact the PBIS framework had on disproportionality in one Eastern Virginia school division. Additionally, the purpose was to gain insight into the perceptions of principals and the wide range of variables that may have played a role in the disparate rates of discipline among minorities.

The study was seeking to find if principals saw a decrease in disproportionality after implementing the PBIS framework. Although the implementation of PBIS has been used to decrease suspension in schools, there is limited available research on how principals perceive the impact the PBIS framework has on discipline disproportionality. This study moved beyond the documentation of this problem into an exploration of the phenomenon.

Research Method

This study used a phenomenological qualitative case study to explore the perceptions of principals on the impact of PBIS on disproportionality in the discipline at their school. Phenomenology provides participants a chance to describe their experiences (Creswell, 2015). Creswell (2015) described a phenomenological qualitative research study as one that allows a researcher to ask open-ended questions in order to gather information from interviews, observation, and document analysis to better understand a

phenomenon, theme, pattern, or interpretation. My decision to use a phenomenological qualitative study over the other forms of qualitative research was because the phenomenological approach aimed to develop a complete and articulate description or explanation of a particular human experience and perspective. Phenomenological studies use specialized methods of participant selection, information collection, systematic data treatment, and assembling of interview themes to provide that clear description. This type of study emphasizes the importance of personal perspective and interpretation and is effective at challenging structural or normative assumptions (Lester, 1999). It allows a more in-depth understanding of the experiences of others. It is most fitting for this study because it includes the experiences of the principals in order to understand the essence of the phenomenon at hand (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Descriptive statistics was also used in this qualitative study as a means to describe and compare the enrollment and disciplinary data of the division before and after the implementation of PBIS. Descriptive statistics is a branch of statistics that describes the features of data within a study. The purpose of descriptive statistics is to provide a brief summary of the data within a study and is often supported by graphical analysis (A Research Guide, 2019). This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of what particular experiences principals have with PBIS and disproportionality in their schools.

Study Participants

The division utilized in this study was composed of 47 schools and two centers. Of the 47 schools, there were 28 elementary/primary schools, 10 middle schools, seven high schools, and two centers. It was fully accredited and had been under the leadership of that superintendent for 2 years. At the time of the study, all schools were required to

have implemented PBIS as of the 2019-2020 school year. Many had already implemented PBIS, so there was a large variety of experiences with PBIS implementation within the division. To optimize the results of the study, purposive sampling was used to select the principals for this study. Principals in this study had to have led a school that fit the following criteria: (a) started the PBIS implementation with the initial 2014-2015 cohort; and (b) the current principal has been at the school for at least 3 years since the start of PBIS implementation. I was hopeful that there would be representation from each school level including primary, elementary, intermediate, middle, high school, and the alternative school. I anticipated approximately 10 participants for this study.

Data collection to select study participants began after approval from the doctoral committee to move forward with the study. Once approval was granted, I applied to the Gardner-Webb University Institutional Review Board (IRB) requesting permission for the study. While awaiting IRB approval, I applied to the division of study to conduct research (Appendix A). Upon IRB and division approval, an initial conversation with the assistant director in the division helped me to narrow down the list of schools that had implemented PBIS since the division started utilizing the framework. Additionally, that conversation helped me to gather information on how long each principal had been at their current school. Following the conversation, research was done using each school's website to obtain principal contact information. Before starting the data collection, I requested permission for school data from the Office of Information Technology. Once qualifying schools were identified, qualifying principals were asked to participate in the study through phone calls and accompanying emails (Appendix B). At this point, consent from the principals who agreed to be in the study was obtained (see Appendix C). Once

consent was granted, interviews were scheduled and conducted. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants in the study during a 2-week time frame set by me.

Research Design

To determine the relationship between the PBIS framework and the disproportionality of African American students in exclusionary discipline practices, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How has the implementation of PBIS impacted the number and percentage of African American students being suspended?

The use of descriptive statistics helped in finding the answer to the first research question in this study. The focus of this question was to determine the impact of PBIS implementation on the number of African American students receiving exclusionary discipline. I requested school discipline data (office referrals, ISS, OSS, expulsions) from 2011-2019 broken down by race in an excel document. This information was organized into an individual profile for each school displaying enrollment by race and discipline data by race for school years 2011-2013 (pre-implementation years), 2014-2015 (implementation year), and 2015-2019 (post-implementation years). Overall annual suspension totals were also included in this profile for additional numerical data. For comparison purposes and trend identification, I used the 3 years before implementation to compare to the years following implementation. Year 2019-2020 data were not included due to school closures surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Office of Information Technology provided discipline records for each school in the study for the requested years. I wanted to examine the percentage changes in the

use of exclusionary discipline in African American students from the baseline to after PBIS implementation. Microsoft Excel was used to analyze the descriptive statistics collected in the study. These data were displayed in tables and charts. I looked for trends in the school demographics, discipline percentages, and number of suspensions by race each year. Once these numbers were available per year for each school, the charts and tables were analyzed to identify trends. The trends in discipline data before and after PBIS implementation were discussed in narrative form for each school in the study. Last, an overall analysis of the discipline trends for the division was discussed in narrative form.

2. What are the perceptions of principals regarding the impact of the PBIS framework on school discipline, student behavior, and disproportionality?

The qualitative approach allowed me to describe the perceptions expressed by the principals interviewed in this study. The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews that included open-ended questions. Open-ended questions were utilized so participants could express themselves freely and openly share their experiences. Interviews were held on Google Meets. Google Meets is a video communication service developed by Google. There was an encrypted network on Google Meets to safeguard privacy while utilizing the service. Google Meets could record the entire meeting, so all interviews held via Google Meets were recorded. A program called Rev was used for transcriptions of the interviews. An interview protocol was used as a tool for data collection (Appendix D). This protocol contained demographic questions and open-ended questions regarding principal perceptions of discipline disproportionality, student behavior, and PBIS. All principals participating in

the study signed the informed consent (Appendix C), and each principal interview took place in a single interview session.

The data collected were reported in the principals' own words through recordings and transcriptions. Field notes were collected by me. The interviews were transcribed, organized, coded, and then used as the primary source for data analysis. Common themes found in the interview responses were thematically analyzed in a manner that maintains the privacy of all principals. Identification codes were used for the principals and the schools involved in the study to provide anonymity. Once these themes were identified, they were categorized, and a narrative was used to explain the trends found. Thematic coding of transcripts was completed in the order of the interviews conducted, which allowed me time to reflect and edit the interview questions as needed. Thematic coding was used to assist me in understanding the principal perspectives and to analyze their experiences. Coding the transcriptions and grouping together similar responses were critical parts of the data analysis (Urquhart, 2013). Throughout the coding process, I conducted constant comparative analysis. This type of analysis was critical in crediting the themes that emerged from the data; constantly reviewing the previous data helped me stay focused on the data and no other opinions. The phenomenological approach used careful techniques like constant comparative analysis to keep me mindful of maintaining the original participant transcripts.

The phenomenological data analysis process was used to categorize and make sense of the phenomenon presented in the study. The steps taken were to (a) read each interview transcript completely to get a global sense of the participants, (b) reread the interview transcripts more closely to divide the data into meaningful categories, (c)

combine the sections that were identified as having similarities, (d) determine if any of the findings were essential for the phenomena (free imaginative variation), (e) elaborate on the essential meanings of findings, and (f) revisit the initial transcripts to justify all interpretations of themes found. Once that analysis was complete, the constant comparative and critical analysis was used to verify the themes and phenomenon discovered (Kleiman, 2004).

For the descriptive statistics data from Research Question 1, a table was used to display the discipline data alongside a graph for each school. The data from the interviews were displayed in a table designated for each question that stated all participant responses. Following each table, a narrative explained the similar categories found within the answers from that question. Finally, any major themes that were unearthed from the study that were related to the research questions were further described in narrative form. The data found within the descriptive statistics analysis were used to determine if there were discipline trends present before, during, or after PBIS implementation. The coded interview responses were used to compare themes found in this research study to the research discussed in Chapter 2. The results of the study are further discussed in Chapter 5 of this work.

Instrumentation Validity

The interview protocol that was used in this study were questions created by me (Appendix D). The first two questions in the interview are considered demographic questions used gain more insight into the backgrounds of the principals. The latter questions were all focused on PBIS and the impact it has on disproportionality and other factors of school. To ensure validity, the interview questions were administered to four

administrators through the Lawshe's validity method. I created a Google Form and sent it to all administrators via email. Administrator A was a middle school principal of a PBIS school in Eastern Virginia. Administrator B was also a middle school assistant principal of a PBIS school in Eastern Virginia. Administrator C was an assistant director at the school division office in an Eastern Virginia division who did her dissertation research on PBIS. Last, Administrator D was a middle school principal in Eastern Virginia who was the lead of PBIS for his school and did his dissertation research on PBIS. These administrators, who were not a part of the study, were asked to provide feedback on the questions to ensure that the questions were able to capture the perceptions and responses of the participants in the study.

The suggestions presented from the panel of experts were taken into consideration, and a few changes were made to the interview questions. All experts believed the questions were aligned to the study. All questions, except Question 4, received an average score of 4.75 of 5 possible points. Question 4 received an average score of 4.25 of 5 possible points. A suggestion was made to change the wording of, "Could you identify groups of students who are more disciplined compared to others? Why do you think this happens," to "Can you identify groups of students who receive more discipline referrals when compared to their peers?" This question was also suggested to be moved from being the fourth question to the seventh question asked in the interview. This recommendation was made to provide "a better flow."

Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been a public school principal?
2. How many years have you been the principal of this school?

3. How would you define discipline disproportionality?
4. What specific PBIS strategies have impacted your school's culture?
5. What specific PBIS strategies have impacted your school's student behavior?
6. How has PBIS impacted the overall discipline program at your school?
7. Can you identify groups of students who receive more discipline referrals when compared to their peers?
8. How has PBIS impacted disproportionality in student discipline at your school? Particularly African Americans students?
9. What factors of PBIS do you feel could be enhanced to address the issue of disproportionality?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Ethical Considerations

The principals involved in the study were informed about the research study and why they were being asked to participate (Appendix C). Principal privacy was protected throughout the entire study. Personal identity was removed as well as any information that could lead to subject identification such as names, addresses, and school names. Each principal was referenced as Principal A, B, C, etc. Also, schools were labeled School A, School B, School C, etc. to protect their identification.

The methods outlined in this chapter were used to ensure the validity of the study. The informed consent form was provided for each participant before interview. This letter of consent followed the IRB guidelines that provided participants with an explanation of procedures, risks, and their right to withdraw from the study. The risks to human subjects in this study were minimal. All participants were over the age of 18 years

of age and did not demonstrate any mental impairment.

The Researcher

I worked as a classroom teacher in Eastern Virginia. I had been in the field of education for 8 years, holding a Bachelor of Science in Physical Education/Health Promotion and a Master of Education in Administration and Leadership. I spent 5 years teaching high school science and 1 year as a curriculum consultant at the central office. I was trained in the skills necessary to carry out the study. I interviewed multiple people during my career and while I obtained my Master of Education and time spent on the administration team during my first 5 years in the field.

Furthermore, my firsthand experience with PBIS within the division showed my professional perspective and background knowledge. As an African American, my social experience also informed my perspective. I was extremely passionate about equity in education, yet guarded against intent bias. I was familiar with the school division and worked at one of the schools in the division but was not solely responsible for or involved with the administrative aspects of the PBIS program for the division. The school in which I worked was not a part of the study. This was a precautionary decision to ensure that all biases were eliminated.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide the research methods, research design, procedure, study participants, and interview questions that were used in the study. A phenomenological qualitative methodology was used to find emerging themes that principals shared regarding the impact PBIS has on discipline disproportionality. Chapter 4 provides the results from the study. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the data

concerning the literature found in Chapter 2. Also, implications for practice and recommendations for further study are offered.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter contains the results of the qualitative, phenomenological study conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. How has the implementation of PBIS impacted the number and percentage of African American students being suspended?
2. What are the perceptions of principals regarding the impact of the PBIS framework on school discipline, student behavior, and disproportionality?

This chapter also includes direct responses from participants in the study, school enrollment demographics, and the utilization of tables to complement the narrative summaries. The tables and graphics are used to present the trends found in the enrollment and discipline data. These tables, graphics, and narratives are used to emphasize key themes and results from the study.

Sample

The sample size includes 10 schools that implemented PBIS during the 2014-2015 school year. Of 13 qualifying schools, there were 10 schools that agreed to participate in the study. There was one primary school (PK-2), one primary school (PK-3), three elementary schools (PK-5), one intermediate school (3-5), one intermediate school (4-5), two middle schools (6-8), and one middle school (6-8) that added (9-12) students in the Year 2019.

For Research Question 2, 10 participants were interviewed for this study. All participants were verified that they met the minimum requirements sought as described in Chapter 3. Of 13 qualifying schools, only 11 principals qualified to participate in the study and 10 agreed to participate. Each participant was interviewed for a maximum of

30 minutes; seven via Google Meet, one participant via Zoom, and two via telephone due to time constraints and technical difficulties with Google Meet. The responses provided in this chapter display the trends found throughout the interviews. These are direct responses from each participant. This information was used to determine the perceptions of principals regarding the use of PBIS to decrease disproportionality in discipline.

Data Collection

For Research Question 1, the school division provided the school enrollment data from 2011-2019 in an excel spreadsheet. The school division also provided information regarding the requested discipline records. The discipline records included the total number of students receiving ISS, OSS, and expulsions each year from 2011-2019. Please note that the numbers provided for discipline records were duplicated and represent the regular school year. Duplicated means that this count includes students with multiple dispositions counted multiple times and provided a more realistic total count. These data were aggregated by race to better determine disproportionality rates where applicable. There are several years for various schools where those discipline data were not reported; one will see gaps in the graphs and empty cells on the chart for those years. The school division switched systems in 2015 which resulted in a challenge to collect the data from any previous school year. The division also stated that reporting of discipline varied for each school prior to the new system.

The 10 interview questions served as the primary source of data for Research Question 2. The interview questions provided an opportunity for principals of PBIS schools to share their perceptions of its impact in their building. After each interview, the interview was transcribed to ensure validity. Following transcription, I coded and

reviewed all responses for emerging themes. I ensured the phenomenological methodology was embedded throughout the data collection part of the research process. Trends that emerged from interview responses are reported in the latter section of this chapter.

Data and Analysis

During each interview, field notes were collected by me with special attention to common words and opinions. All interviews were later coded manually by me. The interviews were analyzed immediately after being transcribed to allow for the information to be “freshly” processed. I coded each interview and analyzed for themes or phenomena. All responses that fit into a particular theme were identified, coded, and maintained for conclusions.

Interview recordings were uploaded into computer software Rev for further analysis and a more accurate transcription. Rev guarantees 99% accuracy for all transcriptions provided. Each interview was coded again using the software and then compared to the video recordings and field notes that were initially compiled. Coding the interviews again for a third time, comparing all 10 interviews, aided constant comparative analysis techniques which is critical to phenomenological methodology. This process helped me to remain consistent in emphasizing phenomena in the results.

In the next portion of analysis, I found categories emerging from the responses. Color coding was used to categorize themes found within participant responses. If there was a relationship, I used the color to distinguish the category; similar responses were given the same color. The use of color coding helped me to keep track of responses that were similar and to ensure all responses were included. This method was also essential in

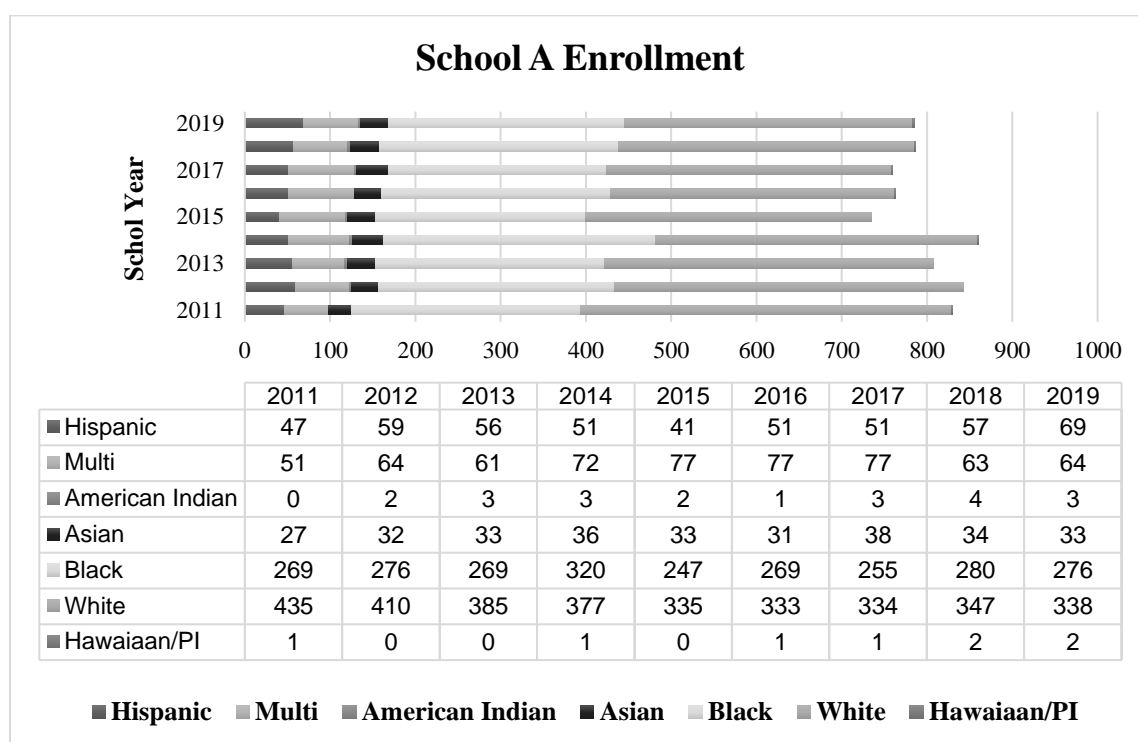
the organization of the responses to ensure validity of reported data.

School Enrollment Data

The 10 participating schools were coded using the letters A-J. Each school's enrollment data are displayed in a data table and bar graph. When reviewing the bar graph, please note that the longer the bar, the more students are in that particular race group. All data are organized by school year ranging from 2014 to 2019. A narrative to describe the population of each school follows each graphic.

Figure 4

School A Enrollment

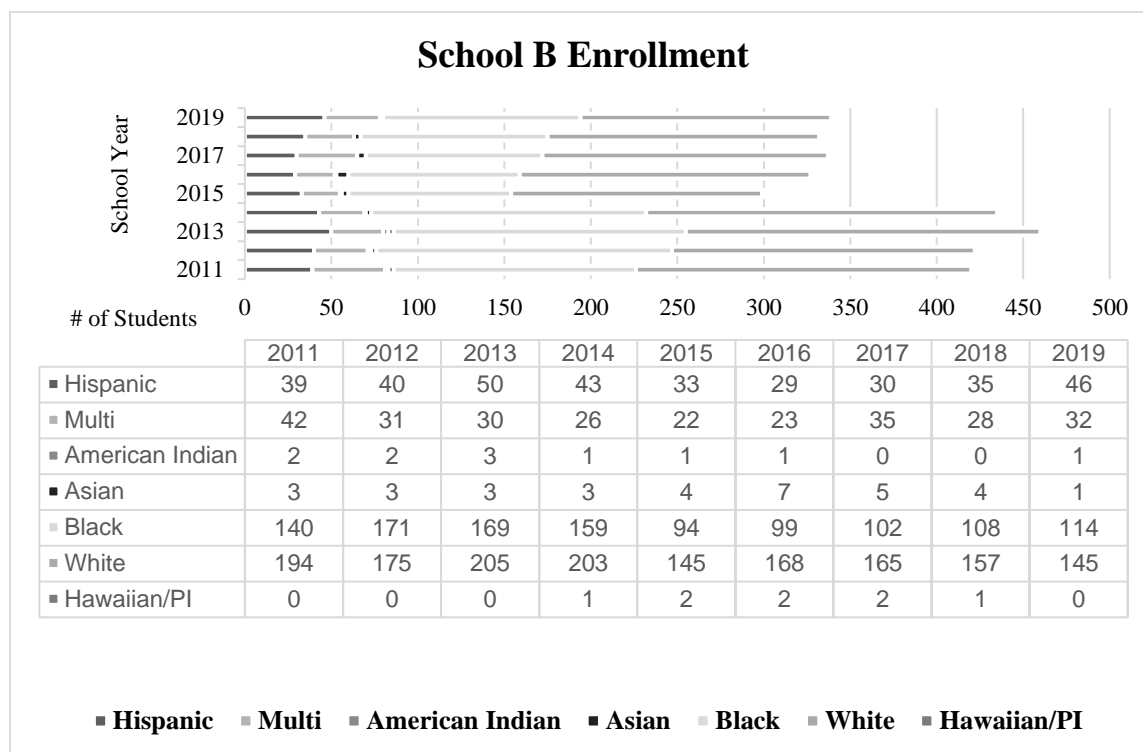


Note. Figure 4 displays the enrollment data for School A. Overall, from the years 2011-2019, School A was comprised of majority Black and White students. The multiracial and Hispanic students made up the next largest percentage, while the Asian population followed. The American Indian and Hawaiian/PI populations were small or not at all

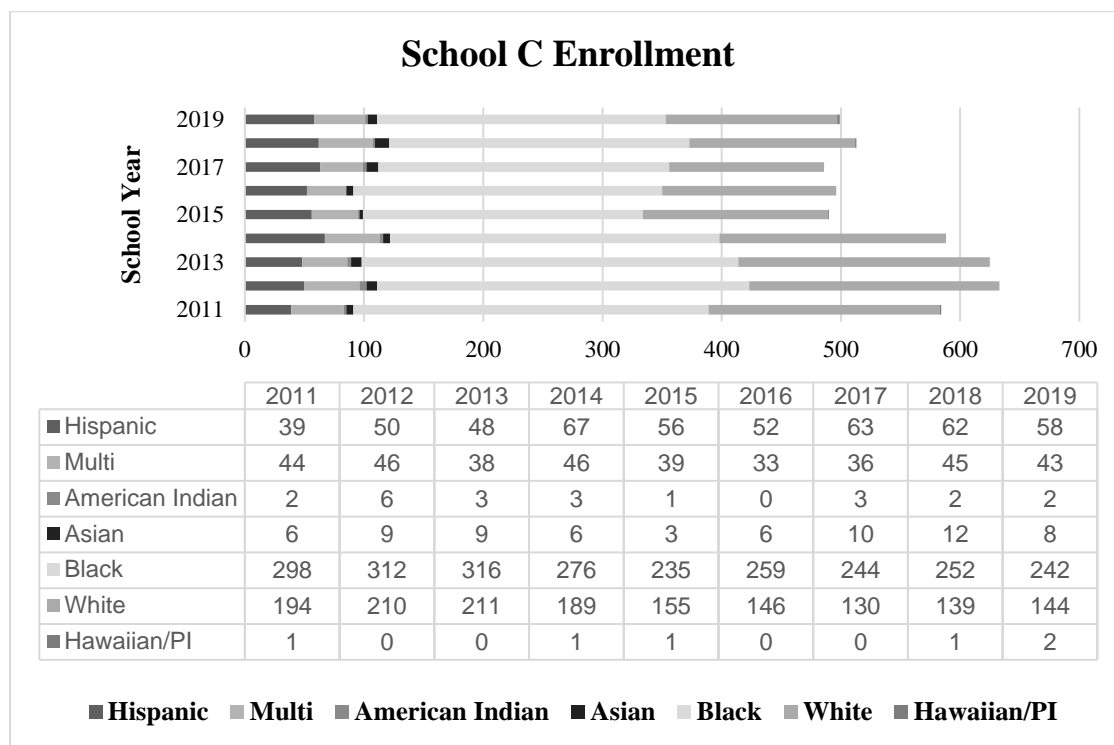
represented in the data.

Figure 5

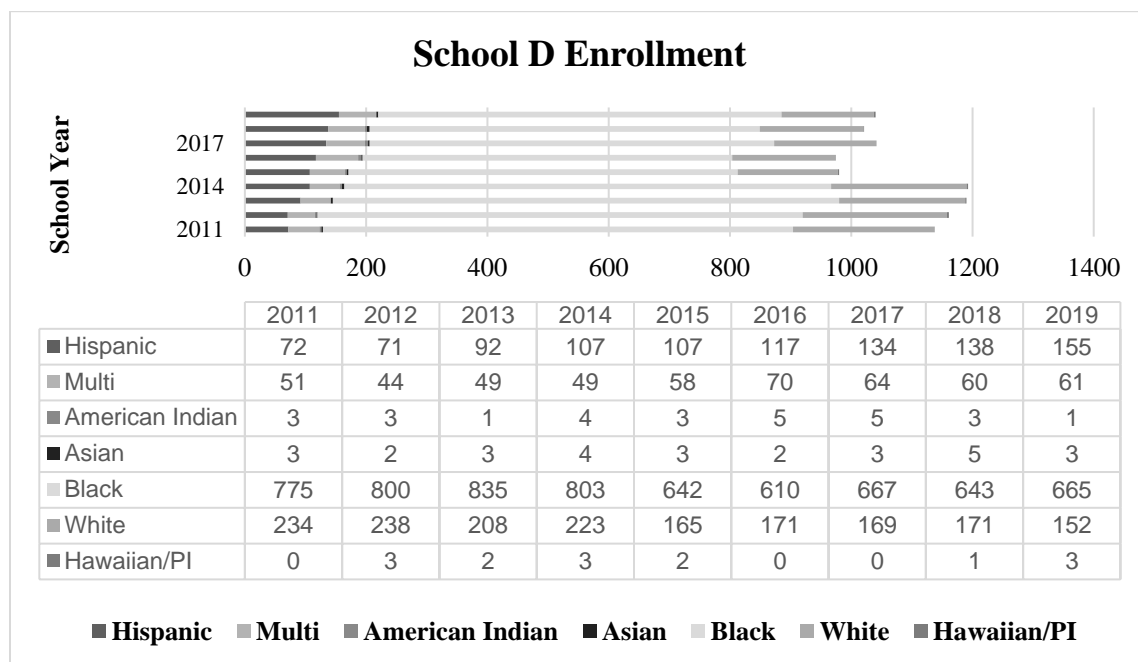
School B Enrollment



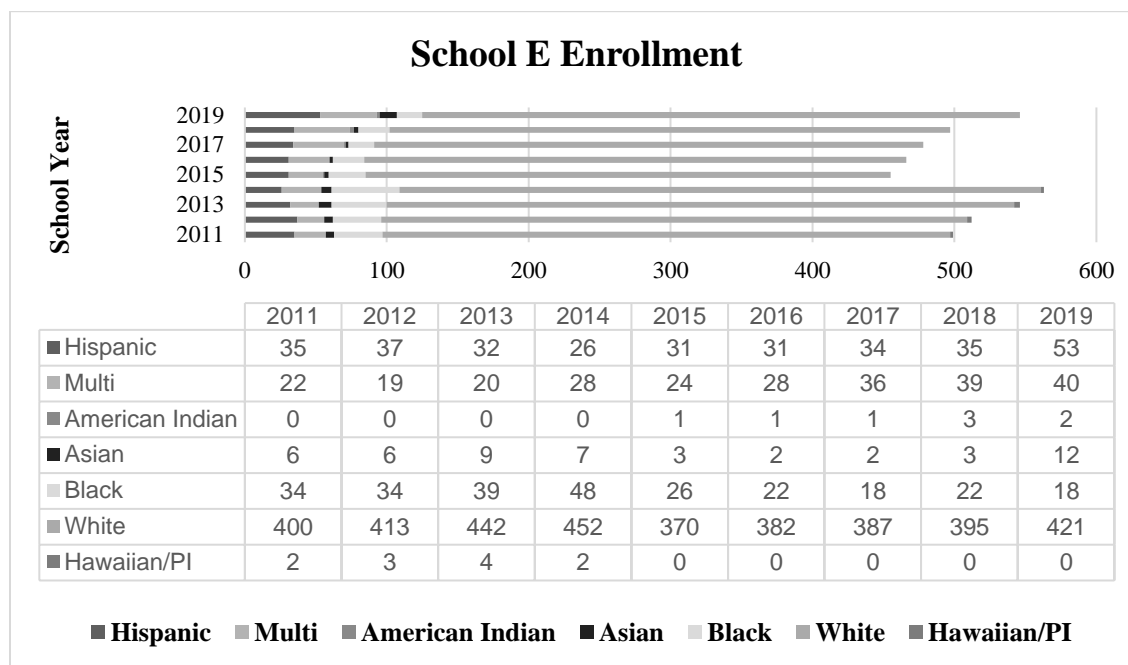
Note. Figure 5 displays the enrollment data for School B. Overall, from the years 2011-2019, School B was comprised of majority White students, with the second largest population being Black students. The multiracial and Hispanic students made up the third largest percentage, while the American Indian, Asian, and Hawaiian/PI populations were small or not at all represented in the data.

Figure 6*School C Enrollment*

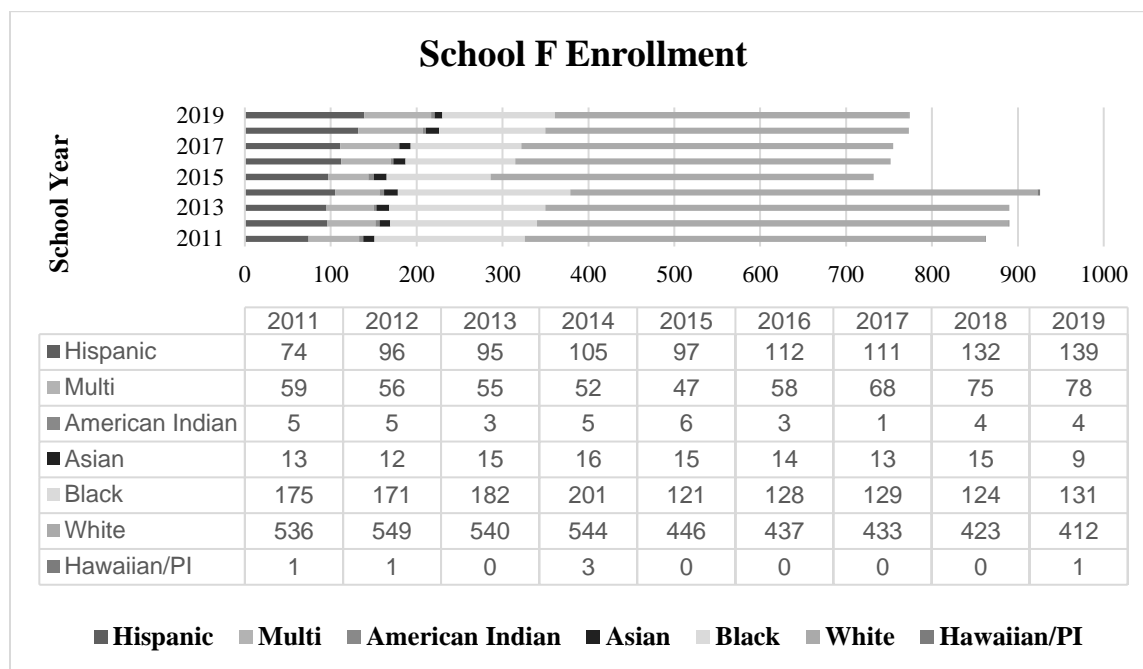
Note. Figure 6 displays the enrollment data for School C. Overall, from the years 2011-2019, School C was comprised of majority Black students, with the second largest population being White students. The multiracial and Hispanic students made up the third largest percentage, while the American Indian, Asian, and Hawaiian/PI populations were small or not at all represented in the data.

Figure 7*School D Enrollment*

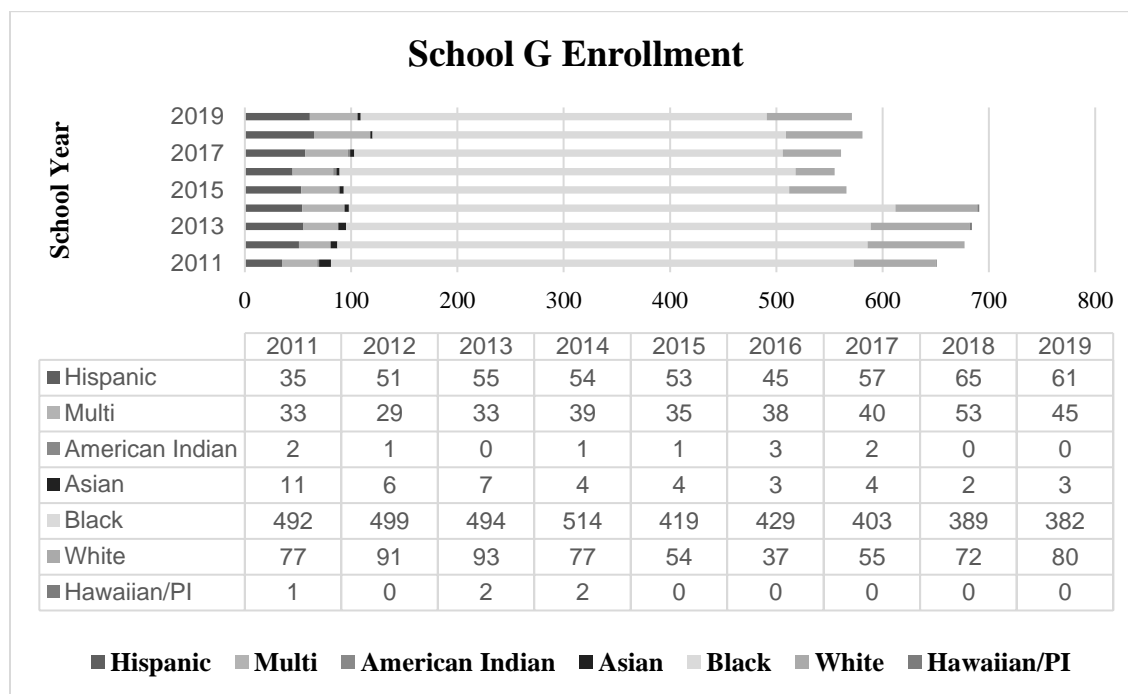
Note. Figure 7 displays the enrollment data for School D. Overall, from the years 2011-2019, School D was comprised of majority Black students, with the second largest population being White, and the third largest being Hispanic students. The gap between the Black students and the other races is exceptionally large. The multiracial students made up the fourth largest percentage, while the American Indian, Asian, and Hawaiian/PI populations were small or not at all represented in the data.

Figure 8*School E Enrollment*

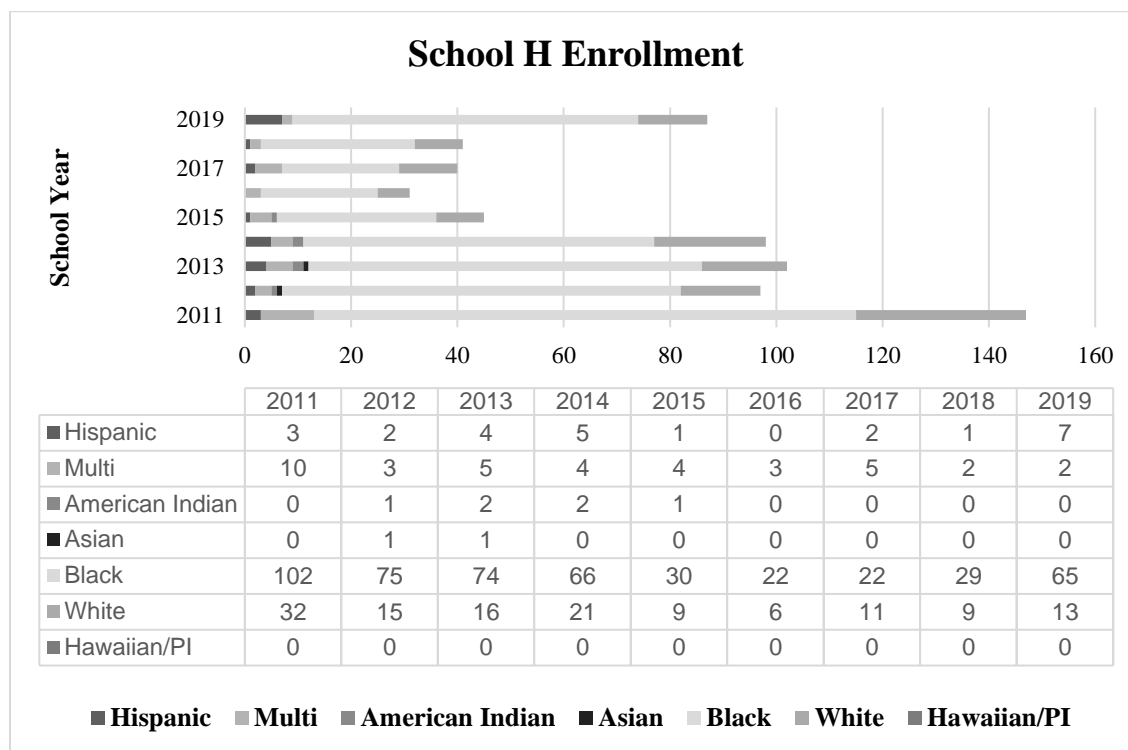
Note. Figure 8 displays the enrollment data for School E. Overall, from the years 2011-2019, School E was comprised of majority White students, and the gap between the number of White students and all other races was exceptionally large. The multiracial, Hispanic, and Black students made up the next largest percentage of the population; and the American Indian, Asian, and Hawaiian/PI populations were small or not at all represented in the data.

Figure 9*School F Enrollment*

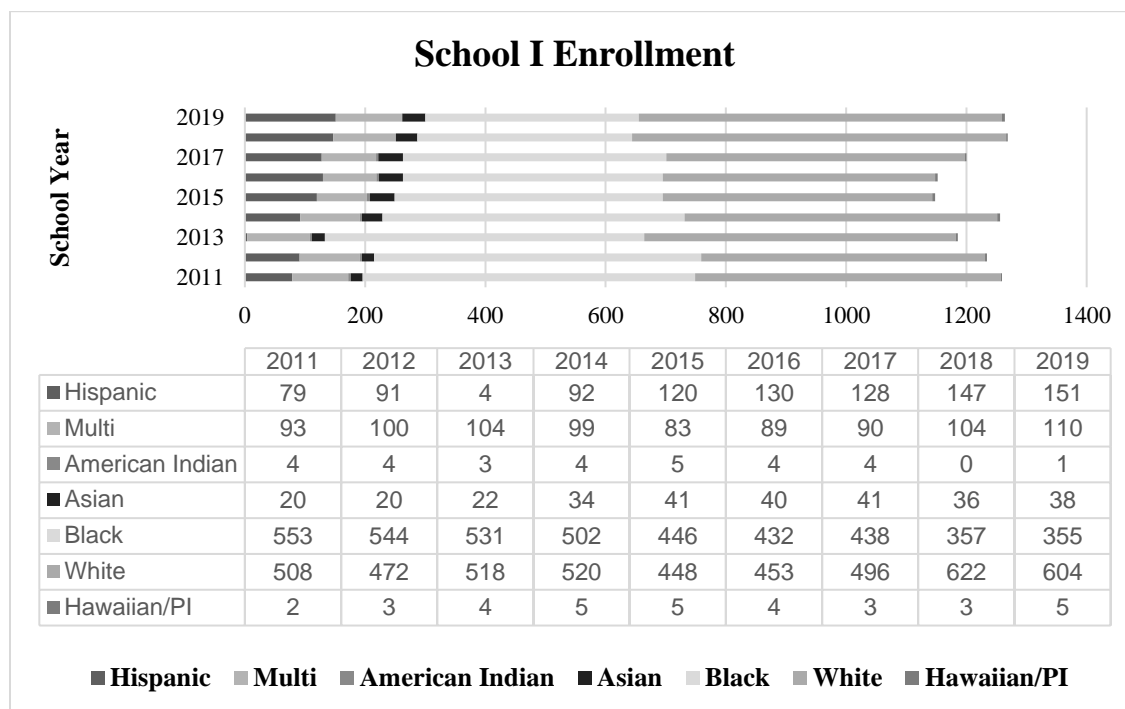
Note. Figure 9 displays the enrollment data for School F. Overall, from the years 2011-2019, School F was comprised of majority White students, with the second largest population being Black students, with Hispanic students following in the third largest. The multiracial students made up the next largest percentage; and the American Indian, Asian, and Hawaiian/PI populations were small or not at all represented in the data.

Figure 10*School G Enrollment*

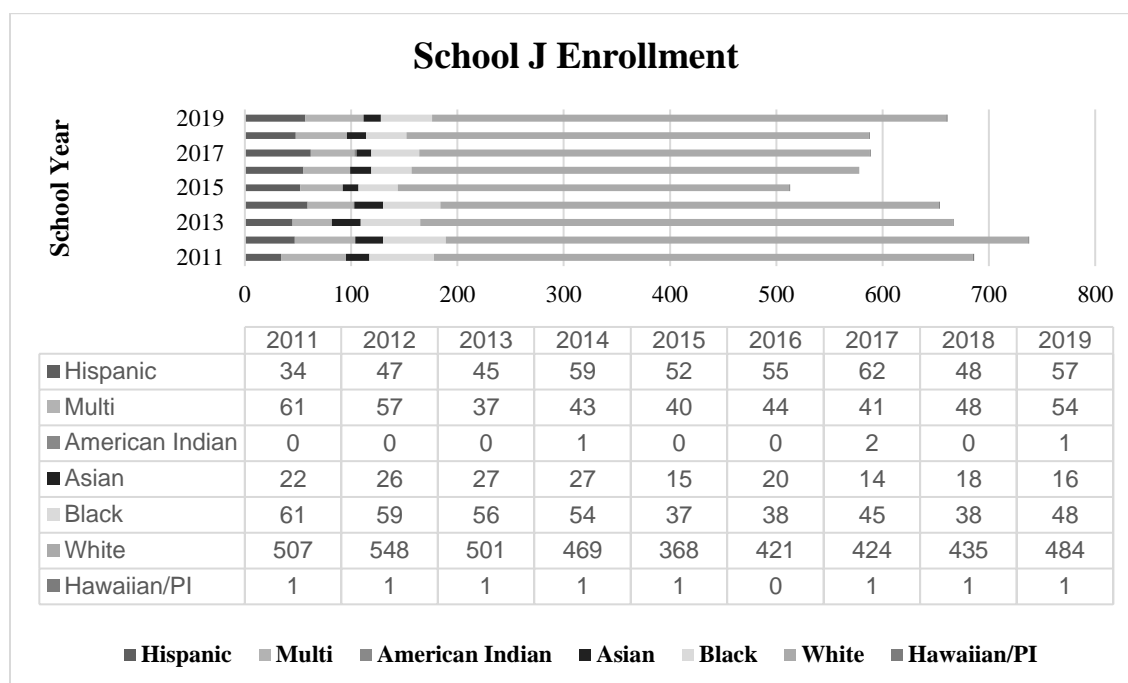
Note. Figure 10 displays the enrollment data for School G. Overall, from the years 2011-2019, School G was comprised of majority Black students, with the second largest populations being White and Hispanic students. The multiracial students made up the next largest percentage; and the American Indian, Asian, and Hawaiian/PI populations were small or not at all represented in the data.

Figure 11*School H Enrollment*

Note. Figure 11 displays the enrollment data for School H. Overall, from the years 2011-2019, School H was comprised of majority Black students, with the second largest population being White students. The Hispanic, multiracial, American Indian, Asian, and Hawaiian/PI populations were small or not at all represented in the data.

Figure 12*School I Enrollment*

Note. Figure 12 displays the enrollment data for School I. Overall, from the years 2011-2019, School I was comprised of mostly Black and White students. The Hispanic and multiracial populations were the next largest, while the American Indian, Asian, and Hawaiian/PI populations were extremely low or not represented in the data.

Figure 13*School J Enrollment*

Note. Figure 13 displays the enrollment data for School J. Overall, from the years 2011-2019, School J was comprised of majority White students; and the Black, Hispanic, and multiracial populations were close in numbers. American Indian and Hawaiian/PI populations were extremely low or not represented in the data.

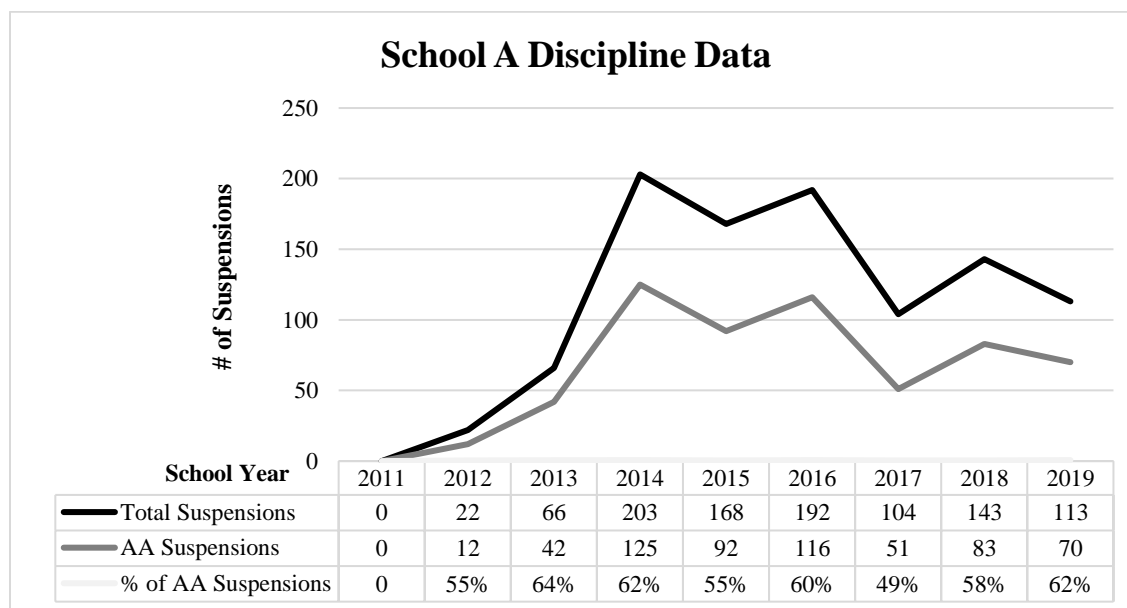
Research Question 1: How has the implementation of PBIS Impacted the Number and Percentage of African American Students Being Suspended?

Research Question 1 is answered by examining suspension data prior to and following PBIS implementation. Each school's discipline data are displayed in a data table and line graph. A line graph was used to display changes over time. The top line in each graph represents the total discipline for the school during that year, and the bottom line represents the African American suspensions. All data are organized by school year ranging from 2014 to 2019. A narrative to describe the data of each school is found

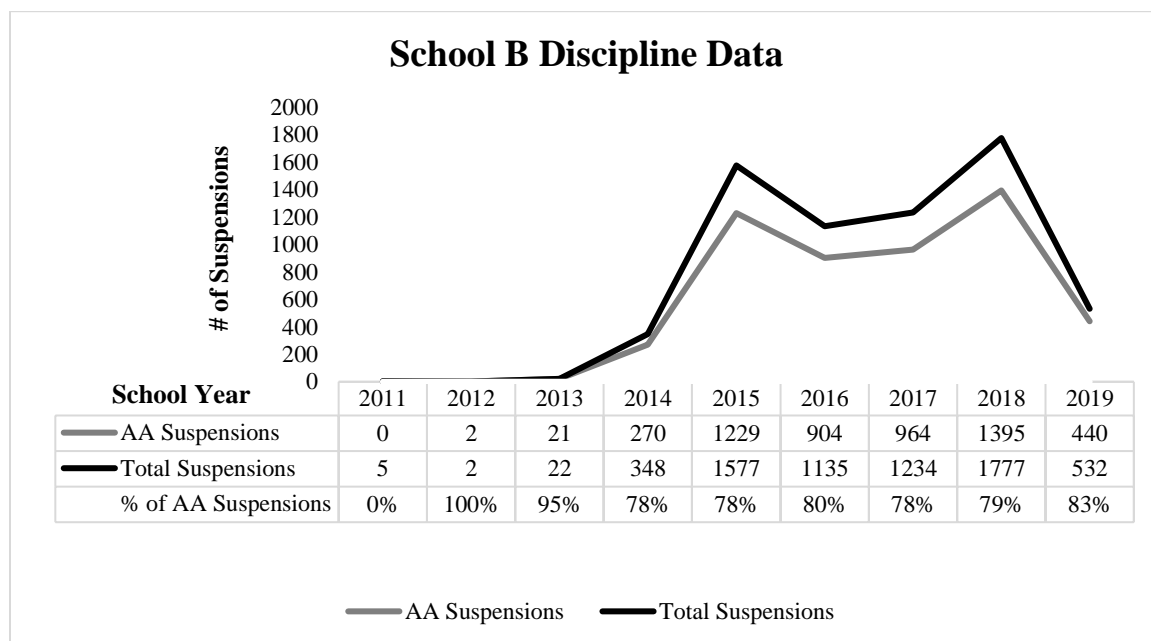
beneath each graphic.

Figure 14

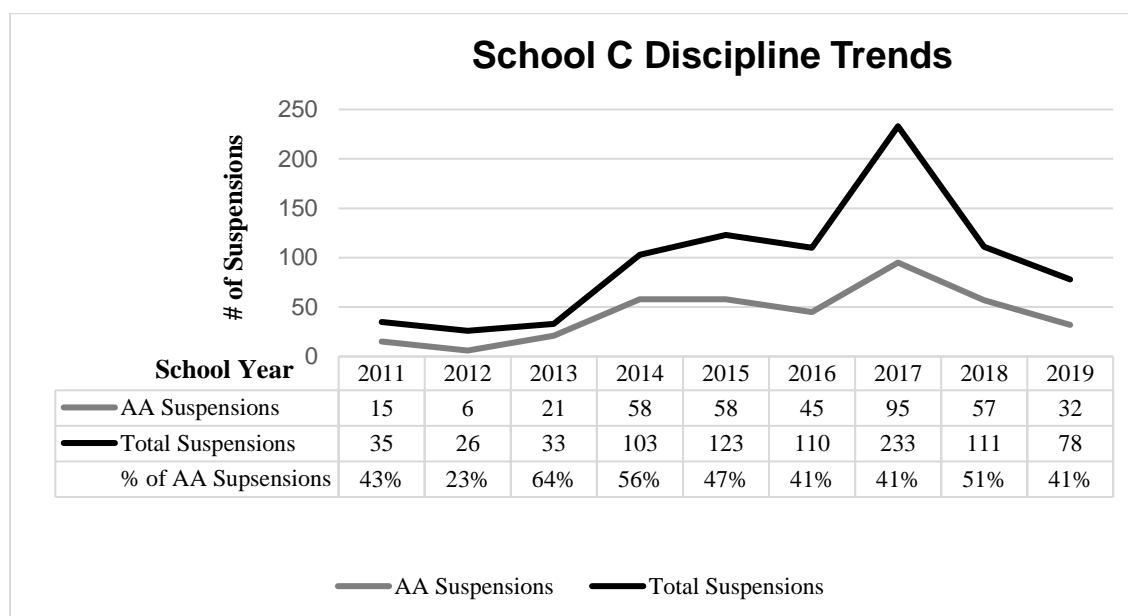
School A Discipline Data



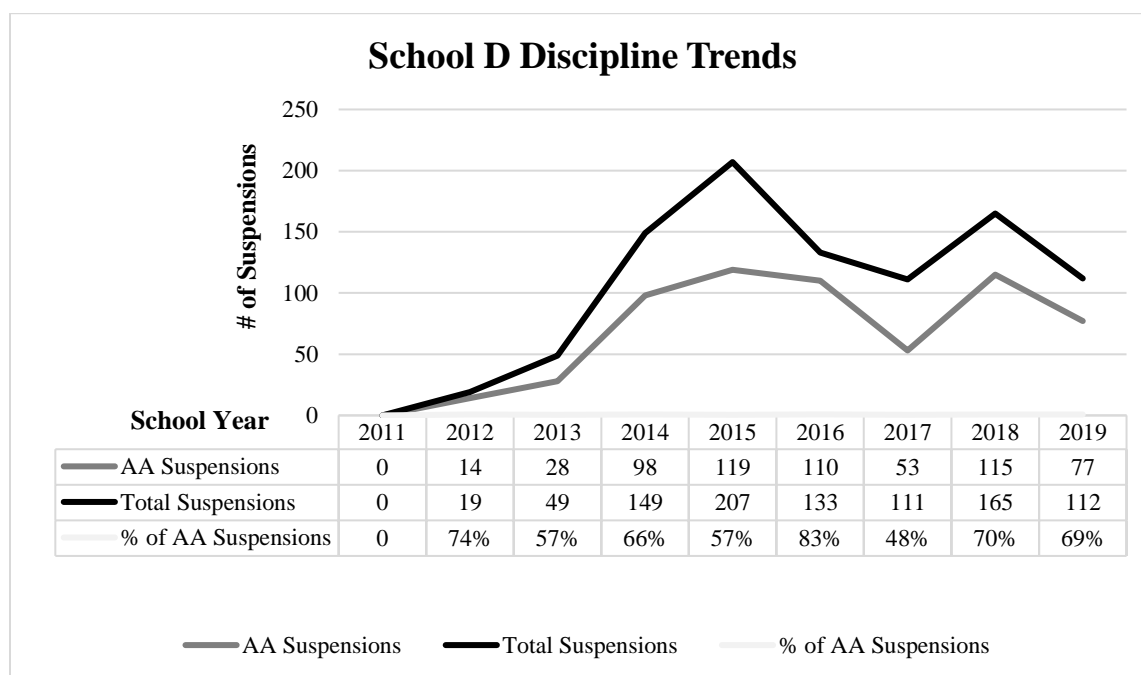
Note. Figure 14 displays the discipline data for School A. Overall, the discipline data show a fluctuation in the number of suspensions and expulsions between 2011 and 2019. Prior to PBIS implementation, Year 2014, one sees a steady increase in total number of African American suspensions and expulsions. Following implementation year, 2014, one sees a continuous rise and fall of suspension and expulsion rates.

Figure 15*School B Discipline*

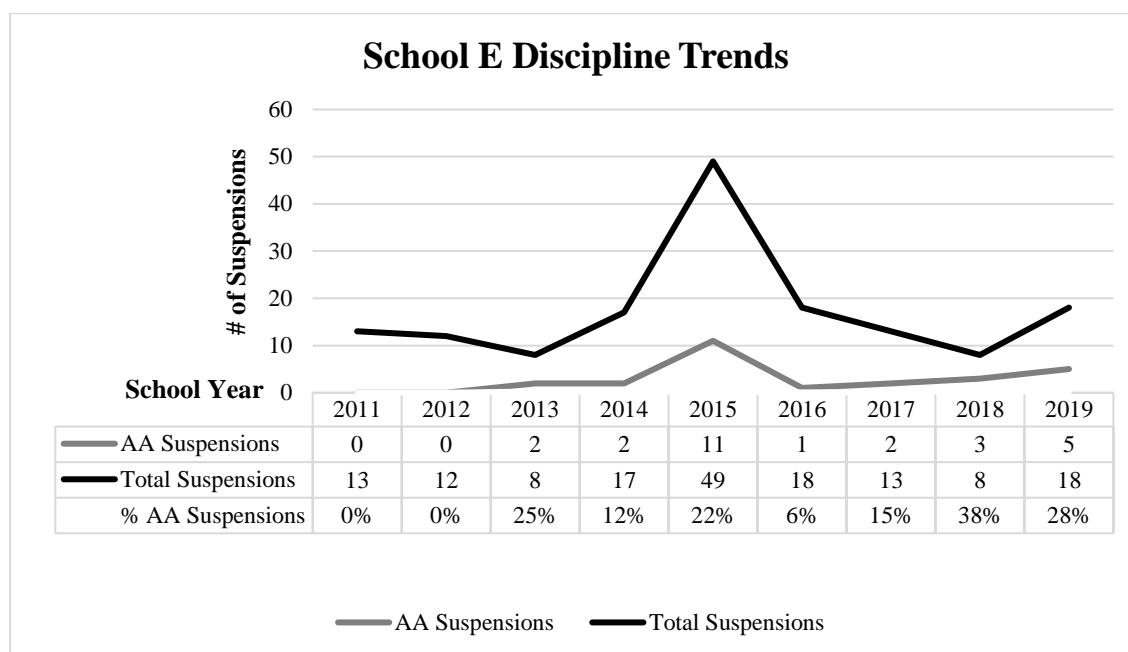
Note. Figure 15 displays the discipline data for School B. Overall, the discipline data show a fluctuation in the number of suspensions and expulsions between 2011 and 2019 with several years of spikes. Prior to PBIS implementation, Year 2014, the number of suspensions was extremely low, while the percentages of African American students receiving suspensions was high. Following implementation year, 2014, one sees a much larger number of suspensions and a fluctuation in the percentages.

Figure 16*School C Discipline Data*

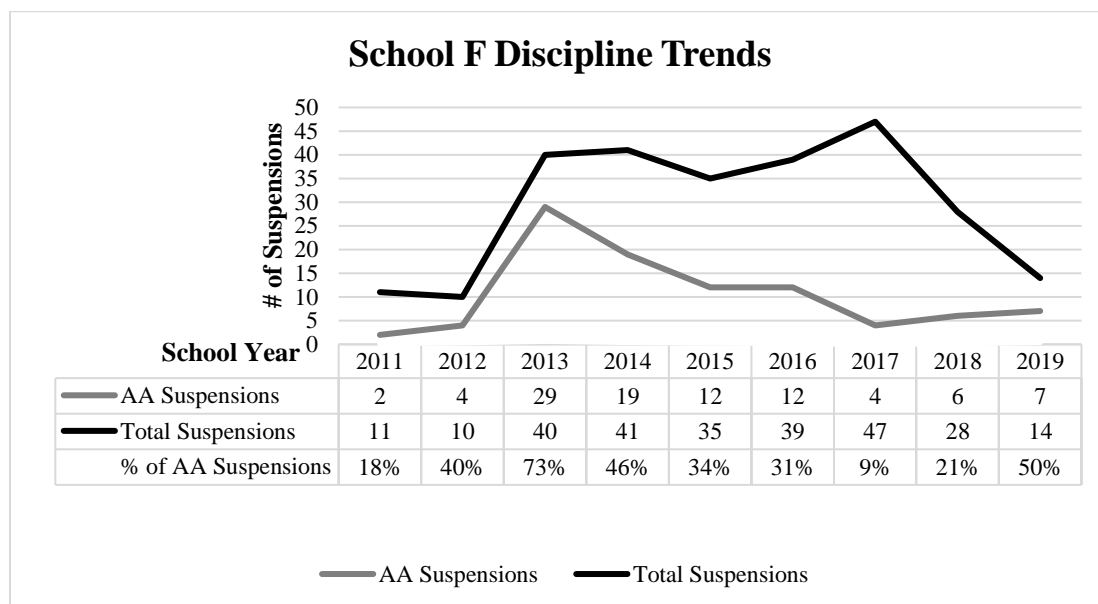
Note. Figure 16 displays the discipline data for School C. Overall, the discipline data show several years of rises and falls in suspensions and expulsions between 2011 and 2019. Prior to PBIS implementation, Year 2014, suspension numbers were low; then one sees an increase in total and African American suspensions and expulsions. Following implementation year, 2014, one sees an increase in African American suspensions but an overall decrease in the percentage of African American suspensions and expulsions.

Figure 17*School D Discipline Data*

Note. Figure 17 displays the discipline data for School D. Overall, the discipline data show some fluctuations in suspensions and expulsions between 2011 and 2019. Prior to PBIS implementation, Year 2014, suspension numbers were steadily increasing. Following implementation year, 2014, one sees an initial increase in suspensions and then fluctuations in the data.

Figure 18*School E Discipline Data*

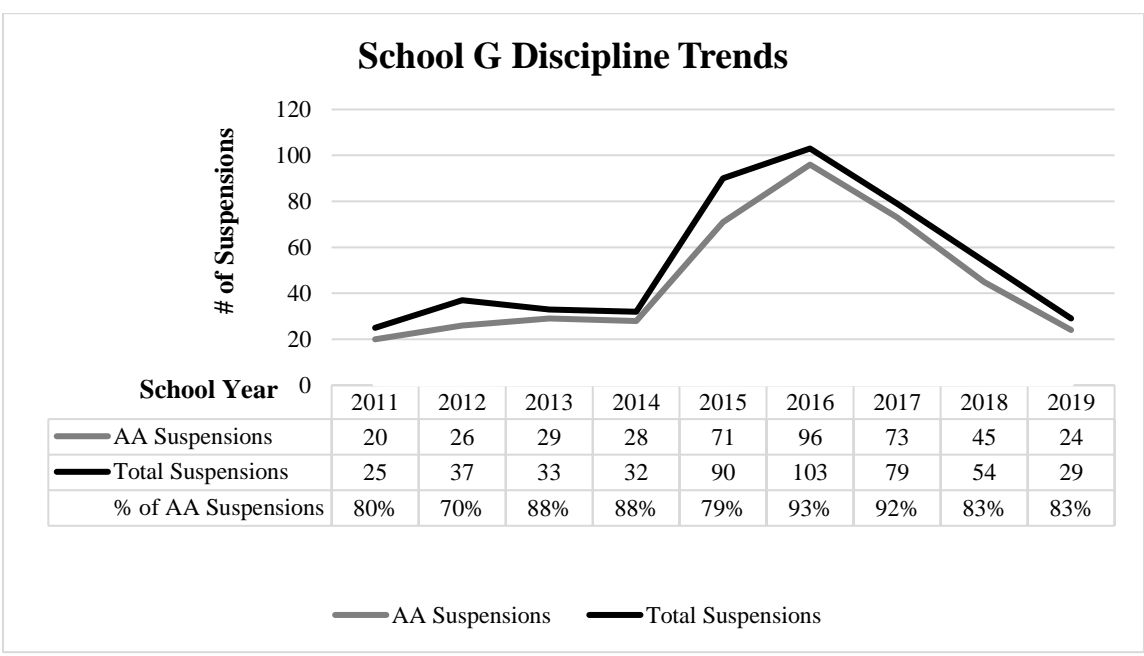
Note. Figure 18 displays the discipline data for School E. Overall, the discipline data show exceptionally low suspensions overall during the years of 2011 and 2019. Prior to PBIS implementation, Year 2014, suspension numbers were decreasing. Following implementation year, 2014, one sees an initial increase in suspensions and an overall decrease in the years following. African American suspensions are low in this set of data.

Figure 19*School F Discipline Data*

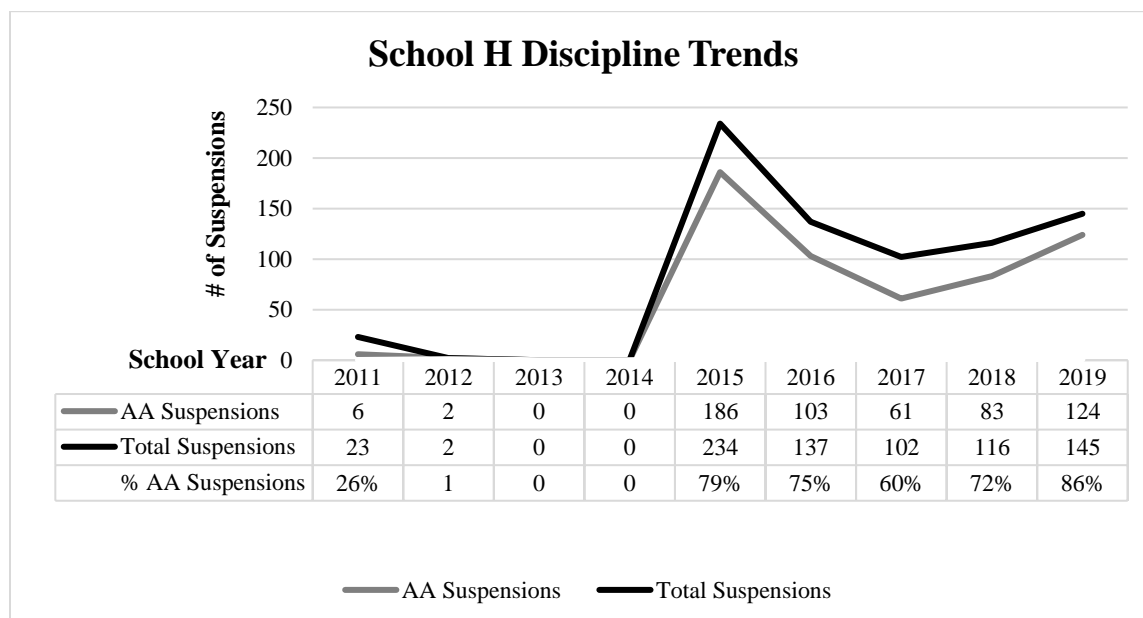
Note. Figure 19 displays the discipline data for School F. Overall, the discipline data show fluctuations in the data from 2011-2019. Prior to PBIS implementation, Year 2014, suspension numbers were fluctuating. Following implementation year, 2014, one sees an initial decrease in suspensions and again fluctuations in the years following.

Figure 20

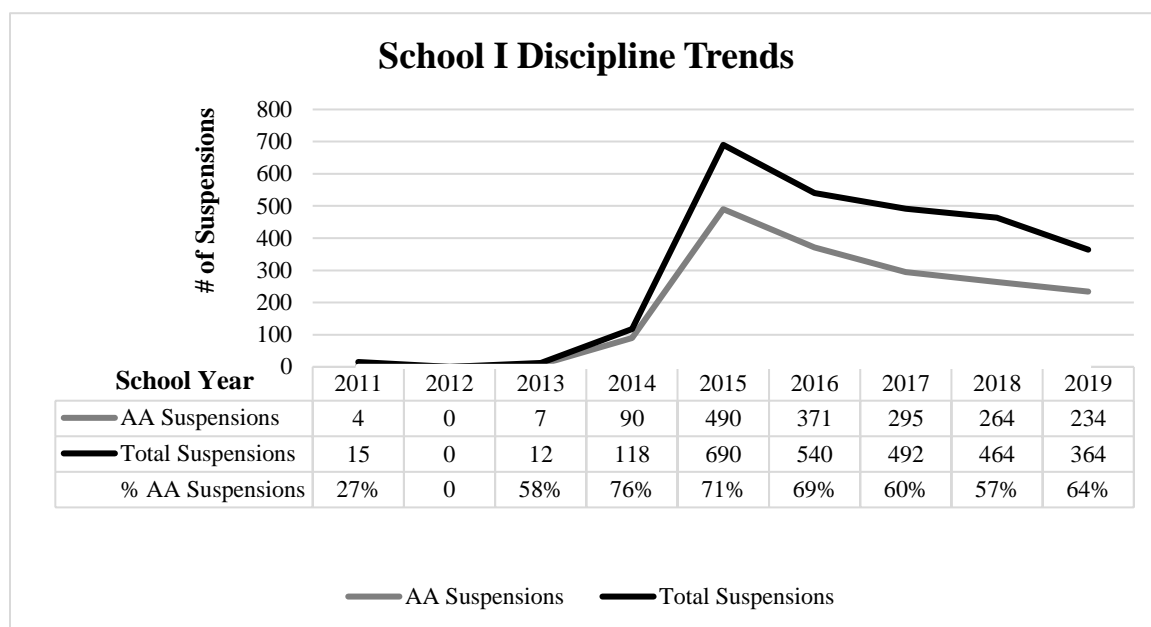
School G Discipline Data



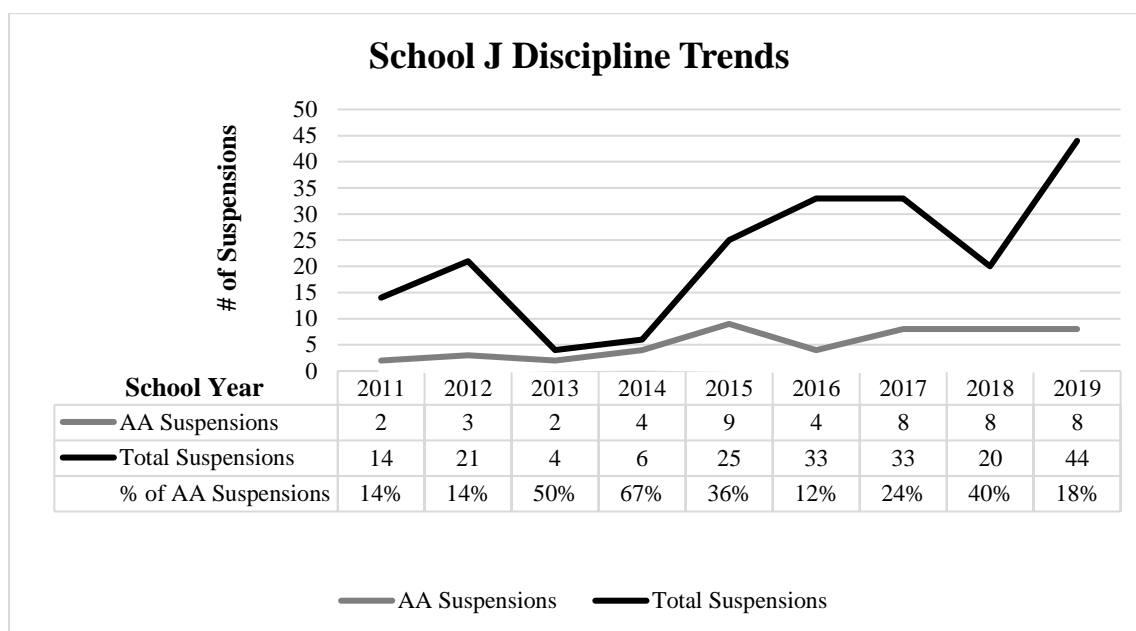
Note. Figure 20 displays the discipline data for School G. Overall, the discipline data show fluctuations in the data from 2011-2019. Prior to PBIS implementation, Year 2014, suspension numbers were fluctuating. Following implementation year, 2014, one sees a drastic increase in suspensions and again fluctuations in the years following.

Figure 21*School H Discipline Data*

Note. Figure 21 displays the discipline data for School H. School H is missing 2 years of data (2013-2014); these data were not able to be located, or the school did not submit a report for suspensions those years. However, prior to PBIS implementation, Year 2014, suspension numbers were decreasing. Following implementation year, 2014, one sees fluctuations in the discipline data and percentages of African Americans being suspended.

Figure 22*School I Discipline Data*

Note. Figure 22 displays the discipline data for School I. School I is missing 1 year of data (2012); these data were not able to be located, or the school did not submit a report for suspensions those years. However, prior to PBIS implementation, Year 2014, suspension numbers were decreasing. Following implementation year, 2014, one sees an initial major increase in the discipline data followed by a steady decrease in the number and percentages of African Americans being suspended.

Figure 23*School J Discipline Data*

Note. Figure 23 displays the discipline data for School J. School J is missing 1 year of data (2012); these data were not able to be located, or the school did not submit a report for suspensions those years. However, prior to PBIS implementation, Year 2014, suspension numbers were decreasing. Following implementation year, 2014, one sees an initial major increase in the discipline data followed by a steady decrease in the number and percentages of African Americans being suspended.

Discipline Data Summary

The figures above show tables and graphs of the total suspensions as well as the number and percentages of African American suspensions for each school during the years of 2011-2019. Overall, the trends identified include major fluctuations in discipline, initial decreases after PBIS implementation, and initial increases after PBIS implementation. Schools B, D, E, G, I, and J experienced initial increases in the number

of suspensions in 2015 following implementation, and then the data fluctuated afterwards. Schools A and F experienced initial decreases in the number of suspensions in 2015 following implementation and fluctuations afterwards. School C data remained the same the year following implementation, and School H is missing 2 years of data and no comparison can be made.

Research Question 2: What Are the Perceptions of Principals Regarding the Impact of the PBIS Framework on School Discipline, Student Behavior, and Disproportionality?

Research Question 2 is answered through interviews with principals in schools implementing the PBIS framework following 2015. Following is the emerging themes from the 10-question interview conducted to support Research Question 2. The first two questions were demographic in nature.

Principal Experience

Table 1 displays the number of years each principal has been a public school principal and at their school respectively.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Q1	Q2
Principal A	7	7
Principal B	7	7
Principal C	7	7
Principal D	7	5
Principal E	13	8
Principal F	4	4
Principal G	10	5
Principal H	14	6
Principal I	7	3
Principal J	10	7

Note. When asked how many years they have been public school principals, the data show that the average participants have been a public school principal for 8.6 years. When asked how many years they have been or were the principal of the qualifying school, the data show an average of 5.9 years.

Principals Define Disproportionality

When asked to share their own definition of discipline disproportionality, the emerging themes were having minorities represent the majority of discipline data in a building, equity in discipline, and disproportionate rates of discipline among various subgroups. The majority of principals shared a common idea that disproportionality was related to minority students receiving more discipline than other race groups. There were also common mentions of the term equity in discipline and the reality that disproportionality depends on student enrollment.

Principal A stated, “discipline disproportionality reflects the discrepancies between the rates of incidents between different subgroups of students.” Principal B shared, “Not having equitable practices. I think it comes down to having a wide range of understanding culture and different diverse communities.” Principal F stated, “having your minority population, being the majority of your discipline problems.” Principal I stated,

If you look at the overall national average of your discipline when you break it down by race and gender and other subgroups, that one group is far off from the national average or basically the percentage breakdown of your school population.

Principal C stated, “a certain group of students whose data does not align with our

overall school data, meaning there's a higher incidence for some particular subgroups than others.” Principal D shared, “equity of discipline in looking at different ethnicities, genders, there can be a disproportionality or studies have shown that there is a difference in the discipline.”

Principal Perceptions: PBIS and School Culture

When asked to share their perceptions of how PBIS impacted the culture of their school, the emerging themes were sharing a common language and schoolwide expectations, teaching explicit expectations, modeling positive behavior, and the intentionality of recognizing positive student behavior. Many principals felt that PBIS paved the way for everyone in the building to speak the same language surrounding expectations and discipline. Many responses discussed the value of behavior assemblies and explicitly teaching instructions. Last, there was a great deal of appreciation for the emphasis PBIS put on recognizing and rewarding positive behaviors. Principal A stated,

I think the strategy that had the most positive impact was just the common language that we utilize with the students. So, making sure that they understood what our school expectations were positively stated and having all adults speak that language. From the parents who entered the building to our resource teachers, our general education teachers, teacher assistants, having everyone speaking the same common language had the most positive impact.

Principal E shared, “it is also the common language and the common expectations of the staff. I think that had the biggest impact.” Principal I stated, “The first thing I think is making sure that everybody spoke the same language and that there were the same expectations, no matter if you were in the hallway or if you were in the classroom or the

cafeteria.”

Principal E stated, “I think absolutely teaching explicit expectations. We had a matrix that we developed, and we had explicit lessons that were taught to the entire student body the first week of school and then we revisited them midyear.” Principal G shared,

We had behavior assemblies the first day of school. We did it on the first day coming back from winter break, and I met with every grade level individually. So, it was not a full auditorium, but in smaller groups and we taught them the expectations. We modeled the expectations.

Principal I stated,

We actually taught what we expected. And I say to that, you can teach a kid to add four plus four. They are not going to know it right off the bat, but that is the same way with discipline. Everyone's expectations, everyone's background home life is different, culture is different. So, teaching those expectations, reinforcing them, having the same expectations so there is nothing hidden, and kids know what to expect all the time.

Principal B shared, “Being able to highlight students who are caught doing great things, having an incentive system set up, being able to share specific, should I say, shout outs or focus on specific character traits on the announcements.” Principal C expressed,

We use ClassDojo, the reinforcement portion of that. Every classroom teacher is required to do that. So, then the teachers use ClassDojo in their classrooms for different kinds of incentives. But what we have done schoolwide is we have done a school store, a ClassDojo store. The kids earn points and they are put on a credit

card, kind of a debit card if you will, and then they are scheduled certain times in the morning from like 8:15 to 8:30ish to go to the store and shop. I think it helps overall having the incentive that is something that is schoolwide that the kids can work for.

Principal D shared, “The positives that it promoted. Making people more aware of positives behaviors, giving the children just a lot of positives, bringing the positive to the forefront rather than the behaviors that were not as positive.” Principal G stated,

It had several layers to it for the swag club. So I met with my teachers and I said, "Okay, I want to be able to come in your class and have five envelopes for you to choose, but I'm going to ask you specific questions, and if you can answer 'yes' you get to pull this folder and open it up and the class gets whatever that reward is.

Principal H expressed,

Somewhere through the day, you have to find something positive to praise. So, we call them those BSPs, those behavior specific praise statements, and they were not allowed to be I like your shoes, I like your shirt. It could not be superficial like that. It had to be behavior based only.

Principal I stated,

And also recognizing our students for positive things all the time, whether it would be our Mustang shout outs or teachers looking for it. Sometimes when we get busy during the day, it is really difficult because you are busy with the content, the instruction. And it's little time, you've got to get so much in there, but making that purposeful effort to recognize students that are doing well means that

you are going to more often than not highlight some child who has not been highlighted and positive feedback grows more positive behavior.

One principal focused on removing the negatives before increasing the positives in the building. Principal H shared,

So, the biggest thing, which sounds surprising was just getting rid of the negative statements. So, we got rid of all of the use of no, do not, and stop. You do not realize how much teachers actually use those words until they have to be accountable for the word choices that they are using.

Principal Perceptions: PBIS and Student Behavior

When asked to share their perceptions of how PBIS impacted student behavior, the emerging themes were building relationships with the students and consistency with modeling the common norms, expectations, and behaviors. Several principals stressed the importance of building relationships with students. Another major theme was the consistency that PBIS brought to their expectations for behavior.

Principal B stated, “We focus on building relationships and part of that, we do our morning meetings. We have incorporated morning meetings to help to build the relationships.” Principal H shared,

I mean, that relationship building, I think, was the biggest piece, even for our kiddos, because then once you build that true, authentic relationship, and that opens up the door for these non-trusting individuals. Most of our kiddos, our parents did not have good school experiences. The kids have never had a good school experience. So, once that relationship started to be built, then the trust kind of came right after.

Principal J expressed,

The relationship and addressing student needs versus punitive, which is pretty old school. I think when the children there, you are trying to help them and you are actually taking constructive steps to meet needs, you get much better results.

Principal C stated,

I just think the consistency. We spend the entire month of September during our power up block, which is from 8:30 to 9:00 every single day, going over the expectations and teaching the expectations and modeling the expectations and taking kids to certain locations, whether it's the cafeteria or the playground or the bathroom. So, I think the consistency of making sure everybody is speaking the same language, following the matrices and making sure that we are constantly modeling those expectations for our kids. They are not one and done. They need it all the time.

Principal E shared,

Again, I think common language, common expectations, and consistency from one setting to the next. Those were probably the thing that had the biggest impact. Whether they were with their general education teacher or where they were with the PE teacher, or whether they were in the cafeteria with the lunchroom monitors or the bus drivers.

Principal F expressed,

We spend a lot of time at the very beginning of the year, possibly a week or two talking about PBIS and what good behavior looks like, but not necessarily what good behavior looks like, what bad behavior looks like also. So, the teachers do,

we do a lot of skits to give them the opportunity to see what those behaviors look like in all areas. In the hallway, in the bathroom, in the cafeteria, on the playground. So, we try to model those behaviors for the students. So, every student knows what it looks like.

Principal H stated,

So, when we created a highly structured environment for them where they did not have to question how to navigate the environment, the rules, that is how I go to the restroom, how I walk in the hallway, how I am going to respond to questions or prompts in a classroom.

Principal I shared, “I would say having common norms and positive praise and same expectations, very similar.”

Principal Perceptions: PBIS and School Discipline Program

When asked to share their perceptions of how PBIS impacted the overall discipline program at their school, the emerging themes were a positive impact on the overall discipline program, reduction in discipline referrals and incidents, teacher awareness and proactivity when handling discipline, and an increase in student understanding of the importance of their behavior and expectations. Overall, principals reported PBIS having a positive impact on the discipline program at their schools. Many principals reported a decrease in discipline referrals and incidents and an increase in teacher proactivity and mindset towards discipline.

Principal C stated,

I hate to use the word positive, but it has had a positive impact. When I first started here and over the years, as we have gotten better with PBIS and we have

gotten more specific about it, we have had a decrease in referrals, a drastic decrease. Over the years, the transition with a new AP and then the consistency of the program, it has slowly declined the number of referrals that we are dealing with.

Principal D shared, “It affected it in a positive way.” Principal G expressed, “I saw it having a positive impact overall in the building.” Principal E shared, “We had significant decreases in the discipline, between 40% and 60% decrease in office referrals.” Principal H expressed,

Prior to implementing PBIS, our first year, we had 12 expulsions and we were in the...I want to say 500 or 600 behavior referrals. I do not remember exactly, but that was my first year. And that is when we decided we have to do something different. So, we started implementing PBIS. And then we went down to six to two, and then the last three years, we had not one expulsion. And we were down into less than 100 behavior referrals per year.

Principal I shared, “We saw significant decrease in referrals.” Principal J stated, “But overall PBIS reduced our discipline incident rate.”

Principal B shared, “We did activities, PD with our entire staff, so they can start being aware of what restorative practices work.” Principal C also stated,

We spent a whole...a couple of training sessions in which we sat down, and they determined what should be handled in the classroom and what should be sent to the office. So, they had total input on that. Then we also define those behaviors because for some people, disrespect comes in a lot of different ways. Disrespect for someone might be rolling of the eyes, whereas other persons, it might be a kid

cussing them out. So, we had to clearly define those behaviors, so everybody had a clear understanding of what each specific behavior was. Then we came up with a flow chart as far as what specifically should be handled in the classroom and what comes to the office. And I think that decreased our referrals as well. We are really, really big on trying to get the teachers to understand that they have the power, that the administration does not necessarily have the power that...the kids want to perform for their teacher.

Principal D shared, "Teachers were more willing to work with the students instead of just writing referrals." Principal H expressed, "it opened that door where teachers became much more proactive because they knew their kids and they could identify an issue or behavior before it ever even came to fruition." Principal I stated,

Teachers started utilizing additional methods in the classroom to work with students prior to referring them to the office. We decided what was a large or major infraction and what was a minor infraction to give teachers more autonomy in their classroom.

Principal B stated,

I think the students are able to share. You can stop any student in the hall. In fact I can always send you that data where we had another school come to monitor to see how we've been implementing PBIS and every student, every staff member, except for one, but every student knew exactly what the three main things were.

Principal G shared,

What was nice was we had that common understanding to begin our conversations. So, what we did was problem solving. One thing I did teach them

right away, and I tell them being a student walking in excellence, it is not a choice. It is an expectation. So, they knew it was the expectation. It is not a choice. I think that is why it helped that common language to have those conversations.

Principal J stated, “And I think that educating, and the teaching expectations, and rationale as to why, is also incredibly supportive. Children understand what's expected, the reason for it versus do it because I told you so.”

Principals Perceptions: Student Discipline and Their Peers

When asked to share their perceptions of student groups that are disciplined more than their peers, the emerging themes were African American males and special education students. Most principals identified African American boys and special education students as the most disciplined groups of students in their school.

Principal A stated, “Yes. So definitely our students with disabilities. Definitely our African American students and our African American males, particularly.” Principal B shared, “My second-grade groups of students receive more overall than any other grade level and Black males.” Principal C stated, “I would say two groups. Number one our African American boys and our special ed students.” Principal D stated, “There was a disproportionality with African American males.” Principal E shared, “students with disabilities. But boys.” Principal H shared, “So, I can tell you prior to coming to School H, it would have been African American boys, because we had an overwhelming number of referrals of African American boys in my first one-to-three years.” Principal I stated, “definitely our Black, special education males.”

Principal F shared a differing opinion: “I think when I say that I think my White

students have more behavior concerns. And my new students, students that possibly have not grown or came up through [School F].”

Principal Perceptions: PBIS and Disproportionality

When asked to share their perceptions of the impact PBIS has had on disproportionality, especially with African Americans, the emerging theme was PBIS brought an awareness of the issue and allowed them to focus on disproportionality. Many responses showed an overall appreciation for the awareness the PBIS program brought to their discipline programs. Many expressed that seeing the numbers helped them to make equity a focus when rendering discipline consequences. Principal A stated,

Mainly in that it brought awareness to the problem and it allowed us to direct the focus at that problem. We started having some difficult conversations about making sure that our classroom reflects the students with whom are in it. So, we tried to really encourage them to make sure that the classroom environment was reflective, and it allowed them to make connections to the teacher and the learning environment so that students were not so disconnected.

Principal F shared, “Again, the *awareness* going over the school requirements.” Principal H expressed, “restorative practices and looking at those tiered interventions, it forced my teachers to also look through an equitable lens when...even before they would even write a referral.”

Principal I stated, “Well, first off, it was the awareness and recognition that there was a disproportionate number of referrals being referred. Sometimes you need to see the data in black and white to know that it is happening.” Principal J shared,

It definitely has created a focus on different needs, I think. And when we looked

at it initially, we did have a higher proportion of minority students receiving referrals and especially little boys. I think to focus on the disproportionality has made us all look at the needs a little more deeply. And time to find those and address an awareness.

Principal Perceptions: PBIS Enhancement

When asked to share their perceptions on how PBIS could be enhanced to address the issue of disproportionality, the emerging theme was an increase in training on PBIS strategies, interventions, and equity. Principal responses indubitably expressed the need for PBIS training in various areas for staff across the division.

Principal B stated, “Professional development training, and I think that falls under equity training because a lot of the reason why is lack of classroom management.”

Principal C expressed, “I think it comes back to just more training and more awareness and more conversations and more empathy and understanding of different cultures.”

Principal G expressed, “I think that would be really continuing the training and the discussions with staff members because everybody is at a different place.” Principal H stated,

We need to incorporate an equitable lens or an equitable piece where we start really talking about implicit biases, courageous conversations, what those things are, because when you are talking about running any school, you are talking about people coming from all different places.

Principal J shared,

Well, I definitely think our teachers need more training in some of the explosive behaviors. If they have had some training in the trauma, I think that would be

helpful. And then if they started the discussions about race, and everybody is hearing everyone's story, and feeling what is going on in their lives.

Principal Remarks

When asked to share any additional remarks surrounding disproportionality, discipline, and PBIS, the following themes emerged: the value and benefits of PBIS and the need for accountability and progression with how PBIS looks in schools. Overall, responses were positive regarding PBIS and encouraging to me. Participants were supportive of my process and gave their best wishes.

Principal A shared,

The only thoughts I have right now are the things that are on my mind right now that are important to me, which is the disproportionality, equity disparities, appreciating people who are different, whether it be racially, ethnically, gender identification. There are just so many factors I think at this point are going to play into student behavior and performance all the way down to trauma. And the significant... In addition to the trauma that our students had already faced. The significant trauma that our students have likely faced over this school closure. And then also the trauma that our adults have also experienced through this. And I believe that when you marry those two together, students are not necessarily going to respond to our adult educators in the same way. And our adult educators are not necessarily going to present in the same way. So, if we do move forward with PBIS, it will need to look quite different than the traditional PBIS.

Principal B stated, "So, I would say just making sure that holding people accountable because that does not happen. You just assume you check off but holding

schools accountable to ensure that that's being done, and it's not always that way.”

Principal C shared,

I know PBIS has changed our entire culture of our building. I can honestly say even with the pandemic, last year was year seven for me, and it took us that long to finally get to the point where I felt like the culture of our building was vibrant and alive and people were invested in kids. When it first started here at School C, the staff that was here were folks that had been here for a long period of time and getting them to invest in it was extremely difficult. But over the years, we've stood pretty steadfast in the belief system of, if you focus on what you want from kids, you're going to get what you need from them, as opposed to focusing on what you don't want them to do. As soon as we got more people invested in that philosophy and belief system, I think it gradually changed the culture of our building.

Principal D shared,

I think PBIS really was hitting home. It is data driven. So I think it is a very positive program when you are looking at the data because a lot of times people do not realize exactly where the statistics are and what the kind of disciplines are being handed down and whom they are being handed down. And so using that data to drive what you're doing in the building, using student input, teacher input, parent input, and the data with the discipline, I think it has a very big, positive impact because it really brings it to the forefront of the disproportionalities that are occurring. And a lot of people do not think that is happening, but it happens. And so, I think that is a really important part of PBIS is actually starting with

looking at that data, looking at where things are happening with fractions, who these infractions are occurring with. So, I think it is really a big part of it to help move towards that positive change that you want to see. I think it is exciting.

PBIS, I think is a really great program, but it is got to be implemented correctly and it is got to be done slowly for it to have that positive impact.

Principal G stated,

It is teaching them life skills. Just like we teach reading and math and everything, we have to teach behavior and just like anything else. These are the skills that are going to help them be successful. The next day, the next school year, as they move through middle school, high school, college, career, whatever they do. That is how I feel.

Principal H shared,

We embraced the program. We stretched our teachers, I think, sometimes to their limits where there were a lot of tears. We coupled it with a lot of growth fixed mindset, book studies to kind of look at that, because that has to come in play with the PBIS. You have to have that growth mindset to change our practices. It is just too bad that districts are not provided enough funding to allow them to have just committees that just do that and make sure that those pieces are embedded in our schools, because it's a lot of work for a school to do sometimes independently on their own.

Summary of Results

Overall, there were two major trends that emerged from the discipline data analysis: fluctuation in the number and percentage of African American student

suspensions and a decrease in the number and percentage of African American student suspensions. Six schools experienced initial increases in suspensions following PBIS implementation, two experienced initial decreases in suspensions, and one stayed the same. The major trend identified in the discipline data is the fluctuation in the number and percentages of African American suspensions each year following implementation.

Several themes emerged from the interview portion of this study. Overall, principals view PBIS as having a positive impact on school culture, student behavior, and their discipline programs at large. Many described seeing decreases in the number of office referrals and suspensions rendered to students. Participants shared gratitude for the awareness PBIS brought to the issue of disproportionality and the path it allowed for teachers to become more proactive in their classrooms. A need for training was expressed by many participants in order to enhance PBIS in their buildings and in the district at large.

Chapter 5 includes a summary, critical analysis, and discussion on the themes reported in this chapter. In addition to an analysis of the themes, Chapter 5 compares the discipline data to perceptions of the participating principals to see the correlation. The research found in Chapter 2 is compared to the results of this study to help determine the impact of PBIS on the number and percentage of African American students being suspended.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact PBIS had on disproportionality in one Eastern Virginia school division. Additionally, the purpose was to gain insight from the perceptions of principals and the wide range of variables that may play a role in the disparate rates of discipline among minorities. This chapter includes a discussion of major findings as related to the literature on disproportionality, PBIS, and the implications that may be valuable for use by superintendents, PBIS coordinators, school administrators, and teachers. Also included is a discussion on connections to this study and CRT. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and a brief summary.

This chapter contains discussion and recommendations for future research that could help answer the following research questions:

1. How has the implementation of PBIS impacted the number and percentage of African American students being suspended?
2. What are the perceptions of principals regarding the impact of the PBIS framework on school discipline, student behavior, and disproportionality?

The findings from determining how the implementation of PBIS has impacted the number and percentage of African American students are inconclusive. There were major fluctuations from year to year for seven of the 10 schools in the study. The remaining three schools saw decreases up to a point and then experienced increases or decreases in numbers. However, the majority of principals in this study felt that PBIS had a positive impact on school discipline and student behavior. The major findings from the perceptions of principals regarding disproportionality is that PBIS helped bring

awareness to the issue.

Interpretation of Findings

While each school had differences in enrollment demographics, in most schools, the number and percentages of African American students being suspended and expelled were disproportionate to other races. The common theme of fluctuating discipline data was prominent, and the principal perceptions were mostly positive. The themes that emerged from principal interviews have an interesting contrast to the discipline data provided by the division. Each theme is described in detail in the following sections.

Disproportionality Data

According to the definition stated in Chapter 1, disproportionality refers to the overrepresentation of minority students in suspensions and discipline referrals (U. S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Table 2 shows the percentage of African American students enrolled in each school compared to the percentage of African American students suspended and expelled from 2011 to 2019.

Table 2

Disproportionality Data

School	Percentage of African Americans enrolled (2011-2019)	Percentage of African Americans suspended and expelled (2011-2019)
A	34.3 %	58.5%
B	66.1%	78.8%
C	34.2%	45.4%
D	49.5%	65%
E	5.7%	46.4%
F	18.5%	35.8%
G	72.6%	85.5%
H	70.5%	74.4%
I	37.9%	65.1%
J	7.7%	24%

Note. Table 2 shows that, by definition, each school had disproportionate rates of suspensions and expulsions among African American students from 2011 to 2019. The suspension and expulsion percentages exceed the African American student enrollment percentages for all schools. The numbers were not significantly different in School H.

Analysis of Findings for Research Question 1: How Has the Implementation of PBIS Impacted the Number and Percentage of African American Students Being Suspended?

Research Question 1 was explored through discipline data provided by the division. The data were disaggregated and placed into tables and graphs to identify trends. This study concluded that implementing the PBIS framework in 10 Eastern Virginia schools did not have a conclusive impact on the number and percentage of African American suspensions. In this study, seven of the 10 schools had major fluctuations in the number and percentage of suspensions and expulsions each year.

Schools A, B, D, and E experienced a major increase in 2015; and after that, there was a continuous rise and fall in the number and percentage of African American suspensions. School C remained consistent following implementation and then experienced rises and falls in the number and percentage of African American suspensions. School F experienced an initial decrease in the number and percentage of African American suspensions, then the numbers remained consistent followed by rises and falls in the data. School G experienced an initial major increase in suspensions and expulsions, followed by 3 years of decreases in the numbers. School H does not have pre-implementation data; however, the data following implementation shows rises and falls in the number of suspensions and expulsions. School I experienced a major increase in

numbers immediately following implementation with 4 years of decreases. School J experienced an initial increase, then decrease, and the last 3 years were consistent. Overall, Schools E, F, and J experienced the smallest number of suspensions and expulsions of African American students.

The research in Chapter 2 concludes, “The broad purpose of PBIS is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of schools and other agencies. PBIS improves social, emotional and academic outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities and students from underrepresented groups” (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019, Who Are We section). The research also stated that PBIS has been found to decrease the number of office discipline referrals in schools that implement it with fidelity (Flannery et al., 2014).

The discipline records shown in this study do not support the aforementioned research. The discipline data did not show that PBIS improved outcomes for all students, particularly students from underrepresented groups. The data in this study opposed the research that PBIS decreases the number of discipline referrals or, in this case, suspensions and expulsions. There were no major trends that emerged in the discipline data provided in this study. There can be no conclusive statement made to support the belief that this division experienced a decrease in the number and percentage of suspensions of African American students after PBIS implementation. The implementation of PBIS in this Eastern Virginia school division shows no significant impact on the number and percentage of suspensions of African American students.

Analysis of Findings for Research Question 2: What Are the Perceptions of Principals Regarding the Impact of the PBIS Framework on School Discipline, Student Behavior, and Disproportionality?

Research Question 2 was explored through interviewing 10 principals within the division. While all participants expressed their own perceptions, there were several trends that emerged for each question. The first two questions were demographics to gain background knowledge on the experience level of principals in the study. It was noted that the average years of experience was 8.6 years, with an average of 5.9 years at the school of study.

Principals Define Disproportionality

When asked to define discipline disproportionality, the majority of participants shared a personal definition that involved minorities being the majority of discipline referrals and suspensions. Principal F stated, “having your minority population being the majority of your discipline problems.” Principal C shared, “a certain group of students whose data does not align with our overall school data, meaning there’s a higher incidence for some particular subgroups than others.” The literature suggests that discipline disproportionality is defined as the overrepresentation of minorities in discipline referrals and suspensions (U. S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016). The majority of the principals in this study had a definition that was aligned with the literature and shared close definitions to the accepted definition in this study. Looking at the presented data, the majority of suspensions and expulsions were from minority groups that were not the majority of the school enrollment.

Principal Perceptions: PBIS and School Culture

When asked what specific PBIS strategies impacted the school's culture, there were several themes that emerged. Those themes were common language, schoolwide expectations, teaching explicit expectations, modeling positive behavior, and the intentionality of recognizing positive student behavior. Each principal expressed that PBIS introduced a new positivity in the atmosphere and culture of the school, which aligns perfectly with the research. PBIS is a systems approach that provides a schoolwide framework to implement research-based intervention practices that can improve the overall school climate (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019). Principals saw a major improvement in the overall school culture following PBIS implementation. The use of common language and behavioral expectations led to a positive school culture and left no room for confusion for students.

Common Language and Schoolwide Expectations

It was repeatedly stated that one of the main strategies that impacted the school culture in a positive way was the common language that came with the PBIS framework. Principal A stated, "I think the strategy that had the most positive impact was just the common language that we utilized with the students. Having everyone speaking the same common language had the most positive impact." Principal E shared, "it is also the common language and common expectations of the staff. I think that had the biggest impact." Principal I stated, "The first thing I think is making sure that everybody spoke the same language and that there were the same expectations."

These responses aligned directly with the research presented in a previous study

where a principal stated that PBIS gives a sense of unity and common language that can be used with all school personnel. The example that was given in this study discussed how administrators can request teachers to review certain areas in the PBIS matrix, and every teacher in the building will know the exact expectations, and each child will learn the same expectations (Wooten, 2015). The research showed that disciplinary approaches like schoolwide PBIS are effective at reducing problem behavior and creating a positive learning environment for students (Gershoff & Font, 2016). The common language and expectations of PBIS provided unity and structure to the discipline programs of these schools, thus positively impacting the school culture.

Teaching Explicit Expectations and Modeling Positive Behavior

The principals in this study stressed the value of explicitly teaching expectations for positive behavior. Many principals discussed how they ran their behavior assemblies and how often they revisited these expectations to ensure student success. Principal E stated, “I think absolutely teaching explicit expectations. We had a matrix that we developed, and we had explicit lessons.” Principal G shared, “We had behavior assemblies...and we taught them expectations. We modeled the expectations.” Principal I stated, “We actually taught what we expected.” Modeling and explicitly teaching expectations fell under Tier 1 of PBIS. Tier 1 is where the foundation is established for regular routines, expectations, and support to prevent unwanted behaviors. The expectation is that in Tier 1, stakeholders will effectively teach appropriate behavior to children to avoid unwanted behaviors (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019). This was done by the principals in this study and they agreed that it helps maintain a positive school culture.

Recognizing Positive Student Behavior

The last theme that emerged was the intentionality placed on recognizing positive student behavior. The principals in this study were pleased to share their experiences and successes of recognizing positive student behavior. Principal B stated that being able to highlight students who were caught doing great things and having incentives helped the school culture. Principal D shared, “The positives that it promoted. Making people more aware of positive behaviors, giving the children just a lot of positives, bringing the positive to the forefront rather than the behaviors that were not as positive.” Principal H shared that the biggest impact PBIS brought to the school culture was getting rid of the negatives and focusing on the positives. Principal H said, “We got rid of all of the use of no, do not, and stop. You do not realize how much teachers actually use those words until they have to be accountable for the word choices that they are using.”

The strategies used by the principals in this study align with the purpose and research of the PBIS framework. PBIS institutes tiered systems of rewards for students exhibiting desirable behaviors to prevent negative behaviors from developing or replacing negative behaviors with positive ones (McNeill et al., 2016). PBIS aims to enhance the entire school environment through systems and rewards (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019). The responses showed that PBIS does impact the school culture by focusing on the positives rather than the negatives.

Principal Perceptions: PBIS and Student Behavior

When asked to share specific PBIS strategies that impacted the behavior of students at their school, the following themes emerged: building relationships and

consistency. Principals expressed the value of building relationships and the consistency that PBIS brought to modeling the norms, expectations, and behaviors. Principal B stated, “We focus on building relationships and part of that, we do our morning meetings.” Principal H shared, “I mean, the relationship building, I think, was the biggest piece.” Principal J expressed, “The relationship and addressing student needs versus punitive.” The work of Skiba and Losen (2016) explained that schoolwide interventions have been found effective in improving school discipline or climate and have the potential to reduce discipline disparities based on race through relationship building. Relationship building sits at the core of every discipline program and can be used to positively impact student behavior.

The consistency of PBIS was highlighted by several principals in this study. Principal C in this study stated, “I think the consistency of making sure everybody is speaking the same language, following the matrices, and making sure that we are constantly modeling those expectations for our kids.” Principal E shared, “Again, I think the common language, common expectations, and consistency from one setting to the next.” Wooten’s (2015) study discussed the importance of consistency in structures and processes within a school: “When school staff is consistent, it can improve learning and discourage inappropriate and disruptive behaviors” (p. 84). Consistency is key, especially with students and behavior expectations.

Principal Perceptions: PBIS and School Discipline Program

When asked how PBIS impacted the overall discipline program at their school, several themes emerged. The themes that emerged were a positive impact overall, reduction in discipline referrals, teacher awareness and proactivity, and an increase in

student understanding of behavior expectations. Almost all participants in this study reported that implementing PBIS had an overall positive impact on the discipline program at their schools. Many principals reported a decrease in discipline referrals, although the discipline data may suggest otherwise.

Positive Impact and Reduction in Discipline

Principal C shared, “I hate to use the word positive, but it has had a positive impact. As we have gotten more specific about it, we have had a decrease in referrals, a drastic decrease.” Principal D stated, “It affected it in a positive way.” Principal G expressed, “I saw it having a positive impact overall in the building.” Principal E stated, “We had significant decreases in the discipline, between 40% and 60% in office referrals.” Principal H expressed a dramatic decrease in expulsions and suspensions after PBIS implementation. These positive responses from the principals align with one of the goals of PBIS which is to reduce the risk of exclusionary discipline, especially in minorities (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019).

Teacher Awareness and Proactivity

Many principals expressed that implementing PBIS allowed them to host professional development sessions to review classroom management and what offenses should be handled in class versus in the office. Referable versus non-referable offenses were also an area of concern in the Wooten (2015) study. Principal D shared, “Teachers were more willing to work with the students instead of just writing referrals.” Principal H expressed, “it opened that door where teachers became much more proactive because they knew their kids and they could identify an issue or behavior before it ever even came

to fruition.”

An effective discipline program should have increased teacher awareness of cultural differences and biases, coupled with proactive classroom management. Many discipline issues arise based on teacher perception. Punishment seems to be mediated by both teacher perceptions and classroom management skills (Vavrus & Cole, 2002).

Minority students, like Blacks and Latinxs, are more likely to be suspended for subjective offenses like disrespect, insubordination, defiance, and disruption than their White peers (Heilbrun et al., 2015). PBIS provides room for teachers to become more aware of their actions and more proactive when handling behavioral issues. If implemented with fidelity, PBIS is a framework that can help educators become proactive versus reactive when they counter many undesired emotional, behavioral, and social issues among the students (Affigne, 2013).

Student Awareness of Behavior Expectations

The last theme that emerged from this question was the value of students understanding expected behaviors and unacceptable behaviors. Principals felt that PBIS provided the framework to teach behavior expectations that encourages communication and student knowledge of the program. Principal B shared that the students being able to share their feelings was valuable and that all students knew the three expectations of PBIS. Those expectations are to be safe, be responsible, and be respectful. Principal G stated, “What was nice was we had that common understanding to begin our conversations. So, what we did was problem solving.” Principal J stated, “And I think that educating, and the teaching expectations, and rationale as to why, is also incredibly supportive. Children understand what's expected, the reason for it versus do it because I

told you so.” Student voice is powerful, even when it comes to behavior. When students had the chance to share their feelings coupled with a true understanding of the expectations, the discipline program changed for the better. Culturally responsive PBIS programs maintain a perspective that promotes responsible citizens and assists students to become more self-aware (Levenson et al., 2019).

Principal Perceptions: Student Discipline and Their Peers

When asked to identify groups of students who receive more discipline referrals when compared to their peers, two themes emerged: African American males and special education students. Principal A stated, “Yes. So definitely our students with disabilities. Definitely our African American students and our African American males, particularly.” Principal B shared, “My second-grade groups of students receive more overall than any other grade level and Black males.” Principal C stated, “I would say two groups. Number one our African American boys and our special ed students.” Principal D stated, “There was a disproportionality with African American males.” Principal E shared, “students with disabilities. But boys.” Principal H shared, “So, I can tell you prior to coming to School H, it would have been African American boys, because we had an overwhelming number of referrals of African American boys in my first one-to-three years.” Principal I stated, “definitely our Black, special education males.” The perceptions of these principals align with the discipline data presented earlier in the chapter, showing that the majority of suspensions and expulsions in this division come from African American students, even when they are outnumbered by other races.

These responses came as no surprise as the research told us that African Americans, males particularly, are disciplined more often and more harshly than their

peers. Students of color, predominantly African American boys, are on the receiving end of corporal punishment more often than their White counterparts (Gershoff & Font, 2016). Like Wooten (2015), Principals A and B both stated that African American males were disciplined more than any other student.

Principal Perceptions: PBIS and Disproportionality

When asked how PBIS has impacted disproportionality in student discipline, particularly African American students, the theme was awareness. Principals also stated that this awareness of the issues allowed them to focus on the disproportionality and no longer ignore the issue at hand. Principal A stated,

Mainly in that it brought awareness to the problem and it allowed us to direct the focus at that problem. We started having some difficult conversations about making sure that our classroom reflects the students with whom are in it.

Principal F shared, “Again, the *awareness* going over the school requirements.” Principal H expressed, “restorative practices and looking at those tiered interventions, it forced my teachers to also look through an equitable lens when...even before they would even write a referral.” Principal I stated, “Well, first off, it was the awareness and recognition that there was a disproportionate number of referrals being referred. Sometimes you need to see the data in black and white to know that it is happening.” Principal J shared,

It definitely has created a focus on different needs, I think. And when we looked at it initially, we did have a higher proportion of minority students receiving referrals and especially little boys. I think to focus on the disproportionality has made us all look at the needs a little more deeply. And time to find those and address an awareness.

Although there were no tangible impacts mentioned by the principals in this study, awareness is a start. Khalifa et al. (2016) identified four major strands that describe CRSL and one of those strands is critical self-awareness. Critical self-awareness, also known as critical consciousness, is the first major area in CRSL. This step precedes any other area of leadership. In order for the PBIS program to be considered culturally responsive, school staff need an awareness and understanding of their personal values and cultures and how that impacts the classroom and school environment (Leverson et al., 2019). So, this awareness expressed by the principals in this study, could be the first step to decreasing disproportionality.

Principal Perceptions: PBIS Enhancement

The final, formal question asked was what factors principals felt could be enhanced to address the issue of disproportionality. The major theme that emerged from that question was the need for training. The specific areas of training suggested were PBIS strategies, interventions, and equity. They expressed a hope that these trainings would provide room for hard conversations to be had among all stakeholders in the division.

Principal B stated, “Professional development training, and I think that falls under equity training because a lot of the reason why is lack of classroom management.”

Principal C expressed, “I think it comes back to just more training and more awareness and more conversations and more empathy and understanding of different cultures.”

Principal G expressed, “I think that would be really continuing the training and the discussions with staff members because everybody is at a different place.” Principal J shared, “Well, I definitely think our teachers need more training in some of the explosive

behaviors.” Principal H shared,

It doesn’t take that really deep, kind of equitable cultural look at when we’re expected to build relationships and institute positive behavior tiered interventions, and what it really means to get to know a kid before you can deliver a consequence or what alternative we may need to be used to connect with that kid so you don’t see that behavior again. I think those pieces sometimes are missing in PBIS.

The request for more training aligns with an area of culturally responsive leadership. A study that weaved CRIL and PBIS together showed that “leaders should model, encourage, provide training and reinforcements for PBIS and CRIL” (Harper, 2017, p. 141). The request for training in equity is important because stakeholders can develop the necessary self-awareness to curtail biases. Principals in this study are requesting training from the division level to ensure all teachers and buildings are receiving the same information. If these schools want to decrease the disproportionality revealed in this study, the training and hard conversations are necessary. In culturally responsive environments, critical consciousness as well as ability to have courageous conversations about inequities is crucial (Singleton, 2012) in changing the culture of the school.

Principal Remarks

The last question was open-ended and asked principals to share any additional remarks to close the interview. Many of the responses were positive; however, the themes that emerged were the value and benefit of PBIS and the need for accountability.

Principal A shared,

The only thoughts I have right now are the things that are on my mind right now that are important to me, which is the disproportionality, equity disparities, appreciating people who are different, whether it be racially, ethnically, gender identification. So, if we do move forward with PBIS, it will need to look quite different than the traditional PBIS.

Principal B stated, “So, I would say just making sure that holding people accountable because that does not happen. You just assume you check off but holding schools accountable to ensure that that's being done, and it's not always that way.”

Principal C shared, “I know PBIS has changed our entire culture of our building.”

Principal D shared, “I think PBIS really was hitting home. It is data driven. I think it is a great program; it just has to be done consistently and continuously.” Principal G stated, “It is teaching them life skills. These are the skills that are going to help them be successful.” Principal H shared,

We embraced the program. We stretched our teachers, I think, sometimes to their limits where there were a lot of tears. We coupled it with a lot of growth fixed mindset, book studies to kind of look at that, because that has to come in play with the PBIS. You have to have that growth mindset to change our practices. It is just too bad that districts are not provided enough funding to allow them to have just committees that just do that and make sure that those pieces are embedded in our schools, because it's a lot of work for a school to do sometimes independently on their own.

Although PBIS provides an ideal framework for increasing equity in student outcomes, principals in this division desire more centered trainings and accountability

from district-level officials. Research suggests that implementing PBIS with fidelity has had a greater impact on equity in school discipline, specifically for African American students. However, PBIS teams may need to include equity-focused strategies in their action plans to achieve equitable outcomes for all student groups (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019, Equity section).

Implications for Theory and Research

Chapter 2 included a detailed description of CRT, the theoretical framework used to shape this study. The results of this study fit within the perceived theories of CRT and are discussed in the following paragraphs. When trying to understand race and property, there are three central propositions to keep in mind. Those propositions are (a) race continues to be a significant component in ascertaining inequity in the U.S., (b) U.S. society is centered on property rights, and (c) the connection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand school inequity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT's ideology that shows White people have privilege in nearly all areas of life, including the American educational system (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), is unfortunately shown through the data of this study.

Race and Inequity

This study, in addition to many, documents the statistical and demographic discipline data that support the statement that race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States. The schools in this study have suspended and expelled African American students at a disproportionate rate even following the implementation of the PBIS framework. The data presented in this study mimic the

aforementioned statistics of the Children's Defense Fund, national disproportionality data, and previous studies on the topic. It was interesting to note that half of the principals in this study were even able to blatantly say that African American boys are disciplined at a higher rate than their peers. Race must be a factor.

Property Rights and Education

The CRT's belief that whiteness is the ultimate property (Ladson-Billings, 1998) can be found in education in both explicit and implicit ways. Property tax is often a factor when zoning areas are determined, and decisions are made about which neighborhoods will attend which school. These decisions give privileged students the opportunity to attend more affluent schools, and those living in less affluent areas attend less affluent schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In this study, for example, School G is filled with students who live in less affluent areas. If you notice the demographics of that school, it is largely African American, and discipline is a major issue. School E is filled with students who live in affluent neighborhoods. If you look at the demographics, it is largely White students, and discipline is not a major issue. Disproportionality existed in that school, but overall, the number of suspensions and expulsions for the school was lower than others in the study. Unfortunately, whiteness is still a privilege, as displayed in this study.

CRT and Education

According to CRT scholars, ignoring the role of race in social outcomes ensures the continuation of racial injustices in our society (Bell, 2018). The third tenet of CRT warns against liberalism and "color-blindness," which cause more harm than good. The principals in this study expressed that PBIS hit home when their schools became more

aware of the issue of disproportionality. The awareness made space for hard, uncomfortable conversations to be had and for teachers to shift their thinking. One principal, Principal C, expressed the need to hire more African American teachers because it was important for the African American students in the school. These moments of awareness discussed by the principals in this study are important, because ignoring the role of race in social outcomes ensures the continuation of racial injustices in our society (Bell, 2018). There is a need to recognize race, recognize bias, and change the way educators view students and how to handle discipline. Educators who fail to recognize race and ethnicity are “unconscious about the ways schools are not racially neutral but reflect White culture” (Capper & Young, 2015, p. 817).

Finally, the tenet of counter-storytelling was used in this study to give principals in this division a chance to speak their truth and share their thoughts and experiences. I felt the need to see how principals felt about the impact of PBIS on disproportionality. The story told by the principals in this study suggest that (a) disproportionality is an issue, and African American males are disciplined more than their peers; (b) PBIS helped to bring awareness to the issue of disproportionality and gave them the focus they needed to decrease this issue; and (c) overall, PBIS had a positive impact on student behavior, school culture, and the discipline program at their school. The story told was positive. Although PBIS did not fix the issue of disproportionality, it brought awareness and focus to the issue at hand. CRT emphasizes the significance of observing and trying to understand the socio-cultural entity that shapes how we view, experience, and respond to racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The principals shared a recognition of the significance of shifting their focus, assisting their teachers in becoming more proactive,

and responding to discipline differently.

Implications for Practice

This study's findings are based on the enrollment and discipline data for 10 public schools, along with the perceptions of 10 principals in an Eastern Virginia division. After analyzing the data in this study, several implications can be drawn for use by school and district administrators using the PBIS framework:

- School districts should determine if disproportionality is an issue in their division by closely monitoring discipline referral, suspension, and expulsion rates by race. If disproportionality is found to be an issue and PBIS is the initiative they desire to put into practice, they must ensure training is done for all stakeholders. Several principals in the study shared that the division used a “train the trainer” model and that this could possibly cause some grey areas in implementation in each school. There was also an expressed need for ongoing training each year in PBIS to ensure fidelity and uniformity within the division. Harper's (2017) study found that principals identified training as a necessary piece of a positive PBIS implementation, and the principals in this study agreed with this notion. “The leaders should model, encourage, provide training and reinforcements as supports for PBIS with CRIL” (Harper, 2017, p. 141). This study defined the *leaders* doing the training as the district administration or PBIS officials in addition to the principals of the buildings.
- In addition to training, principals in this study stressed the need for a concerted focus on PBIS district wide. One major theme derived from this study was the need for accountability. Principals felt that schools, leaders, and

teachers need accountability in place specific to PBIS implementation. There is currently no district-led PBIS implementation team, and there is a need. PBIS recommends that appropriate implementation of the framework would follow these steps: (a) develop a long-term implementation plan for annual trainings to include all stakeholders; (b) create a data-driven PBIS team that meets at least monthly; (c) assign an administrator liaison to provide administrator support and accountability; (d) establish campus guidelines for success; and (e) conduct an annual evaluation and assessment of the PBIS plan (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019). Principals do not feel this has been done and feel it could help the programs out tremendously if implemented. Principal A stated, “I think what would be most beneficial to PBIS and support it in being effective if there were perhaps a coach.” Principal H commented, “It is just too bad that districts are not provided enough funding to allow them to have committees that...make sure that those pieces are embedded in our schools.” When implementing the PBIS framework, it is essential to follow the long-term plan provided by PBIS and ensure that there is accountability and support from the district level. In order for schools to be effective, principals are juggling roles both as administrator and supervisor (Rebolledo, 2019). The principals play a crucial role in the implementation of the framework, but these principals need support from the district level in order for the program truly to be successful.

- “PBIS is not fully implemented until it is culturally responsive. Culturally responsive PBIS should include: (1) Identity, (2) Voice, (3) Supportive

Environment, (4) Situational Appropriateness, and (5) Data for Equity” (Levenson et al., 2019, p. 2). The PBIS framework should be coupled with other initiatives such as CRSL, CRIL, or simply a focus on cultural responsiveness within PBIS. Although PBIS is a practice intended to produce positive outcomes for all students, it seems less effective for some students due to its race-neutral principles (Vincent et al., 2011). However, too often teachers may ignore the racial, ethnic, and/or cultural identity of their students which could lead to misinterpretation of student behavior (Green et al., 2015). As shown in this study, the PBIS experience was deemed positive and impactful by the principals; however, the number of suspensions and expulsions of African American students remained disproportionate. Incorporating a concerted focus on cultural responsiveness should increase awareness and understanding of students of various cultures. An earlier study showed that weaving CRIL and PBIS had a positive impact by lowering the rates of exclusionary discipline on African American students (Harper, 2017). Being that principals in this division feel positive about the PBIS framework, a concerted focus on disproportionality/cultural responsiveness may render the desired impact.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study explored the impact of PBIS on an Eastern Virginia school division and the perceptions of principals on that impact. The follow recommendations are made for additional studies:

1. The study was conducted with only 10 principals representing the school

division. Future researchers should expand the study by including more schools. This would require the researcher to wait an additional 3-5 years, as some schools implemented PBIS in 2019.

2. This study included two primary schools, three elementary, two intermediate, and three middle schools. Future researchers should include participants at the high school level.
3. This study was limited to interviewing principals of the schools in the study. Future researchers should consider including assistant principals as well since they are often the administrators who handle most discipline.
4. This study focused on the African American population and disproportionality. Future researchers should look into how PBIS has impacted the disproportionality of special education students due to that group being mentioned several times by participants.
5. This study did not focus on the race of the school principal. Future researchers should consider noting the race, age, and gender of the school principal to see if that has an impact on the discipline data of the school.

Limitations/Delimitations of the Study

This study provided a glimpse into the outcomes of the use of PBIS in 10 public schools in Eastern Virginia. Only 10 participants agreed to participate in the study, and they all came from the same school division. The majority of the schools in this study were primary, elementary, and intermediate; so the study lacked variety in age groups with only one middle school participating. Another limitation was the COVID-19 pandemic. During the time of the research, school divisions all over the United States of

America were scrambling to implement virtual learning or determine what was safe for their students. Finding participants and scheduling interviews was difficult.

Additionally, one of the schools, School C, underwent major changes in 2019. School C changed the name of the school and welcomed high school aged students. This change caused a true shift in the culture and dynamics of that school. This could have potentially had an impact on the discipline data for the 2019 school year, impacting the study.

The school division also changed their record system in 2015, which altered where discipline data were housed. This created an issue for me when retrieving discipline data for the schools in the study. There were a couple of schools in the study that did not have discipline data available for certain years. This gave an incomplete picture of the discipline trends for those schools. When asked where the data were or if there was any way to retrieve the data, the following response was given: “If no suspensions or expulsions were reported, there is no data broken down by race available for that school year.”

Data personnel also stated,

I cannot really interpret the data, but this is the best I can do. I hate trying to analyze discipline, because every school has its own way of doing things, and some schools RARELY enter anything into the system. I doubt that means their students are “perfect,” just their philosophy seems to be different.

It should also be noted that I was a novice researcher and did not have much experience conducting independent research. I relied heavily on the mentorship of my assistant principal, previous literature, and my chair to guide me through the process of

conducting a comprehensive research study.

Conclusion

The many positive perceptions of principals regarding PBIS would lead one to believe that the PBIS framework has had a positive impact on disproportionality. However, according to the data presented in this study, PBIS did not have an impact on the disciplinary disproportionality of African American students. The number and percentage of African American suspensions and expulsions fluctuated annually, leaving no room to conclude whether PBIS was a benefit or detriment to the discipline programs. Although, many principals admitted that PBIS aided in bringing awareness to the issue of disproportionality, they did not give specific examples of how PBIS impacted disproportionality within their buildings. The results of this study imply that PBIS can help positively shape the culture, behavior, and discipline program within a school; but it does not impact the disproportionality of African American students in discipline.

References

- Affigne, K. E. (2013). *A case study of the adoption and implementation of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) tier 2 in two elementary schools* (Publication No. 3568720) [Doctoral dissertation, State University of New York at Albany]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Allensworth, E. M., & Hart, H. (2018). *How do principals influence student achievement?* University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.
- American Institutes of Research. (2018). *Discipline*. National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments. <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/environment/discipline>
- American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). American Psychological Association.
- American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. *American Psychologist*, 63(9), 852–862.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.63.9.852>
- Bell, C. A. (2018). *Speaking through my Tears: A Critical Exploration of Black Students' and Parents' Perceptions of School Discipline* (Publication No. 10748073) [Doctoral dissertation, Wayne State University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Bell, D. A. (1995). Who's afraid of critical race theory. *University of Illinois Law Review*, 1995, 893-910. doi:10.2304/power.2009.1.1.125

- Bitensky, S. H. (2006). *Corporal punishment of children: A human rights violation*. Transnational Publishers.
- Booth, E. A., Marchbanks, M. P., Carmichael, D., & Fabelo, T. (2012). Comparing campus discipline rates: A multivariate approach for identifying schools with significantly different than expected exclusionary discipline rates. *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*, 3(2), Art. 6.
- Branch, G. F., Hanushek, E. A., & Rivkin, S. G. (2013). School leaders matter: Measuring the impact of effective principals. *Education Next*, 13(1), 62–69.
<https://www.educationnext.org/school-leaders-matter/>
- Brown, T. M. (2007). Lost and turned out: Academic, social and emotional experiences of students excluded from school. *Urban Education*, 42(5), 432-455.
- Browne, J. (2003). *Derailed: The schoolhouse to jailhouse track*. The Advancement Project Report, ED 480 206, 1-91.
https://b3cdn.net/advancement/5351180e24cb166d02_mlbrqgxlh.pdf
- Burke, A., & Nishioka, V. (2014). *Suspension and expulsion patterns in six Oregon school districts* (REL 2014–028). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest.
<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>
- Butchart, R., & McEwan, B. (1998). Classroom discipline in American schools: Problems and possibilities for democratic education. doi:10.5860/choice.35-5784

- Butler, B. R. (2011). *The puzzle of discipline: An examination of African American disproportionality in school discipline and student performance* (Publication No. 3471199) [Doctoral Dissertation, Texas A&M University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Cameron, M. (2006). Managing school discipline and implications for school social workers: A review of the literature. *Children & Schools*, 28(4), 219–227. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/28.4.219>
- Capper, C. A., & Young, M. D. (2015). The equity audit as the core of leading increasingly diverse schools and districts. In G. Theoharis, & M. Scanlan (Eds.), *Inclusive leadership for increasingly diverse schools* (pp. 186-213). Routledge Taylor & Francis.
- Castillo, A., Abalogu, J., & Linder, L. (2020). Reversing the pipeline to prison in Texas: How to ensure safe schools and safe students. *Texas Criminal Justice Coalition*. <https://www.texascjc.org/system/files/publications/Reversing%20the%20Pipeline%20Report%202020.pdf>
- Catizone, A. (2016). *Racial disproportionality in exclusionary discipline: School factors and disciplinary practices* [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Virginia]. file:///C:/Users/court/Downloads/1_Heilbrun_Anna_2017_PHD.pdf
- Children's Defense Fund. (1975). *School suspensions: Are they helping children? A report*. Washington Research Project, Inc.
- Cholewa, B., Hull, M. F., Babcock, C. R., & Smith, A. D. (2017). Predictors and academic outcomes associated with in-school suspension. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 33(2), 191-199. doi:10.1037/spq0000213

- Christy, D. L. (2018). *The influence of school discipline approaches on suspension rates* (Publication No. 10979277) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Coates, T. (2015). *Between the world and me* (1st ed.). Spiegel & Grau.
- Cohen, R. M. (2016). Rethinking school discipline. *The American Prospect Magazine*.
<https://prospect.org/education/rethinking-school-discipline/>
- Coleman, N. (2015). Promoting resilience through adversity: Increasing positive outcomes for expelled students. *Educational Studies*, 41(1-2), 171-187.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2014.955741>
- Conte, A. E. (2000). In loco parentis: Alive and well. *Education*, 121(1), 195.
- Creswell, J. (2015). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Pearson.
- Curran, F. C. (2016). Estimating the effect of state zero tolerance laws on exclusionary discipline, racial discipline gaps, and student behavior. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis: SAGE Publications*, 38(4), 647-668.
doi:10.3102/0162373716652728
- Dauber, J. J. (2013). *Public v. private: Parental choice of schools and the reasons why* (Publication No. 3559855) [Doctoral dissertation, Rutgers University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (2nd ed.). New York University Press.
- DiPietro, J. (2003). Corporal punishment in Beverly and Cambridge, MA: Just, or just plain mean? www.primaryresearch.org/PRTHB/schoolhistory

- Ellis, T. L. (2016). *African American males matter: Closing the discipline gap and increasing engagement* (Publication No. 10801615) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Southern California]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Evans, K. R. (2011). *Suspended students' experiences with in-school suspension: a phenomenological investigation* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Tennessee].
https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/966
- Fabelo, T., Thompson, M. D., Plotkin, M., Carmichael, D., Marchbanks III, M. P., & Booth, E. A. (2011). *Breaking schools' rules: A statewide study of how school discipline relates to students' success and juvenile justice involvement*. Council of State Governments: Justice Center and Public Policy Research Institute.
- Fenning, P., & Rose, J. (2007). Overrepresentation of African American students in exclusionary discipline: The role of school policy. *Urban Education, 42*, 536-559.
 doi:10.1177/0042085907305039
- Flannery, K. B., Fenning, P., Kato, M. M., & McIntosh, K. (2014). Effects of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports and fidelity of implementation on problem behavior in high schools. *School Psychology Quarterly, 29*(2), 111-124.
- Flessa, J. (2009). Urban school principals, deficit frameworks, and implications for leadership. *Journal of School Leadership, 19*, 334-373.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460901900304>
- Ford, J. E. (2016). The root of discipline disparities. *Educational Leadership, 74*(3), 42-46. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov16/vol74/num03/The-Root-of-Discipline-Disparities.aspx>

- Garrison, T. (2001). From parent to protector: The history of corporal punishment in American public schools. *Corporal Punishment in Public Schools, 16*, 117.
- Gastic, B. (2017). Disproportionality in school discipline in Massachusetts. *Education and Urban Society, 49*(2), 163-179. doi:10.1177/0013124516630594
- Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education, 53*(2), 106–116.
- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Gay, G., & Kirkland, K. (2003). Developing cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection in preservice teacher education. *Theory in Practice, 42*(3), 181-187. doi:10.1353/tip.2003.0029
- Gershoff, E. T., & Font, S. A. (2016). Corporal punishment in U.S. public schools: Prevalence, disparities in use, and status in state and federal policy. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5766273/#R94>
- Gibson, P. A., Wilson, R., Haight, W., Kayama, M., & Marshall, J. M. (2014). The role of race in the out-of-school suspensions of Black students: The perspectives of students with suspensions, their parents and educators. *Children and Youth Review, 47*, 274-282. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.09.020>

- Green, A. L., Nese, R. N. T., McIntosh, K., Nishioka, V., Eliason, B., & Canizal Delabra, A. (2015). *Key elements of policies to address disproportionality within SWPBIS: A guide for district and school teams*. OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.
<https://www.pbis.org/resource/key-elements-of-policies-to-address-discipline-disproportionality-a-guide-for-district-and-school-teams>
- Gregory, A., Allen, J. P., Mikami, A. Y., Hafen, C. A., & Pianta, R. (2014). Eliminating the racial disparity in classroom exclusionary discipline. *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*, 5(2), Article 12.
<http://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/childrenatrisk/vol5/iss2/12>
- Harper, I. B. (2017). *High school leaders' perceptions on disproportionality in school discipline among African-American students* [Doctoral Dissertation, Texas A&M University]. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/186713734.pdf>
- Hauserman, C., & Stick, S. (2013). The leadership teachers want from principals: transformational. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 36(3), 184-203.
- Hawken, L. S., MacLeod, S. K., & Rawlings, L. (2007). Effects of the behavior education program (BEP) on office discipline referrals of elementary school students. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 9(2), 94-101.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10983007070090020601>
- Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings*. Guilford Publications.

- Heilbrun, A., Cornell, D., & Lovegrove, P. (2015). Principal attitudes regarding zero tolerance and racial disparities in school suspension. *Psychology in the Schools*, 52(5), 489-499. doi:10.1002/pits.21838
- Henderson, D. X., & Barnes, R. R. (2016). Exploring dimensions of social inclusion among alternative learning centers in the USA. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 20(7), 726-742. doi:10.1080/13603116.2015.1111444
- Hirschfield, P. J. (2008). Preparing for prison? The criminalization of school discipline in the USA. *Theoretical Criminology*, 12(1), 79-101.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480607085795>
- Horner, R. H., & Sugai, G. (2005). School-wide positive behavior support: An alternative approach to discipline in schools. In L. Bambara, & L. Kern (Eds.), *Positive behavior support* (pp. 359–390). Guilford.
- Imbrogno, A. R. (2000). Corporal punishment in America's public schools and the U.N. convention on the rights of the child: A case for non-ratification. *Journal of Law and Education*, 29(2), 125-147.
- Ingraham v. Wright, 430 U.S. 651 (1977).
- Khalifa, M. (2012). A re-new-ed paradigm in successful urban school leadership principal as community leader. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48, 424–467. doi:10.1177/0013161X11432922
- Khalifa, M. (2013). Creating spaces for urban youth: The emergence of culturally responsive (hip-hop) school leadership and pedagogy. *Multicultural Learning and Teaching*, 8, 63–93. doi:10.1515/mlt-2013-0010

- Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E. (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 1272-1311.
doi:10.3102/0034654316630383
- Kleiman, S. (2004). Phenomenology: To wonder and search for meanings. *Nurse Researcher*, 11(4), 7-19. doi:10.7748/nr2004.07.11.4.7.c6211
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7-24.
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47-68.
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2006). Transformational school leadership for large-scale reform: Effects on students, teachers, and their classroom practices. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 17, 201-227.
doi:10.1080/09243450600565829
- Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. The Wallace Foundation.
- Lester, S. (1999). An introduction to phenomenological research.
<https://www.rgs.org/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?nodeguid=7ad9b8d4-6a93-4269-94d2-585983364b51&lang=en-GB>

- Levenson, M., Smith, K., McIntosh, K., Rose, J., & Pinkelman, S. (2019). *PBIS cultural responsiveness field guide: Resources for trainers and coaches*. OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.
<https://www.pbis.org/resource/pbis-cultural-responsiveness-field-guide-resources-for-trainers-and-coaches>
- Levin, S., & Bradley, K. (2019). *Understanding and addressing principal turnover: A review of the research*. National Association of Secondary School Principals and Learning Policy Institute.
- Lewallen, J. D. (2019). *Campus administrator perceptions of exclusionary discipline and alternative practices* (Publication No. 27739881) [Doctoral dissertation, Dallas Baptist University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Losen, D., Hodson, C., Keith, I., Michael, A., Morrison, K., & Belway, S. (2015). *Are we closing the school discipline gap? K-12 racial disparities in school discipline*. University of California.
- Losen, D. J., & Skiba R. J. (2010). *Suspended education: Urban middle schools in crisis*.
<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8fh0s5dv>
- Marchbanks, M. P., Blake, J. J., Smith, D., Seibert, A. L., Carmichael, D., Booth E. A., & Fabelo, T. (2014). More than a drop in the bucket: the social and economic costs of dropouts and grade retention associated with exclusionary discipline. *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*, 5(2), 1–34.
- Martinez, S. (2009). A system gone berserk: How are zero-tolerance policies really affecting schools? *Preventing School Failure*, 53(3), 153-157.

- McCann, S. (2017). *Detention is not the answer* [Master's Thesis & Capstone Projects, Northwestern College].
https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1069&context=education_masters
- McHatton, P. A., Boyer, N. R., Shaunessy, E., & Terry, P. M. (2010). Principals' perceptions of preparation and practice in gifted and special education content: Are we doing enough? *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 5(1), 1–22.
- McIntosh, K., Barnes, A., Eliason, B., & Morris, K. (2014). *Using discipline data within SWPBIS to identify and address disproportionality: A guide for school teams*. Office of Special Education Programs Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.
- McKenzie, K. B., & Scheurich, J. J. (2004). Equity traps: A useful construct for preparing principals to lead schools that are successful with racially diverse students. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40, 601–632.
doi:10.1177/0013161X04268839
- McNeill, K. F., Friedman, B. D., & Chavez, C. (2016). Keep them so you can teach them: Alternatives to exclusionary discipline. *International Public Health Journal*, 8(2), 169-181.
- Meek, A. P. (2010). School discipline “as part of the teaching process”: Alternative and compensatory education required by the state’s interest in keeping children in school. *Yale Law & Policy Review*, 28, 155-185.

- Milner, H. R. (2008). Critical race theory and interest convergence as analytic tools in teacher education policies and practices. *Journal of Teacher Education, 59*(4), 332-346. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0022487108321884>
- Morris, R. C., & Howard, A. C. (2003). Designing an effective in-school suspension program. *Clearing House, 76*, 156-159. doi:10.1080/00098650309601994
- Morrison, G. M., Anthony, S., Storino, M., & Dillon, C. (2001). An examination of the disciplinary histories and the individual and educational characteristics of students who participate in an in-school suspension program. *Education and Treatment of Children, 24*(3), 276-293.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2015-2016). *National teacher and principal survey*. <https://nces.ed.gov/statprog/instruct.asp>
- Nelson, J. M. (2016). *Middle and high school principals' perceptions of exclusionary discipline practices* (Publication No. 10158676) [Doctoral Dissertation, Tennessee State University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Nelson, L., & Lind, D. (2015). The school to prison pipeline, explained. *Justice Police Institute*. <http://www.justicepolicy.org/news/8775>
- Noltemeyer, A. L., & Mcloughlin, C. S. (2010). Changes in exclusionary discipline rates and disciplinary disproportionality over time. *International Journal of Special Education, 25*(1), 59-70.
- OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. (2017). Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports [Website]. www.pbis.org
- OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. (2019). Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports [Website]. www.pbis.org

- Parker, L., & Lynn, M. (2002). What's race got to do with it? Critical race theory's conflicts with and connections to qualitative research methodology and epistemology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 7–22.
- Pettit, B., & Western, B. (2004). Mass imprisonment and the life course: Race and class inequality in U.S. incarceration. *American Sociological Review*, 69, 151-169.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240406900201>
- Pollack, T. M., & Zirkel, S. (2013). Negotiating the contested terrain of equity-focused change efforts in schools: Critical race theory as a leadership framework for creating more equitable schools. *The Urban Review*, 45(3), 290-310.
- Rebolledo, M. S. (2019). *Positive behavior intervention supports and relational trust in an elementary school: A self-study of a principal's impact on supportive environment and student achievement* (Publication No. 10640943) [Doctoral Dissertation, Loyola University Chicago]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Renner, R. (2019). The differences between school administration from school supervision. <https://www.theclassroom.com-8230963>
- A Research Guide. (2019). Definition and usage of descriptive statistics.
<https://www.aresearchguide.com/a-descriptive-statistics.html>
- Roch, C. H., & Edwards, J. (2017). Representative bureaucracy and school discipline: The influence of schools' racial contexts. *American Review of Public Administration*, 47(1), 58-78. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0275074015589126>
- Sege, R. D., & Siegel, B. S. (2018). Effective discipline to raise healthy children. *Council on Child Abuse and Neglect and Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health*. 101(4),723. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-3112>

- Singleton, G. E. (2012). *More courageous conversations about race*. Corwin.
- Skiba, R. J. (2014). The failure of zero tolerance. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 22(4), 27–33. https://reclaimingjournal.com/sites/default/files/journal-article-pdfs/22_4_Skiba.pdf
- Skiba, R. J., Chung, C.-G., Trachok, M., Baker, T. L., Sheya, A., & Hughes, R. L. (2014). Parsing disciplinary disproportionality: Contributions of infraction, student, and school characteristics to out-of-school suspension and expulsion. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51(4), 640–670. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831214541670>
- Skiba, R. J., Horner, R. H., Chung, C.-G., Rausch, M. K., May, S. L., & Tobin, T. (2011). Race is not neutral: A national investigation of African American and Latino disproportionality in school discipline. *School Psychology Review*, 40(1), 85–107.
- Skiba, R. J., & Losen, D. J. (2016). From reaction to prevention: Turning the page on school discipline. *American Educator*, 39(39), 4–11. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1086522.pdf>
- Skiba, R. J., Mediratta, K., & Rausch, M. K. (2016). *Inequality in school discipline: Research and practice to reduce disparities*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Skiba, R. J., Michael, R. S., Nardo, A. C., & Peterson, R. L. (2002). The color of discipline: sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. *Urban Review*, 34(4), 317–342.

- Skiba, R. J., & Peterson, R. (1999). *The dark side of zero tolerance: Can punishment lead to safe schools?*
https://curry.virginia.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/resourceLibrary/dark_zero_tolerance.pdf
- Skiba, R., Simmons, A., Ritter, S., Kohler, K., Henderson, M., & Wu, T. (2006). The context of minority disproportionality: Practitioner perspectives on special education referral. *Teachers College Record*, 108(7), 1424-1459.
- Smith, B. L. (2019). *Student suspension and the school administrator: An analysis of the relationship between student suspension, administrator beliefs, and school characteristics* (Publication No. 13426506) [Doctoral Dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Smith, B. N., & Hains, B. J. (2012). Examining administrators' disciplinary philosophies: A conceptual model. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(3), 548-576.
- Smith, E. J., & Harper, S. R. (2015). *Disproportionate impact of k-12 school suspension and expulsion on Black students in southern states*. University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education.
- Smolkowski, K., Girvan, E. J., McIntosh, K., Nese, R. N., & Horner, R. H. (2016). Vulnerable decision points for disproportionate office discipline referrals: Comparisons of discipline for African American and White elementary school students. *Behavioral Disorder*, 41(4), 178-195.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1113080.pdf>
- Staats, C. (2014). *Implicit racial bias in school discipline disparities*. Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity.

- Straus, M. A. (2001). *Beating the devil out of them: Corporal punishment in American families and its effects on children*. Transaction Publishers.
- Sugai, G., & Horner, R. H. (2014). Positive behavior support, school-wide. In C. R. Reynolds, K. J. Vannest, & E. Fletcher-Janzen (Eds), *Encyclopedia of special education* (pp. 1-25). <http://doi.org/10.1002/9781118660584.ese1902>
- Sugai, G., & Simonsen, B. (2012). PBIS in alternative education settings: Positive support for youth with high-risk behavior.
http://idahotc.com/Portals/6/Docs/2015/Tier_1/articles/PBIS_history.features.misconceptions.pdf
- Sugai, G., Sprague, J. R., Horner, R. H., & Walker, H. M. (2000). Preventing school violence: The use of office discipline referrals to assess and monitor school-wide discipline interventions. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 8(2), 94-101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106342660000800205>
- Sullivan, A. L., Van Norman, E. R., & Klingbeil, D. A. (2014). Exclusionary discipline of students with disabilities: Student and school characteristics predicting suspension. *Remedial and Special Education*, 35(4), 199–210.
<http://doi.org/10.1177/0741932513519825>
- Terrell, R. D., & Lindsey, R. B. (2009). *Culturally proficient leadership: The personal journey begins within*. Corwin.
- Theriot, M. T., & Dupper, D. R. (2010). Student discipline problems and the transition from elementary to middle school. *Education and Urban Society*, 42(2), 205-222.

- Touré, J. L. (2008). *“There’s some good karma up in here”*: A case study of White school leadership in an urban context (Publication No. 3349246) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburg]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.
- Transfield, D., Denyer, D., & Palminder S. (2003). *Towards a methodology for developing evidence-informed management knowledge by means of systematic review*. *British Journal of Management*, 14(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.00375>
- Triplett, N. P. (2018). *Does the proportion of White students predict discipline disparities? A national, school-level analysis of six racial/ethnic student groups* (Publication No. 10749986) [Doctoral dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2014). U.S. Departments of Education and Justice release school discipline guidance package to enhance school climate and improve school discipline policies/practices.
<https://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads/CRDC-School-Discipline-Snapshot.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2016). *2013–2014 civil rights data collection: A first look*.
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf>
- Urquhart, C. (2013). *Grounded theory for qualitative research*. Sage Publications Limited.
- Van Dyke, J. D. (2016). Removing defiance: An analysis of disciplinary referral data of African American children within a title I school. *Journal of African American Studies*, 20(1), 53-66. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-015-9318-9>

- Vavrus, F., & Cole, K. (2002). "I didn't do nothin.": The discursive construction of school discipline. *Urban Review, 34*, 87-111. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015375215801>
- Vincent, C. G., Randall, C., Cartledge, G., Tobin, T. J., & Swain-Bradway, J. (2011). Toward a conceptual integration of cultural responsiveness and schoolwide positive behavior support. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 13*(4), 219-229. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300711399765>
- Wald, J., & Losen, D. J. (2003). Defining and redirecting a school-to-prison pipeline. *New Directions for Youth Development, 2003*(99), 9–15. <http://doi.org/10.1002/yd.51>
- Walker, T. (2016). Why are 19 states still allowing corporal punishment in schools? <http://neatoday.org/2016/10/17/corporal-punishment-in-schools/>
- Wooten, S. W. (2015). *The impact of the PBIS framework: A strategy used to address disproportionality in middle schools* (Publication No. 10002565) [Doctoral dissertation, Wingate University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Wright, A. C. (2015). *Teachers' perceptions of students' disruptive behavior: The effect of racial congruence and consequences for school suspension* [Unpublished Manuscript]. University of California Department of Economics.
- Young, K., & Rouse, M. (2010). Preparing teachers for inclusive and diverse educational environments: Studying curricular reform in an initial teacher education course. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 14*(7), 709-722. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603111003778536>

Appendix A

Division Approval to Conduct Study

Division Approval to Conduct Study

July 7, 2020

Courtney Johnson
Doctoral Student, Gardner Webb University

Dear Ms. Johnson:

Your request to conduct research for your doctoral degree at Gardner Webb University is approved. Specifically, you are approved to contact those in your target audience regarding your study – *Principal Perceptions: The Impact of Postive Behavior Interventions and Supports on Discipline Disproportionality*. The approval is granted with the understanding that the following conditions will apply:

- ❑ Participation of school personnel is strictly voluntary. Approval to contact specific groups does not guarantee participation.
- ❑ Parent permission must be obtained for student participation (if applicable).
- ❑ Names of individuals, school names, or the name of the school district cannot be used in the reporting of your data or your findings without prior permission from the Department of Strategic Planning and Partnerships.
- ❑ All copies, distribution, retrieval of materials, and arrangement of interviews/collections will be your responsibility.
- ❑ Questions/procedures must be limited to those detailed in your prospectus.

You may use this letter as a cover letter when contacting administrators and teachers in [REDACTED]. However, please be advised that all contact and distribution will be your responsibility. Should you have further questions, feel free to contact me at [REDACTED]. Best wishes with your research study and continued pursuit of your educational goals.

Appendix B

Email of Invitation to Principals

Email of Invitation to Principals

Dear Principal _____,

I am currently a teacher at XXX, as well as a doctoral candidate at Gardner-Webb University in the Educational Leadership program. I would like to conduct an interview with you via Google Meets or by telephone with the intention of acquiring crucial information that may be used to better serve the current and future students of XXX.

My research is focused on the impact of PBIS on discipline disproportionality. Our strategic plan endeavors to ensure school environments that utilize research-based, tiered systems when handling discipline. Equity in discipline has been a national issue since 1975 in this country and this study will allow an analysis on the impact PBIS has had on this issue. The study will also determine if our division has seen a decrease in this national issue since the implementation of PBIS in 2014-2015. I would like to conduct an open-ended interview with you that should take approximately 20 minutes of your valued time. I will record our interview for transcription purposes and to validate the results of this research.

Please feel free to contact my doctoral chair, Dr. Stephen Laws at slaws@gardner-webb.edu if you have any additional questions. You are also welcomed to reach me at XXXXX. If you wish to participate, you can simply respond to this email accepting my request. Thank you for considering my invitation and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Courtney K. Johnson, Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C
Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER: Courtney K. Johnson

DISSERTATION TITLE: Principal Perceptions: The Impact of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports on Discipline Disproportionality

INTRODUCTION: You are being invited to participate in a study to explore the impact of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) on discipline disproportionality. Please review and ask any questions that you might have concerning this study.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to explore disproportionate rates of discipline among minority students and investigate the impact the PBIS framework has on disproportionality. Additionally, the purpose is to gain insight into the perceptions of principals and the wide range of variables that may play a role in the disparate rates of discipline among minorities. The researcher will choose participants based off of the criteria that their school has had PBIS implementation since 2014-2015 and the principal has been at the school since the start of implementation. Emails to the principals will solicit interest from those willing to participate in the study. There will be at least ten participants total.

DURATION: The interview that will be conducted with each principal will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

PROCEDURES: Data will be collected by using a general interview guide with open-ended questions. All participants will be given ample time to respond to the questions. With the expressed permission of each participant, the interviews will be recorded. The researcher will transcribe the recordings following each interview. Copies of transcribed data will be available upon request. No participant's name or school names will be used, but each interview will be coded with a number or letter.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: Some of the questions asked during the interview may make the participant feel uncomfortable or may be challenging to answer. Participants are free to stop the interview at any time and may choose not to answer any question that makes them feel uncomfortable.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS AND/OR COMPENSATION: No participant benefits or compensation are included in this study.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS: If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Courtney Johnson or Dr. Stephen Laws (slaws@gardner-webb.edu) at Gardner-Webb University.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Every attempt will be made to keep participants and interview information confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in a digital file on the researcher's personal computer for 5 years following the study. Recording applications used for this study will be deleted immediately following transcription and verification of the transcription. The results of this study may be published and/or presented without naming the participants. Although the participants' rights and privacy

Appendix D
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Principal Perceptions: The Impact of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports on Discipline Disproportionality

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the perceptions of principals concerning the impact of PBIS implementation and disproportionality in discipline.

Research Questions:

- (1) How has the implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports impacted the number and percentage of African American students being suspended?
- (2) What are the perceptions of school administrators regarding the impact of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports framework on school discipline, student behavior, and disproportionality?

Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been a public-school principal?
2. How many years have you been the principal of this school?
3. How would you define discipline disproportionality?
4. What specific PBIS strategies have impacted your school's culture?
5. What specific PBIS strategies have impacted your school's student behavior?
6. How has PBIS impacted the overall discipline program at your school?
7. Can you identify groups of students who receive more discipline referrals when compared to their peers?
8. How has PBIS impacted disproportionality in student discipline at your school? Particularly African Americans students?
9. What factors of PBIS do you feel could be enhanced to address the issue of disproportionality?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add?