

KNOWLEDGE OF TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY:
DESIGNING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
TO REDUCE THE DISCIPLINE GAP FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS
WITH DISABILITIES

by
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ABSTRACT

The researcher used a socio-cultural framework to investigate the impact of teachers' actions and beliefs on the risk of suspension for African American students who are eligible for special education services. A review of literature established that African American students and those with disabilities are more than twice as likely as their White, non-disabled peers to be suspended following matriculation to middle school. The literature further establishes that the issue of disproportionate school discipline is complex. Through analysis of extant demographic and suspension data from a large suburban school district, the researcher confirmed that challenges associated with disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for African American students with disabilities were a significant issue in the local context. The researcher sought to determine the levels of teacher self-efficacy in classroom disciplinary practices within the district's middle schools. Using a qualitative methodology, the researcher first administered a survey and interviewed a core group of informants, five professionals with extensive experience in planning professional development opportunities for teachers within the school district. She then compiled results of a survey on self-efficacy administered to 48 middle school teachers. This was followed by a second interview of the professional development planners, during which the results of the survey were presented. The goal of this interview was to determine the ways in which knowledge of the results of the teacher self-efficacy survey data supported planners of professional learning in examining the priorities of the school district in the development of culturally responsive and equitable disciplinary practices. Results indicated that, although planners see a need to expand the content for professional learning, there was a greater need to support

consideration of the context in which professional learning is conducted. Implications are provided for continued investigation into the impact of teachers' self-efficacy in implementing behavior supports, as required by the disciplinary provisions in the reauthorizations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Training and practice implications for school districts that seek to close the discipline gap through professional learning opportunities (PLO) are also provided.

Keywords: classroom discipline, disability, disproportionality, race,
professional learning, self-efficacy

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DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to my mother,
Sherene Brown Webb,
who loves and encourages me, provides prayer and wisdom,
and is my inspiration and role-model.

Thank you, Mom.

I love you.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A differential risk of suspension exists based on disability (Achilles, McLaughlin & Croninger, 2007) and race (Davis Ganao, Suero Silvestre, & Glenn, 2013; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Skiba et al., 2011). Current policies in Mid-State Independent Schools (MSIS) aim to eliminate such discipline gaps for students who are African American and eligible for special education (Faneslow, 2007). However, the compounded impact of disproportionality in discipline for students who fall simultaneously into both categories also needs consideration (Gregory, Skiba, Noguera, 2010; Krezmein, Leone, & Achilles, 2006).

Although MSIS has had success in reducing the overall suspension rate within the district, it has not experienced the same level of success in reducing gaps in disciplinary outcomes based on race and disability (State Schools Department of Education, 2013). Teacher self-efficacy, defined as the belief in one's own ability to meet a desired standard of performance (Bandura, 1977), represents a new lens through which the district can view and address the discipline gap dilemma. Redesigned professional learning opportunities may be an effective way for the district to improve teacher self-efficacy (JohnBull, Hardiman, & Rinne, 2013) in addressing the behavior of African American students with disabilities within the classroom, rather than through exclusionary discipline approaches.

The literature reviewed focused on potential drivers of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes and the impact of teacher self-efficacy on teachers' pedagogical disciplinary choices. Based on this review, the researcher designed an intervention that sought to refine priorities for planning professional learning opportunities (PLO). Study

participants included five school personnel with experience designing PLO. This qualitative study focused on responses of the five participants with extensive experience designing PLO to open-ended interview questions before and after exposure to the results of teacher self-efficacy data. Knowledge of teacher self-efficacy served as the moderating variable. Findings suggested that priorities for planning professional learning opportunities changed when planners knew the areas in which certain identified groups of teachers were more or less confident in their abilities to manage the behavior of African American students with disabilities. Based on the results of the findings, the student researcher highlighted implications for MSIS and other school districts.

CHAPTER 1 UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

The provision of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) requires establishing and sustaining positive learning environments. It is this requirement that constitutes the problem of practice for this dissertation research. School staff must respond to negative student behavior in an equitable manner and teach self-regulation strategies in accordance with legal precedence and the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Failure to implement equitable strategies results in a discipline gap in which students who have disabilities and who represent minority groups receive disproportionately more discipline referrals and harsher punishments than other students. The proposed research addresses the ways in which Mid-State Independent Schools (MSIS), a pseudonym, can address this problem at the middle school level.

Based on a review of literature, the researcher provides background information on the identified problem of practice, including the degree to which the problem impacts students in schools and districts throughout the nation. A consideration of the available literature results in the emergence of research themes and a refinement of the proposed research questions. The review of the literature further helped determine whether study within the proposed context would be viable and beneficial.

Literature included in this chapter represents a range of peer-reviewed journal articles and books which confirm the defined problem and themes essential to the study of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes. Although the theoretical framework for this study is identified as the socio-cultural perspective, other perspectives in the literature are also important to understanding the problem. The review of literature, therefore, begins with articles that informed the researcher about the history of school function and the

factors related to disciplinary practices for African American students eligible for special education services. The literature suggests that the history of schools and the legal precedents pertaining to schools may account for origins of bias and many of the socio-cultural factors influencing the problem of practice.

History of School Function and Student Discipline

Formalized education provides a context in which individuals become self-sufficient and the goals and values of a society are transmitted to the next generation (Toch, 2011). Practices for disciplining children are deeply imbedded in those beliefs. Garrison (2007) suggested that the origins of expectations regarding school behavior are found in understanding that parents, once part of relatively homogeneous communities, expect that schools convey a set of agreed-upon values to children. During the times that students are in school, parents expect teachers to act on their behalf – in *loco parentis* (Alexander & Alexander, 1998).

The Common School Movement

Under economic, political, and social pressures of the 19th century, the Common School Movement began and Horace Mann's vision of education as a right took hold (Alexander & Alexander, 1998). Decisions made in the establishment of public schools, the transmittal of community values, the individual right to an education, accountability of state and local government, and educational purpose attached education to economics. As such, a primary goal of the movement was to "Americanize" immigrants and others to improve the workforce for a developing industrial economy (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Warder (2015) elaborated and noted that some of Mann's reforms were troubling, especially for students with disabilities, immigrant children, and children who did not

fluently speak standard English. He noted that Mann's advocacy for oral education had lasting consequences, as intellect was considered to be reliant on spoken language.

Marginalization

Also during the 19th century, following the Emancipation Proclamation and reconstruction, the population grew and demographics changed. Former slaves moved north and attended schools in large numbers. Community values associated with race were communicated through the schools. The practice of marginalization, including socially constructed categories of disability and race, was taught and reinforced, both directly and indirectly (Braddock & Parish, 2001). "People learn who matters, what social priorities are important, and with whom and how to interact" (Guy, 2007, p. 7). Thus, as members of identified social groups, students who were identified as African American or as having a disability were formally defined as minorities and given status associated with their classification.

Harsh School Discipline and Corporal Punishment

In the century that followed, harsh discipline of school children continued as part of the educational experience. The use of corporal punishment, in particular, was an expected part of the experience. Middleton (2008) noted that corporal punishment was valued by many educators and aimed at encouraging "the backslider to willingly do what he ought to do" (p. 253). Middleton also discussed *The Principles and Practice of Teaching and Class Management*, first published at the end of the 19th century, which explain classroom discipline as the method by which a teacher impresses on a child the need for law, order, and better effort.

McFadden, Marsh, Price, and Hwang (1992) also studied race and gender biases in the punishment of children with disabilities. They confirmed an existence of racial bias in the administration of punishment. These authors noted that African American, male students with disabilities were punished more severely than other students and were more likely to be subjected to corporal punishment. Until the 1970's, corporal punishment in American schools was commonly accepted. Since then, however, corporal punishment has been linked to both physical and psychological harm of children (McFadden et al., 1992). Thus, as corporal punishment became a less favored disciplinary consequence, schools began using exclusion and suspension as a disciplinary strategy. Yet, this strategy was also disproportionately applied to African American students with disabilities.

Socio-Cultural Framework

The socio-cultural view of school disciplinary practice serves as the guiding theory for this research. It establishes that expectations regarding school behavior are largely driven by values associated with middle-class norms since the perspective of those in power guides both policy and practice (Delpit, 1995). Foley (2010) agreed and suggested that schools both inadvertently and willfully produce and reproduce inequalities. Cardone and Johnson (2012) followed this research with a focus on how groups use cultural reproduction to either create and conform to or resist larger conditions. Thus, the persistence of the discipline gap can be viewed, in large part, through a socio-cultural lens.

The sociological perspective is also important in determining the impact of the social context and social life on the school performance of children (Johns Hopkins

University, 2013). This perspective, as Dr. Karl L. Alexander suggested, allows for a keen focus on the complex issues of inequality within schools and in the greater society that impact educational outcomes (Johns Hopkins University, 2013). To reduce disproportionate suspension rates, educators must shift both practice and paradigm. Bonesheski and Runge (2013) posited that meaningful action in addressing disproportional school discipline practice begins with systematically analyzing office referral data and evaluating the efficacy of efforts to change systems. As such, the results of data analysis help school staff look inward and recognize factors contributing to disproportionate rates of office referral and suspension.

Also aligned with socio-cultural theory is the concept of cultural capital developed by Bourdieu (1986) and described by Winkle-Wagner (2010). Cultural capital provides a lens through which the social inequalities in educational processes and outcomes, including disciplinary practices, are studied. Thus, cultural capital partially explains the less tangible and less visible inequalities that include abilities, mannerisms, norms, preferences, and skills that influence disciplinary exchanges between teachers and students.

Analysis of school cultural capital enables school leaders to focus on how students are viewed and the dynamic relationships between various student groups and the environments they encounter. The reciprocal relationships between classroom teacher, students, instructional strategies, and policy are all part of this consideration. As indicated by Morris (2005), educators identify students deemed deficient in cultural capital and attempt to reform perceived deficiencies through discipline and regulation. The proposed study, therefore, focuses on the socio-cultural implications that arise from

teachers' perceptions of student behavior and how these perceptions influence teacher self-efficacy and decisions related to the disciplinary consequences assigned students who are African American and eligible for special education services.

Drivers to the Problem of Practice

Many drivers influence the application of disciplinary consequences in schools. Some of these drivers impact African American students who are eligible for special education services. The identified drivers form a complex picture and may explain the reasons it has been difficult for schools to effectively address the problem of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes.

School Culture and Social Constructs

School culture and policy impact how students are perceived and treated in schools. Deeply held and often unconscious beliefs, stereotypes, and biases influence the ways in which school culture and policy develop. Because language rooted in racial stereotypes from the days of slavery persist, George (2015) found that social hierarchies and constructions within schools reflected and reinforced cultural beliefs of the majority. If schools are designed to prepare students for civic life, then the structures and values of a society dominated by White interests, preferences, and norms continue to be reinforced. George further suggested that, in the context of school discipline, racial stereotypes function to criminalize African American youth; the stereotypes reinforce beliefs about behavioral deficiencies and the need for social correction of African American cultural norms.

The assigning of disciplinary consequences is often subjective. Little justification is required for administrative decisions. The level of discretion afforded, along with

racial and disability bias, results in discipline practices that disproportionately impact African American students. Only in recent years have the racial disparities in school disciplinary practice received national attention and guidance from the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (George, 2015).

Watts and Erevelles (2004) argued that school violence results from oppressive social conditions that make students, especially African American students from low income families, feel vulnerable, angry, and resistant to White normative expectations. Watts and Erevelles went on to make the comparison between schools and prisons, citing the presence in both of armed police officers, security cameras, metal detectors, isolation areas, and uniform policies. This focus is predicated by the societal need to address school safety and security. In short, efforts to prevent school violence go beyond addressing the behavior of individual students and focus more on the contexts in which ideologies of disability and race combine to produce aggressive students.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Disability Studies, as described by Watts and Erevelles (2004), may be used to study the impact of social, political, economic, and ideological structures on the social construction of the “deviant” student (of color). CRT and Disability Studies offer a set of theoretical assumptions from which Watts and Erevelles (2004) and George (2015) concluded that, in a climate of oppression, social constructs create a deviant, violent student.

Schools are intended to promote academic achievement, prepare students for future endeavors, and promote positive social interaction. They are also intended to be places where ideas are shared in a respectful and a meaningful way. These goals, however, are difficult to attain when schools are more concerned with restricting

students' behavior than with teaching collaboration, mediation, and social skills (Watts & Erevelles, 2004).

Monroe (2005) noted that, although studies reveal insights about the salience of culture and race in schools, few school districts have explored the ways in which social constructs relate to school disciplinary practice. Monroe also suggested that the country's history of institutional racism that once justified slavery, segregation, and brutality against African Americans was based on socially constructed beliefs of Black inferiority. These beliefs impact current perceptions of African American students and perpetuate normative behavior consistent with beliefs of White superiority. By failing to recognize the way the educational experiences of African American students are impacted by historical bias and the underlying stereotypes, schools enable "school push-out" and the "school-to-prison pipeline" (George, 2015).

The Cycle of Exclusionary Discipline

There is a link between school disciplinary outcomes, juvenile delinquency, and involvement in the criminal justice system. Although there are many possible causes, Rocque and Paternoster (2011) indicated that, for many African American students, the impact was evident when students were very young. School characteristics, including the percentage of African American students enrolled in a school, were related to disproportionate disciplinary outcomes and were consistent with a racial threat hypothesis.

Compared to White students, African American students are more likely to be held back, placed in lower academic tracts, and identified as needing special education services (Rocque & Paternoster, 2011). Rocque & Paternoster also reported African

American students drop out of school prior to graduating at higher rates than White students. Additionally, they have higher rates of criminal involvement and incarceration and are less likely to attend college. The connection of exclusionary discipline with race and poor academic outcomes, therefore, needs to be investigated.

It is possible that school staff may be partially responsible for both the academic failure and the disproportionate disciplinary outcomes of African American students. Early in their school experiences, many African American children experience hostile environments in which they receive disparate disciplinary treatment. Citing statistics from the Office for Civil Rights, Townsend (2000) confirmed the earlier findings of McFadden et al. (1992) and indicated that African American students in American public schools are “disproportionately subjected to corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion” (p. 381). Although African American males represent only 8 % of students enrolled in schools, they receive corporal punishment and are suspended at more than three times this rate.

For students with disabilities and for those who are African American, the consequences of suspension are numerous. Beyond the denial of access to instruction that occurs when students are suspended, students who receive suspension are often not allowed to make up missed assignments. When they are allowed to make up assignments, they often do so independently and without instruction or the support of staff. Townsend (2000) suggested that suspension contributes to the widening achievement gap. As such, students with a history of school suspension are more likely to be assigned to lower-ability groups and remedial tracking, which increases their association with students with antisocial and oppositional behavior (Wu, Pink, Crain, &

Moles, 1982). These students enter a cycle of disengagement, repeated negative school behavior, and more exclusionary discipline.

Bias in Suspension Risk for African American Students

The historical understanding of how people who differ in terms of disability and race are viewed provides clarity on why the issue of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes is best studied through the socio-cultural lens. In considering this perspective, the most relevant theme associated with the described problem is based on the possibility that patterns of disproportionality in school disciplinary outcomes is based on bias. The literature reviewed in this area is considerable and confirms that disproportionality in disciplinary practice is widespread in the United States and other western countries.

The seminal studies of Skiba (2002) and Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002), as well as that of Skiba et al. (2011), found that racial bias in school discipline can be verified. These studies and those that follow suggest that bias in school disciplinary practices rests in teacher referral rather than administrative bias in the dispensation of consequences. Gregory and Mosley (2004) contributed to this body of research by focusing on teachers' perceptions of bias associated with race. They found that bias in the determination of disciplinary outcomes existed even after teachers were presented with data that suggested bias. The results of these studies led to consideration of teachers as the population focused on for this study.

One of the arguments against teacher bias being the determining factor is the idea that differential behavior of African American students is the cause of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes. Eitle and Eitle (2004) posed this question in their research and found that behaviors of these students were not related to disciplinary outcomes. Patterns

of racial differences in school disciplinary practice based on student behavior were also studied. Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, and Bachman (2008) used a multi-state sampling procedure from the national population of grade 10 students and found that there were no racial and ethnic differences in the prevalence of more serious behavior. The study further confirmed that African American students more often received exclusionary consequences. Additionally, the literature in this area challenges the theory that for African American students, family situation and community indicators are predictive of suspension. Although true for White students, these predictions of suspension have not been found to be true for African American students (Davis Ganao et al., 2013).

Bias for African American Students with Disabilities

Multiple studies confirm the existence of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for African American students. In addition to these studies, researchers conducted quantitative analyses to determine differentiated levels of risk for suspension based on disability. Krezmein et al. (2006) drew data from an 8-year period and found that, when a student is identified as African American and diagnosed with ADHD, risk of suspension increases significantly compared to when a student is White and diagnosed with ADHD or has no disability. Achilles, et al. (2007) used the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS) database for a multiyear study that incorporated multilevel predictors into logistics regression analysis and, like Krezmein et al., found that risk of suspension increased for students diagnosed with ADHD as well as those identified under the special education code of emotional/behavioral disorders.

Butler, Lewis, Moore, and Scott (2012) considered suspension risk factors associated with gender, school level, and behavior roles. They found that students who

were male, in middle or high school, and engaged in violent or illegal behaviors often received an exclusionary discipline. However, when a student was also African American there was an increased risk of longer out-of-school suspension for similar behavior of White students. Boneshefski and Runge (2013) recommended that schools use a formula to compare risk index and risk ratio to calculate a student's risk of suspension. Based on the application of this formula, they found that White students were significantly underrepresented in the suspension data and African American students were significantly over-represented in the data. For the purposes of this dissertation, information on suspension risk factors for middle school students who are African American and have a disability are part of the extant data that provide insight into the depth of the issue addressed.

Congressional Acts, Legal Precedence, and Policy Decisions

Congressional acts and court cases are also contained within the literature and provide a context in which student rights and due process for current disciplinary practice may be understood. The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, as referenced by Good (2008), and related zero-tolerance policies (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2004) are cited and serve as the impetus for many of the adult actions associated with school discipline. The purpose of zero-tolerance policies, following several nationally publicized school shootings, is to improve school safety. Garman and Walker (2010) identified efforts of public school districts to find effective ways to manage student behavior through mandatory suspensions and recommended expulsion for certain behaviors. In their study, Garman and Walker questioned if such policies were consistent with constitutional guarantees of due process. Krezmein et al. (2006) linked the concern regarding due process and

implementation of zero-tolerance policies to students with disabilities. They found that such policies significantly increased rates of suspension among students who were African American and those who were diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Their findings are also aligned with those of Lashley and Tate (2009) who found that zero-tolerance policies were particularly harmful to students with disabilities and that these policies do not reduce recidivism. Ultimately, it is the Winton (2012) study that confirmed that schools are not more or less safe with the implementation of zero-tolerance policies.

Wilkinson (1975) described the 1975 U.S. Supreme Court case of *Goss v. Lopez* and provided insight into case law related to student rights regarding school disciplinary processes. This case addressed a student's procedural rights regarding notification of charges and opportunities to present an explanation of events from the student's perspective. Zirkell and Covell's (2009) study found significant variance in the application of *Goss* principles. The 1978 District Court case, *Stuart v. Nappi*, as described by Ekstrand (1982), weighed a special education student's right to the provision of FAPE against the operation of a safe and orderly school. As a result of the court's decision, the provision of FAPE may not be denied.

Disciplinary Provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The disciplinary provisions contained in the reauthorizations of IDEA highlight the need to balance acting decisively on matters of student behavior with adhering to required processes and documentation (Skiba, 2002). The ways in which teachers understand these provisions may influence the disciplinary choices they make (Hartwig & Reusch, 2000; Ryan, Katsiyannis, Peterson, & Chmelar, 2007; Smith, 2005). The

literature in this area provides the basis for one of the research questions of the dissertation study.

The most significant change in the disciplinary provisions for special education students, based on the 1997 and 2004 reauthorizations of IDEA, involves requiring consideration of the impact of the identified or suspected disability on student behavior (Conroy, Katsiyannis, Clark, Gable, & Fox, 2002). Ryan et al. (2007) gave an overview of the specific disciplinary provisions, identified the purpose of the amendments, and aligned IDEA with No Child Left Behind (NCLB). They referred to Smith and Katsiyannis (2004) who identified competing interests within the reauthorization and indicated that the IEP team may need to

- design, conduct, and document functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans;
- prepare data to substantiate dangerous behavioral situations;
- defend the appropriateness of placements/interventions;
- implement strategies to assess the child's understanding of the impact and consequences of behaviors and the ability to control behavior;
- participate in screening of children facing disciplinary action who may not yet be eligible for special education; and
- establish relationships with other agencies, including law enforcement and the courts.

Although teachers are members of the IEP team, many do not know their responsibility as a participating member or their role in implementing behavior strategies.

In addition to the provisions stated in the previous paragraph, IDEA also requires that an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting, referred to as a manifestation determination meeting, be held when a student with a disability accrues more than 10 cumulative days of suspension within a school year (Smith, 2005; Smith & Katsiyannis, 2004). Not only is an IEP team required to complete the manifestation determination, but the team must also complete it within 10 school days after the decision to suspend is made. Smith and Katsiyannis (2004) further explained that during the manifestation determination, the team must answer specific questions related to the appropriate implementation of the IEP. The team needs to give thoughtful consideration to whether appropriate special education services, including behavior supports and intervention, were provided. The team also determines whether the student's disability impaired his/her understanding of the impact and consequences of the behavior and the degree to which the student's disability impacted his/her ability to control the behavior. When a direct and substantial relationship between the behavior and the student's educational disability exists, the suspension ends and the student may immediately return to school. Teachers who do not understand these legal provisions may be upset by the perceived lack of student accountability for behaviors and the perceived lack of administrative support regarding the decisions reached.

Behavior Intervention and Support

In addition to the literature associated with racial bias and accountability for the disciplinary provisions of IDEA, there is a body of literature addressing a need to develop systematic approaches to classroom behavior management that are educative, effective, empowering, and equitable in reducing student misbehavior (Lashley & Tate, 2009).

When implemented with fidelity, positive behavior interventions improve student engagement and reduce exclusionary discipline (Sugai & Horner, 2006). This is particularly important as schools address the discipline gap for students with disabilities who are representative of a racial minority.

As summarized by Ryan et al. (2007), the reauthorization of IDEA requires that schools develop functional behavioral assessments and implement behavior intervention programs, including appropriate research-based interventions to address inappropriate behavior of students with disabilities. Using applied behavior analysis, Sugai and Horner (2006) highlighted the importance of such interventions to inform educators in the selection and evaluation of the intervention based on student and school needs. Thus, the fidelity with which behavior intervention is implemented correlates to achievement of desired outcomes and whether there are negative consequences to both individual students and schools.

The literature includes numerous studies related to specific interventions designed to support individual students. These interventions are associated with improved behavior and increased school engagement. Chin, Dowdy, Jimerson, and Rime (2012) found that, as with differentiated academic instruction, instructional methods applied to behavior, when modified and differentiated, resulted in proactive measures rather than punitive discipline.

Check and Connect, as described by Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, and Lehr (2004), is one such individualized intervention that facilitates improved relationships between staff and students. This study supports the widely-held view that relationships with students are critical to improving student engagement and achievement. *Check and*

Connect is targeted to professionals who work with and plan for students at risk of dropping out of high school. This study represents one of the few empirical studies found that confirms the impact of specific behavior intervention programs on student engagement. When staff formed positive mentoring relationships with students, it was less likely that bias impacted disciplinary interactions.

Access to Direct Social Skills Instruction

Duran, Zhou, Frew, Kwok, and Benz (2011) questioned whether African American students with disabilities have the same level of access to behavior support as their White disabled peers. Using qualitative, self-reporting methodology, the researchers found that direct social skills instruction mediated the relationship between student demographic characteristics and suspensions from school. The findings of this study, however, may be controversial because they imply that students must learn behaviors that allow them to fit within the context of a school, rather than have the school adopt the inclusive philosophy required by IDEA.

School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

In addition to individualized behavior supports, school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports (SWPBIS) are also important in changing student behavior and adult responses to it. Many teachers have difficulty with implementation methodology regarding team functioning, communication, and developing effective reward systems (Fallon, McCarthy, & Sanetti, 2014). Bradshaw, Debnam, Koth, and Leaf (2009) considered stages of effective implementation and assessed the reliability and validity of implementation of SWPBIS through four stages: preparation, initiation, implementation, and maintenance. Feurerborn and Tyre (2012) also addressed the issue

of implementation of SWPBIS and questioned the impact of *Foundations* as an effective staff development tool. They found that, when teachers understood the value and implementation methodology, there was a positive correlation to student outcomes.

A more recent study by Swain-Bradway, Loman, and Vincent (2014) points to the cultural incongruence between students and teachers as a driver of disparity in school disciplinary practices. These authors suggested that culturally responsive SWPBIS reduces discrepancy in the application of disciplinary policy. They further asserted that the incorporation of SWPBIS practices was effective in reducing suspension for students who were culturally and linguistically different from the majority of the school population. The degree to which teachers understand and effectively implement individual and school-wide behavior strategies may support the intervention stage of the proposed research study on disciplinary outcomes for students who have disabilities and who are African American.

School Climate

Persistence of a negative school climate influences disproportionate disciplinary outcomes (Crowson, Boyd, & Mawhinney, 1995). As such, researchers need to consider school climate and institutionalism in relation to issues of bias that persist in school culture. In a related study, Hendron and Kearney (2016) examined the connection between school climate variables and problematic student absenteeism. Using measures to rate child anxiety, depression, and oppositional behavior, these authors found that, especially for male students in middle and high schools, school climate and absenteeism are inversely related to anxiety, depression, and oppositional behavior. Specific climate variables addressed in this study included access to resources, order and discipline in the

school, parental involvement, student-to-student relationships, and teacher-to-student relationships. Students who believe that their class attendance is not recognized or respected through equitable opportunities to participate are more likely to avoid school (Green et al., 2012).

The study of school climate includes consideration of institutionalism. As explained by Powell and DiMaggio (2012), organizational change is episodic and dramatic rather than incremental and smooth. The changes associated with the inclusion of minorities and students with disabilities demonstrate this idea. Regardless of perceptions and biases held by staff, these subgroups of students (minorities and those with disabilities) are now present in classrooms. Teachers must constrain the inclination and capacity to optimize and provide privilege to some students through systems of rewards while sanctioning others (Powell & DiMaggio, 2012). In this view, organizational behavior is not the sum of the actions of individuals within the school. Rather, in the modern school it is not acceptable to be unreflective or view what happens in the classroom in isolation. As such, schools must consider how classrooms are structured as well as how expectations are adjusted and communicated to ensure equity for all students.

Children form perceptions of themselves as students based on their experiences in the classroom. Ozdemir and Pape (2013), in a study on middle school student self-efficacy in mathematics, found that teacher action was critical to students' self-efficacy and classroom participation. They indicated that students' perceptions of their capabilities are based on the messages received from teachers and peers. Teachers must understand the impact of their actions on student performance. Regarding disciplinary

outcomes, students who have positive relationships within the classroom show more participation and effort. Supporting this idea, Anderson et al. (2004) concluded that the closeness and quality of the student-to-teacher relationship affects engagement and reduces behaviors linked to risk of suspension and dropping out of school.

The ways students and staff perceive their relationships influence the cycle of action and reinforcement regarding student behavior, office referral, and exclusionary disciplinary consequence. Christie, Nelson and Jolivette (2004) found that an initial suspension was predictive of future suspensions. Fan, Williams and Corkin (2011) suggested that students' perception of school climate was impacted by

- their history of school disciplinary infractions,
- whether they believe resulting consequences are fairly issued, and
- their perceptions of how they are viewed by teachers.

A positive school and classroom climate, supported by alternatives to suspension, including SWPBIS, yield improved academic and social behavior.

Codes of Conduct

Codes of conduct also influence disproportionate disciplinary outcomes. Cameron (2006) found that codes of conduct and security methods that rely on deterrence, control, and punishment actually increased school disorder. Schools that rigidly enforced discipline policies had more rule infractions and disproportionately more exclusionary consequences. Winton (2012) questioned the impact of the implementation of zero-tolerance policies versus positive disciplinary approaches. He found that the implementation of progressive discipline and the removal of mandatory suspension did not make the school more or less safe.

Brown and Beckett (2006) questioned whether codes of conduct are fully understood by students and families or developed merely for the convenience of school administrators and teachers. They suggested that input from stakeholders is necessary when codes of conduct are written. Not only do students and families understand expectations, but they are supportive and invested in contributing to safe and orderly schools.

Impact of the Literature

This review of literature confirms the existence of the problem of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes and contributes to understanding the problem's complexity. The consistency in the literature affirms that the risk of disciplinary exclusion is two to five times more likely when a student has a disability or is African American (Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; Vincent, Tobin, Hawken & Frank, 2012). The literature further contradicts the supposition that it is the actual behavior of the student that causes the risk of suspension to increase. African American students and those with disabilities do not engage in misbehavior at greater rates or in more significant behavior than their White, non-disabled peers. Due to the quantity and consistency of findings in the literature for each of the identified themes, the student researcher is confident that consideration of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes is a viable research topic.

A considerable gap in the literature was found, however. Few studies addressed disproportionate disciplinary outcomes when a student has both a disability and is African American. Of the studies that address the combination of disability and race, most (Achilles et al., 2007; Krezmein et al., 2006) compared these students to those who are non-disabled and White. This gap in the literature represents a failure to address

disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for African Americans students within the special education subgroup. It is, therefore, this gap in the literature to which the proposed study seeks to contribute.

Although the literature substantiates that a discipline gap exists at the elementary and secondary levels, it is the study of Arcia (2007) that compared the suspension rates in elementary schools, kindergarten through grade eight schools, and middle schools. This study found that sixth grade African American students are suspended at greater rates when sixth grade is contained within a middle school than when sixth grade is included in an elementary or a K-8 school. These findings are particularly interesting since MSIS is a district with consistent school organization. This district's school-level organization includes elementary schools with kindergarten through fifth grade, middle schools with sixth through eighth grades, and high schools with ninth through twelfth grades.

The ways in which disability and race versus perceptions and attitudes toward IDEA's behavioral and due process requirements influence teacher confidence in disciplinary decisions. On the surface, the attitudes and requirements may appear to be in opposition to one another. Whether there is perceived variance in the application of *Goss*' principles within middle schools and if such variance in application can be differentiated based on student race will contribute to the findings of this study. Through this study the student researcher seeks to discover whether teachers have the same level of self-efficacy in addressing the behavior of both African American and White students with disabilities. As such, it is hoped that the study will illuminate the ways in which the themes from the literature come together in the context of a district's middle schools. This research will enhance the professional discourse within the district and influence the

professional learning opportunities provided to teachers in the areas of culturally responsive instruction, disability awareness, and racial bias. Only by increasing teacher self-efficacy will teachers be empowered to reduce the discipline gap.

Delimitations of the Study

As a result of the literature review, the researcher defines delimitations for the study. The literature suggests a need for a firm understanding of the study's context. The study is, therefore, bound by data that focuses on students who are African American and not on students identified as Asian, Hispanic, White or of two or more races. African American students are selected due to the abundance of literature that suggests that it is this group of students, with and without disabilities, who are subject to the most disproportionate patterns of discipline (Butler et al., 2012; George, 2015; Skiba, 2002; Skiba et al., 2002). The research is also concentrated on students with disabilities because African American students with disabilities are dually impacted and suffer most from negative consequences.

An additional boundary is established in the consideration of middle school students rather than on students in high schools or elementary schools. Although the literature suggests that there is a discipline gap for African American students at all levels, the gap significantly increases as students matriculate to middle school settings (Arcia, 2007). As such, the intervention phase of the study is bound by knowledge of the data collected from the teachers who work with this age group of students and provision of this knowledge to planners of professional learning within the school district who focus on increasing teachers' efficacy in culturally responsible and equitable pedagogies. The scope of this intervention is limited due to time and, therefore, only focuses on

determining whether teacher educators' beliefs and priorities change regarding the importance of incorporating knowledge of teacher self-efficacy in PLO training plans for middle school teachers.

CHAPTER 2 NEEDS ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This needs assessment for this study focuses on relevant findings from the literature highlighted in the previous chapter. The researcher begins to focus on a particular school district and explores extant data associated with student discipline that were obtained from state and school district websites. In order to maintain the confidentiality of the school district, the student researcher removed the school district's name from the text and used, instead, the pseudonym Mid-State Independent Schools (MSIS) (R. Rosen, personal communication, May 2017). Also, according to Rosen's precedent, the pseudonym MSIS is included in the references as a modified citation to the data. Likewise, data collected from the state educational agency are included in the text and listed in the references under the pseudonym State Schools Department of Education (SSDE).

The researcher proposes that when a student is categorized as both African American and eligible for special education services, the risk of suspension is far greater than when a student is categorized as either White or eligible for special education services. Many of the seminal studies on the discipline gap describe the impact of race and disability on suspension rates separately. This study, and particularly the findings of the needs assessment, however, align more closely with the work of Krezmein et al. (2006), who reported that risk factors for disciplinary referral and suspension increased significantly when a student fell into both groups.

Goals of the Needs Assessment

While this study does not specifically focus on the achievement gap for students who are African American and eligible for special education, educators must be mindful

that suspensions have an impact on achievement since they result in lost opportunities for academic instruction and positive student engagement in learning activities (Gregory et al., 2010; Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005). Students with a history of school suspensions are more likely to be assigned to lower-ability groups and to be remedially tracked. This increases their association with students who may have antisocial and oppositional behavior (Wu et al., 1982).

Determining whether or not there is a significant discipline gap reflecting a profile similar to those schools and school districts included in the research literature is the goal of this needs assessment. If such a gap is confirmed, the researcher questions the impact of teachers on differential disciplinary outcomes. Gregory and Moseley (2004) identified patterns of low achievement and rates of school misconduct that influence the disproportionate discipline of students. They suggested a need for additional research that sorts out the interacting sources of variance in the disciplinary data. This dissertation study, therefore, seeks to address the contributing factors of teacher attitude and lack of student access to the disciplinary provisions outlined by IDEA.

Research Questions

As a result of the literature review, the parameters of the needs assessment were narrowed and research questions refined. The research concern is teacher attitude and perception regarding disability and race and how such attitudes and perceptions influence disciplinary practices. Additionally, the research focuses on how teachers perceive their own effectiveness in addressing behaviors of a specific population of students. As suggested by Monroe (2005), there is a need to understand how and why teachers' views

of students mediate self-efficacy and, thus, their disciplinary decisions in the classroom. Questions to be answered by the needs assessment include:

- Does the extant data confirm that African American students with disabilities receive disproportionate disciplinary outcomes in MSIS and the state?
- If a discipline gap exists, in what ways is it correlated to teacher's self-efficacy based on the teacher's ethnicity, experience, and gender?

The initial phase of the needs assessment addresses the first question. In a later phase of the needs assessment, results of a teacher-completed questionnaire answer the second question of the needs assessment. This information was used to inform intervention participants as described in Chapters 4 and 5.

Needs Assessment Methodology

The needs assessment for this study provides an analysis of extant district and state data on suspension rates for African American students who are eligible for special education services. It establishes the existence of a problem of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes in the MSIS. The disability groups identified for this study include those most frequently occurring in the district: intellectual disability, other health impairments, specific learning disability, and speech and language impairments.

Setting and Context

Mid-State Independent Schools (MSIS), the school district used for this study, is located in what is considered to be an affluent community. It is the largest school district in the state and currently serves over 159,000 thousand students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12. The student population is diverse (MSIS, 2013c), with no racial group

representing more than 50%. Nearly 18,000 of the students in MSIS receive special education services.

The schools in this district are best known for the high performance of students on nearly all achievement measures (Fanselow, 2007). Although there has been progress in reducing achievement gaps (Schwartz, 2011), not all students in the district are doing well. There remain populations of students who have less positive experiences and who do not achieve at the same high level. In a memorandum to the Board of Education dated November 13, 2012, the superintendent of schools provided an update on state regulatory changes and identified specific goals for the school district. He included goals for the reduction in the number of suspensions for non-violent behavior and the elimination of disproportionate suspensions of minority students and students with disabilities. The disability groups identified for consideration in the needs assessment include those most frequently occurring in the district: intellectual disability, other health impairments, specific learning disability, and speech and language impairments.

Data Collection

The needs assessment for this study provides an analysis of extant district and state data on suspension rates for African American students who are eligible for special education services. It establishes the existence of a problem of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes in MSIS. For the purpose of data comparisons, the 2012-2013 school year is targeted so that all referenced data come from the same school year.

Only data available in the public domain were collected for the initial phase of this needs assessment. The author collected this extant data to confirm whether or not the district's students who are African American and eligible for special education services

received disciplinary consequences disproportionate to other students. The establishment of the problem in the organizational context allows for consideration of contributing factors and possible intervention. The collection of extant data for this study is the result of on-line searches of the Office of Civil Rights, MSIS, and State Schools Department of Education (SSDE) websites. Searches for demographic information and suspension yielded the most applicable data.

Variables

Analysis of the extant data is designed solely to describe the organization and confirm the problem in the specified context. The study's final results, however, are dependent upon the analysis of primary data. Forty-eight middle school teachers consented to complete a survey (see Appendix A), the analysis of which served as the primary data for the needs assessment and as the moderating variable for the intervention.

Key Findings and Analysis

Stage One

Key findings from the data begin with confirming student enrollment and demographic information for school district. For the purposes of reporting state and district data, students referred to as White represent the same group as students referred to as White in the tables and figures. The author elects to use the same terminology as found in the source documents. It is important to note that the federal government provides guidance regarding the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA) that has resulted in restrictions in the type of student data that may be publicly reported. FERPA (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) prohibits the release of individually identifiable information to the public so all data reported is aggregated according to

FERPA. Enrollment data (MSIS, 2013c), reflected in Table 1, show the percentage of MSIS students who are African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, White, and of two or more races.

Table 1

Race/Ethnicity of MSIS Students for School Year 2012-2013

Student Group	Enrollment	
	(n)	(%)
African American	32,336	21.4
Asian	21,742	14.2
Hispanic	41,445	27.4
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	---	≤05.0
White	48,439	32.0
Two or more races	---	≤5.0

Note: Data taken from MSIS Update on Enrollment and Capital Improvements Program, 2013.

These data confirm the diversity of the school district in that no one racial group comprises 50% of the population. The reporting of these data, as well as the data presented in Tables 2 and 4, meets the following MSIS guidelines for the reporting of aggregated student data, adopted from the SSDE:

- Any percentage rates greater than or equal to 95.0% or less than or equal to 5.0% will be noted as $\geq 95.0\%$ or $\leq 5.0\%$, respectively.
- If the percentage rate is greater than or equal to 95.0% or less than or equal to 5.0%, the corresponding number of students enrolled, number of suspension incidents, and number of students suspended will not be published.
- When the number of students enrolled is less than 10 or the number of students suspended is less than 5, no data will be published.

- When the number of students enrolled is between 10 and 20, only the percentage rate will be published, provided the percentage rate is not greater than or equal to 95.0% or less than or equal to 3.0% (SSDE, 2013).

The next data set represents findings related to the special education population. Special education students comprise 11.7% of the MSIS total enrollment compared to a national average of 12.9% (Office of Civil Rights, 2012). Race/ethnicity percentages within the special education group are shown in Table 2. Readers should note the differences in the percentages presented in Table 1 with those presented in Table 2, especially for African American and White students who are the populations identified for comparison in the research questions.

Table 2

Race/Ethnicity of MSIS IDEA-Eligible Students for School Year 2012-2013

Student Group	Enrollment	
	(n)	(%)
African American	4,592	21.4
Asian	1,289	14.2
Hispanic	5,829	27.4
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	---	≤5.0
White	5,299	32.0
Two or more races	---	≤5.0
Total education enrollment 17,663		

Note: Data taken from MSIS Update on Enrollment and Capital Improvements Program, 2013.

Since initiating efforts to reduce rates of suspension, district data indicate a reduction in overall suspensions. Table 3 shows that MSIS had the lowest suspension rate in the state for the 2012-2013 school year (SSDE, 2013). Note the percent of students suspended in the state, by district, ranges from a high of 11.9% in District 20 to a low of 2.4 % in MSIS. This published data is not disaggregated by race or disability and

may give a false impression of the suspension rates for African American students who are eligible for special education services.

Table 3

Percentage of Students Suspended or Expelled from State Public Schools for School Year 2012-2013 (As of June 30, 2013)

Local Education Agency/County	Enrolled Students Suspended or Expelled (%)
District 1	5.7
District 2	5.4
District 3	5.3
District 4	7.3
District 5	5.1
District 6	5.8
District 7	7.7
District 8	10.8
District 9	4.0
District 10	3.5
District 11	5.8
District 12	2.9
District 13	7.3
<i>Mid-State Independent Schools</i>	<i>2.4</i>
District 15	7.0
District 16	2.5
District 18	10.6
District 19	5.0
District 20	11.9
District 21	4.7
District 22	2.6
District 23	11.0
District 24	3.7
State Average	5.1

Note: The percent of students suspended in the state, by district, ranges from a high of 11.9% in District 20 to a low of 2.4 % in MSIS. Data taken from *Suspensions, Expulsions, and Health Related Exclusions in State Public Schools*.

The researcher, however, questions disproportionality in suspension rates for students who are both African American and eligible for special education services. She also questions whether there is a difference at the school level that is relevant to this group of students. For the 2012-2013 school year, 68,534 students were enrolled in the district's elementary schools and fewer than 3% of students in all racial/disability categories received out of school suspension (MSIS, 2013b). In the same year, 31,382 students were enrolled in middle school and 3.6% of these students received out-of-school suspensions.

District data also show a considerable decline in the achievement level of students with disabilities and African American students as they matriculate from fifth to sixth grade along with an increase in disciplinary outcomes (MSIS, 2013a). The researcher, therefore, believes that the greatest impact of the research intervention will be at the middle school level, where access to behavioral supports may be limited, as suggested by Vincent, Tobin, Hawken, & Frank (2012). Table 4 show that while less than <0.3% of all elementary school students enrolled in the district were suspended, 3.9% of all middle school students were suspended. Data for the identified population highlights that 7.9% of African American middle school students and 9.0% of middle school students eligible for special education services were suspended. These numbers reflect, at a minimum, an increase of 263% and 300%, respectively, from elementary to middle school for these groups of students. This comparison of suspension rates at elementary to middle school of MSIS students supports the researcher's decision to focus this study on middle schools. Data show a relationship between increased rates of suspension and enrollment

of African American students and those who are eligible for special education services in middle schools.

Table 4

MSIS Out-of-School Suspension Rates for Elementary and Middle Students for School Year 2012-2013

Student Group	Elementary School		Middle School	
	Students Suspended		Students Suspended	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
All students	---	≤3.0	1,133	3.6
African American	---	≤3.0	540	7.9
Asian	---	≤3.0	---	≤3.0
Hispanic	---	≤3.0	351	4.5
White	---	≤3.0	---	≤3.0
Two or More Races	---	≤3.0	59	4.1
Special Education	---	≤3.0	317	9.0

Note: Data included as of June 30, 2013, was taken from MSIS School Safety and Security at a Glance, 2013.

Although not currently located within the public domain, data on suspension rates based on race within disability categories also provide a contextual background for the study. Non-public district data reflect the same trends as presented in the statewide data. The researcher, therefore, uses public statewide data (see Table 3) to consider the possibility that a disability category does not influence findings related to a discipline gap for students who are African American. In this instance, the number of suspensions for African American students diagnosed with emotional disabilities far outnumber suspensions for every other student group (see Figure 1).

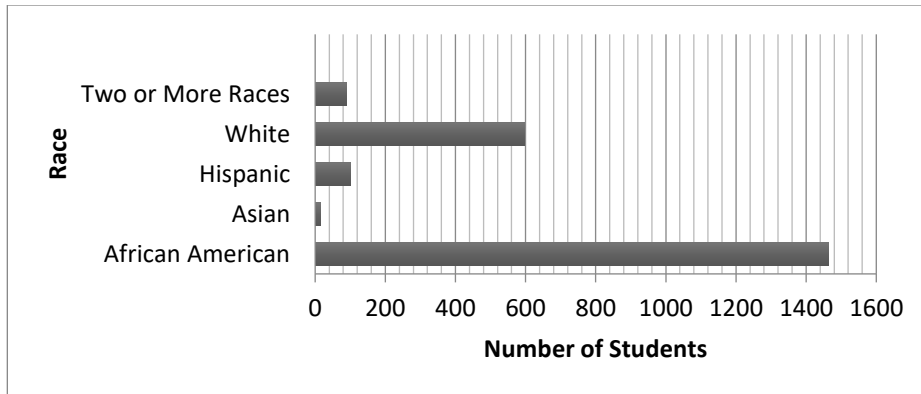


Figure 1. Students with emotional disabilities suspended out-of-school for school year 2012-2013. Data taken from SSDE suspensions, expulsions, and health related exclusions as of June 30, 2013.

A similar situation exists for African American students identified for the disability category of intellectual disability. These students also experienced a much higher rate of out-of-school suspensions than the other four racial categories of students.

Figure 2 graphically displays these suspension rates.

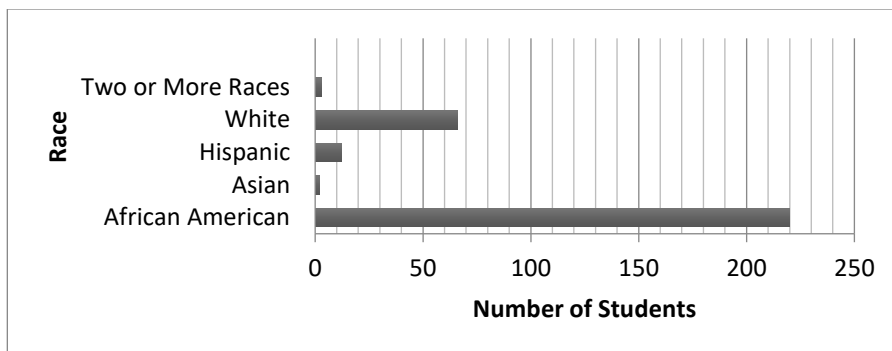


Figure 2. Students with intellectual disabilities suspended out-of-school for school year 2012-2013. Data taken from SSDE suspensions, expulsions, and health related exclusions as of June 30, 2013.

Figures 3 and 4 display the data students with other health impairment and specific learning disabilities. For these two categories, African American students also experienced higher rates of out-of-school suspensions. Thus, for all of these high incidence disability categories (emotional disturbance, intellectual disabilities, other health impaired, and specific learning disabilities) students who are African American

experience suspensions at rates several times greater than their White peers within the same disability category.

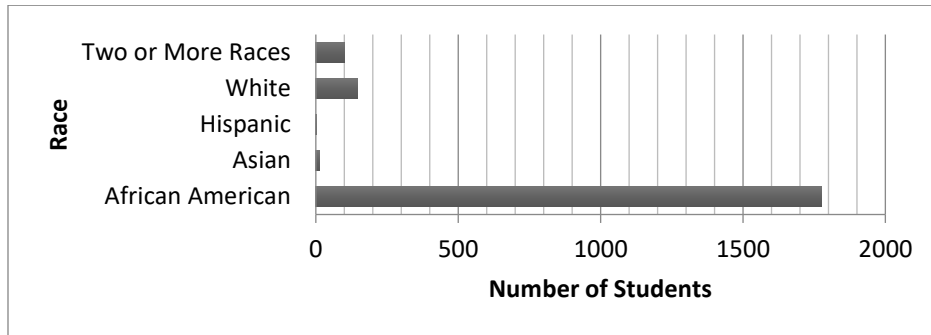


Figure 3. Students with other health impairments suspended out-of-school for school year 2012-2013. Data taken from SSDE suspensions, expulsions, and health related exclusions as of June 30, 2013.

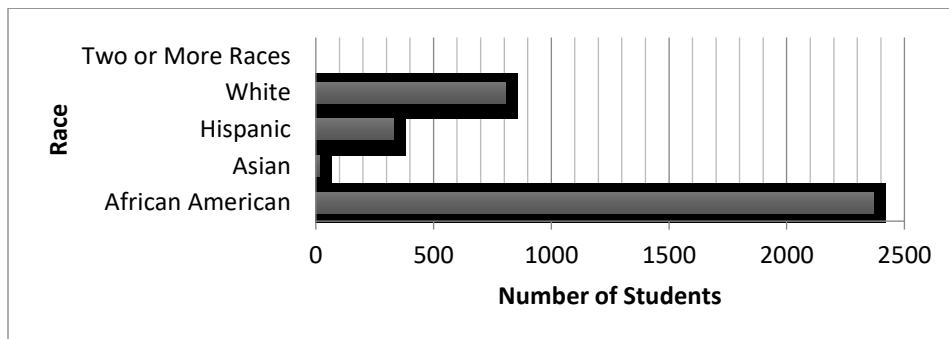


Figure 4. Students with specific learning disabilities suspended out-of-school for school year 2012-2013. Data taken from SSDE suspensions, expulsions, and health related exclusion as of June 30, 2013.

Findings from the literature review suggest that the greatest disproportionality nationwide in suspension for special education students is found for students identified with emotional disability and other health impairment, which includes attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Achilles et al., 2007; Krezmein et al., 2006). In this state, however, the greatest disparity exists for students with specific learning disabilities—a group of students who are suspended more than students in any other category. Overall, the findings from the extant data confirm that a problem of

disproportionate suspension exists in the school district for the targeted group—middle school students who are both African American and eligible for special education service.

Stage Two

Stage one of the needs assessment consisted in amassing data that demonstrated the need for this research. There were no study respondents in stage one. Stage two, conducted at a later date, included middle school teachers selected from four schools that reflected the demographic range of middle schools in the MSIS district. These teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire on self-efficacy (see Appendix A) in managing the behaviors of students who are African American and receive special education services. Per O’Leary (2014), “it is absolutely crucial to figure out who might hold the answer to your research question and how you will open up opportunities to gather information from those in the know” (p. 181). Meyer (2006) described teachers as ‘knowledge workers’ who are positioned to help students develop the skills and knowledge needed to function as contributing members of society but who may have little autonomy or discretion over their practice. Stage two of the needs assessment gives voice to teachers who have not been consequential political actors in the district offerings for PLO (Crawford, 2012). Along these lines, it is teachers who establish and control which students have behavior addressed within the classroom and which receive office referrals resulting in harsher punishment.

Survey Respondents and Stakeholders. In order to ensure a sample of middle school teachers who reflect the teaching demographics of the district, the sample frame focused on racial diversity, gender balance, and range of professional experiences of MSIS middle school teachers. The researcher used stratified sampling methods to divide

the teachers into subgroups and then used a random sample of each group. Although there was a strong desire to increase diversity in the district's teacher workforce, validity of this study's results relied on the use of a sample of respondents that reflected the current workforce. The resulting sample represented the range of county middle school teachers in terms of age, gender, race, and years of teaching experience.

Once completed, the selection process yielded a total of 48 participants. The researcher, however, expected that there might be barriers to teachers' willingness to participate in the study. She believed that it was important to sensitively address the consideration of racial bias within the school district and assured study respondents that their participation and responses were not only valuable to finding a solution to the problem but would remain confidential, as noted on the consent form (see Appendix B). Unfortunately, too few Hispanic teachers opted to participate, and the 5% threshold for inclusion in ethnicity/race data was not met.

The stakeholders impacted by this study are numerous. Of course, African American students, students with disabilities, and the families of these students are those most affected by disproportionate disciplinary outcomes. Other key stakeholders are middle school teachers, school-based administrators, district-level administrators, and members of the Board of Education and County Council. Additionally, the community at-large is a stakeholder impacted by the study because the reputation of the school district is essential to the community's ability to attract and sustain businesses that support the local economy in an area neighboring the nation's capital, the east coast's technology corridor, and numerous research universities and facilities.

Instrumentation. Methodology for the collection of the primary data, the second stage of the needs assessment, was based on responses to a survey questionnaire. This method was selected based on sources in the review of literature that suggested that teacher knowledge, attitude, and actions have significant influence on patterns of suspension (Butler et al., 2012; Conroy et al., 2002). In order to better understand the ways in which teacher attitude and action influence disciplinary practice, the researcher believed that she needed to gather information from the teachers themselves.

The survey instrument (see Appendix A) used to collect this data contained 32 questions, divided into two parts. The first five questions provide demographic information about the respondent's age, ethnicity/race, gender, and years of professional experience. For the remaining questions, presented in a five point Likert-type format, the participant is asked to select a choice that best indicates whether he/she *completely disagrees with the statement (1)* to a choice that indicates whether he/she *completely agrees with the statement (5)*. The second section of the questionnaire consists of items that focus on teachers' understandings, perceptions, and experiences associated with the disciplinary provisions of IDEA, on teachers' beliefs about the behavior of students, and on teachers' confidence and self-efficacy in addressing the behavior of African American students and those with disabilities within the classroom.

Results. Summary data from the questionnaires completed by 48 MSIS middle school teachers informed the second part of the needs assessment. The null hypothesis (H_0) suggests that there is no statistical difference between the mean score for the total sample group and the mean scores of sample group members based on the characteristics of teachers' ethnicity/race, gender, and years of teaching experience, as well as the

intergroup differences. A decision whether to reject the H_0 was based on a p-value of .05 and a 95% confidence interval (CI = +/- 0.4). The dependent variable was teacher self-efficacy as represented by mean scores of the total group (M = 99.77, SD = 1.41). Table 5 displays the results for the total group as well as for subgroups identified by ethnicity/race, gender, and teaching experience.

Table 5
Demographic Questions Mean Scores and Confidence Intervals

Group	Mean (M)	Confidence Interval (CI)
All Participants	99.8	99.4 – 100.2
Ethnicity/Race		
African American	101.4	101.0 – 101.8
Asian	99.9	99.5 – 100.3
White	98.9	98.5 – 99.3
Gender		
Males	99.9	99.5 – 100.3
Females	99.7	99.3 – 100.1
Teaching Experience		
0 to 5 Years	98.7	98.3 – 99.1
6 to 10 Years	98.6	98.2 – 99.0
11 to 15 Years	103.1	102.7 – 103.5
16 to 20 Years	98.5	98.1 – 98.9
Over 20 Years	100.8	100.4 – 101.2

The following three figures graphically display the results for each of the independent variables. Figure 5 shows that the CI of mean scores for African American teachers (CI = 101.0–101.8) and for White teachers (CI = 98.5–99.3) were significantly different, with no overlap when compared to the confidence interval for all participants (CI = 99.4–100.2). African American teachers identified as being significantly more self-efficacious and White teachers as significantly less self-efficacious. The H_0 was not rejected for Asian teachers.

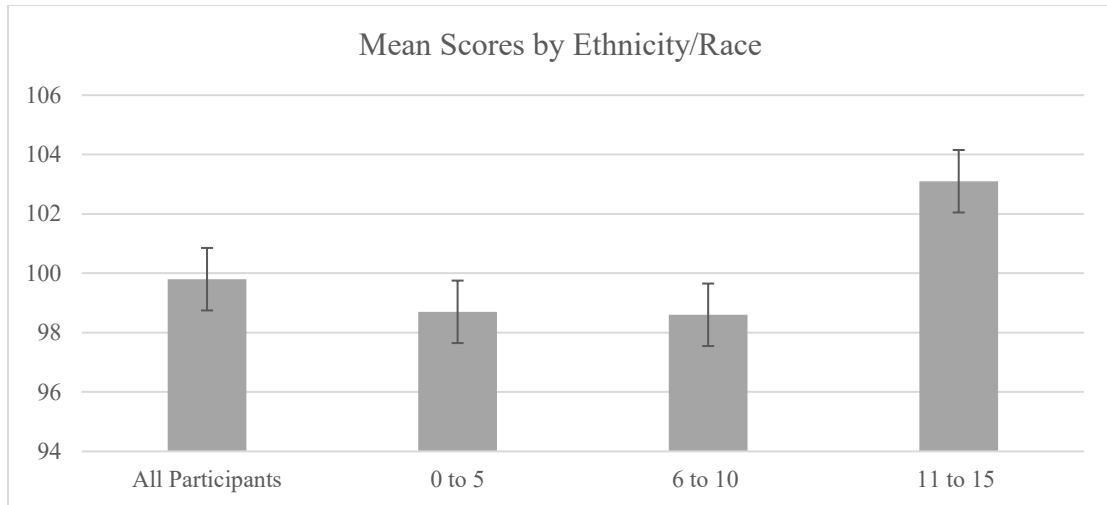


Figure 5. Mean scores by ethnicity/race on teacher survey on teachers’ understandings, perceptions, and experiences associated with the disciplinary provisions of IDEA, on teachers’ beliefs about the behavior of students, and on teachers’ confidence and self-efficacy in addressing the behavior of African American students and those with disabilities within the classroom.

Figure 6 displays mean scores for male and female teachers. Although male teachers reported being more self-efficacious than female teachers, the difference was not significant. Significant differences, however, are illustrated in Figure 7 for years of teaching experience. Teachers with fewer than 5 years of experience, with between 6 and 10 years of experience, and with between 16 and 20 years reported being less self-efficacious than the total group as evidenced by CI scores of 98.3–99.1, 98.2–99.0, and 98.1–98.9, respectively. On the other-hand, teachers with 11 to 15 years of experience and those with more than 20 years of experience reported significantly higher self-efficacy (CI–102.7–103.5 and 100.4–101.2) than the total sample mean.

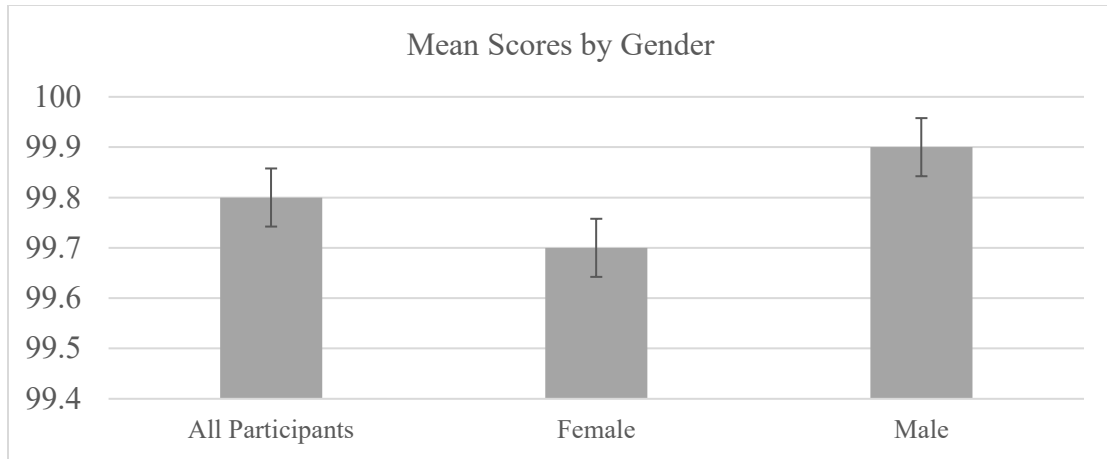


Figure 6. Mean scores by gender on teacher survey of teachers’ understandings, perceptions, and experiences associated with the disciplinary provisions of IDEA, on teachers’ beliefs about the behavior of students, and on teachers’ confidence and self-efficacy in addressing the behavior of African American students and those with disabilities within the classroom.

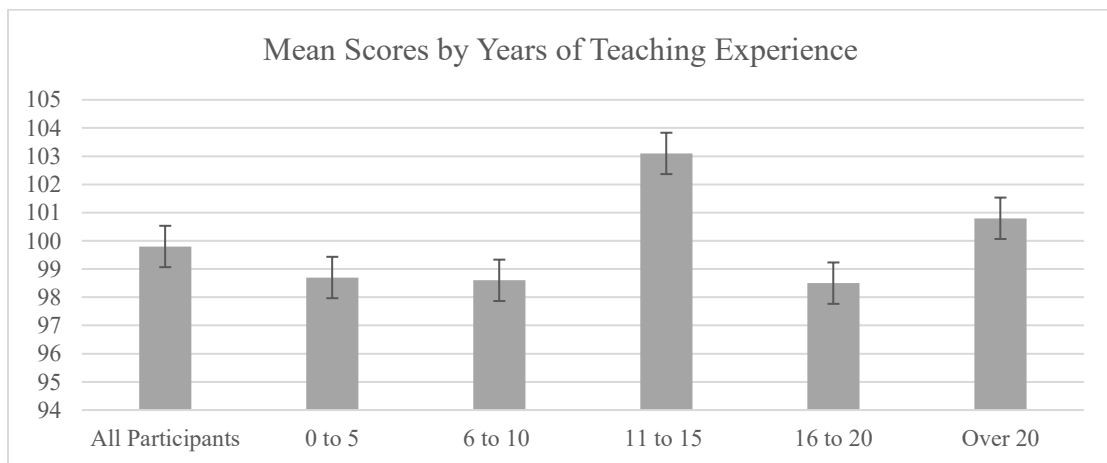


Figure 7. Mean scores by years of teaching experience on teacher survey on teachers’ understandings, perceptions, and experiences associated with the disciplinary provisions of IDEA, on teachers’ beliefs about the behavior of students, and on teachers’ confidence and self-efficacy in addressing the behavior of African American students and those with disabilities within the classroom.

Differences in self-efficacy between subgroups and the means for all participants were significant; it is important for planners of professional learning opportunities to understand these differences. This data analysis confirms Rose’s (2016) supposition that

no one is truly average, at least in terms of years of teaching experience and self-efficacy in addressing the behavior of African American students with disabilities. This knowledge may impact the designated outcomes of professional learning opportunities (PLO) and whether there is a need to differentiate PLO to meet teachers' self-identified needs and, ultimately, eliminate gaps in disciplinary outcomes at the classroom level.

Further analysis was conducted on the differences among the mean scores ($M = 53.4$, $SD = 1.83$, $CI = 53.1-53.7$) on the groups of questions associated with race and special education. Based on the p-value of .05, representing a 95% confidence interval, the analysis indicated only a statistical difference between African American teachers ($CI = 53.9-54.5$) on self-efficacy related to the discipline of African American students (see Table 6). These teachers were more self-efficacious than the total group. The reason for the consistency in the other self-efficacy scores among the other teacher racial groups is unknown. Those interviewed as a part of the intervention considered potential hypotheses and training implications during the post-treatment interviews described in Chapter 5.

Table 6

Ethnicity Questions Mean Scores and Confidence Intervals by Group

Group	Mean (M)	Confidence Interval (CI)
All Participants	53.4	53.1–53.7
Ethnicity/Race		
African American	54.2	53.9–54.5
Asian	52.8	52.5–53.1
White	53.6	53.3–53.9
Gender		
Males	53.9	53.6–54.2
Females	53.2	52.9–53.5
Teaching Experience		
0 to 5 Years	52.9	52.6–53.2
6 to 10 Years	53.1	52.8–53.4
11 to 15 Years	53.9	53.6–54.2
16 to 20 Years	53.8	53.5–54.1
Over 20 Years	53.1	53.8–53.4

Based on the construction of the questionnaire, it was possible for teachers to achieve a score similar on questions associated with students' race and those associated with students' special education status. In general, teacher participants reported a generally lower self-efficacy in relation to the processes, procedures, and interventions associated with managing the behavior of students receiving special education services than with managing the behaviors of African Americans (see Table 7). A comparison of the mean scores of the various groups was conducted to determine significant differences among self-efficacy scores for each of the teacher groups ($M = 49.97$, $SD = 0.81$).

Table 7

Special Education Questions Mean Scores by Group

Group	Mean (M)	Confidence Interval (CI)
All Participants	50.0	49.9–50.1
Ethnicity		
African American	52.5	52.4–52.6
Asian	48.0	47.9–48.1
White	49.8	49.7–49.9
Gender		
Female	50.0	49.9–50.1
Male	49.9	49.8–50.0
Teaching Experience		
0 to 5 Years	47.4	47.3–47.5
6 to 10 Years	51.9	51.8–52.0
11 to 15 Years	53.5	53.4–53.6
16 to 20 Years	49.7	49.6–49.8
Over 20 Years	50.4	50.3–50.5

On the cluster of questions associated with self-efficacy in disciplinary practices for special education, the H_0 was not rejected for White teachers nor for males and females. Their scores (see table 7) had confidence intervals that overlapped with the confidence interval for all participants. However, for all other groups, the H_0 was rejected. African American teachers, teachers with 6 to 10 years of experience, teachers with 11 to 15 years of experience, and those with over 20 years of experience were significantly more self-efficacious regarding special education. Data presented in Table 7 also indicate that two groups of teachers, Asian teachers and teachers with 0 to 5 years of experience, scored significantly below the mean.

The data gathered from stage one of the needs assessment is generally known to planners of professional learning and all district leaders. However, MSIS leaders have not discussed it in combination with consideration of teacher self-efficacy designed to eliminate disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for African American students with disabilities. As such, results from stages one and two of the needs assessments was used

as the knowledge to inform participants who will participate in the pre-treatment and post-treatment interviews during the intervention.

Limitations of the Needs Assessment

This needs assessment is limited in that it focuses on only a small group of middle schools in one large, suburban school district. The findings may not be generalized to smaller, rural, or urban school districts or to elementary or high schools. Limiting access to referral and suspension data found in the public domain reduced the opportunity for individualizing results to the needs of specific schools within a school district. Finally, a limitation also exists in the self-reporting methodology, as participants may be reluctant to respond to questions that could be interpreted as describing personal biases regarding race and disability.

Planning for Intervention

The needs assessment confirms the issue of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for African American students with disabilities in MSIS and the state. A practical question that arises, however. The researcher wonders how the district can effectively address this problem in a systematic way. As previously noted by Conroy et al. (2002) the requirements of IDEA establish the right of special education students to have appropriately designed behavior intervention. Teachers must have the skills to develop and implement behavior interventions without using exclusionary discipline. Therefore, in Chapter 3 the researcher explores the literature related to improving teacher classroom management and disciplinary practices as well as their self-efficacy of these skills.

CHAPTER 3 INTERVENTION LITERATURE REVIEW

Beginning with a statement of the identified challenges and findings from the needs assessment, this chapter establishes a critical need to address the problem of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for African American students with disabilities in MSIS. The researcher also discusses the efforts to address the discipline gap, including zero tolerance, a comprehensive code of conduct, and culturally responsive instruction. This is followed by consideration of the resulting impact of these efforts.

The findings of the needs assessment confirm the existence of a discipline gap based on race for students within the special education subgroup and also confirm differences in teacher self-efficacy in disciplining African American students with disabilities based on teacher characteristics. Literature referenced in this chapter focuses specifically on the impact of teacher self-efficacy, a unifying construct, rather than the many other influences on disproportionate disciplinary outcomes. In this chapter, the researcher also reviews literature on teachers' behavior management practices and their decisions to address behaviors within the classroom rather than seek the support of other school personnel, including administrators and counselors. Then she describes a rationale for including an analysis of teacher self-efficacy in the planning phase of professional learning. Chapter 3 concludes with the proposal for an intervention that considers the change in beliefs and priorities of planners of PLO in addressing the classroom behavior of African American students with disabilities, before and after the planners are provided with knowledge of the influence of teacher self-efficacy in addressing student behavior.

Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Failed Strategy

Brown (2012) asserted that all people bring the prejudices of their culture to their interactions with others; they see and judge others based on their worldview. School districts that recognize that biases and stereotypical beliefs are imbedded in teachers' instructional and management practices use culturally responsive instruction to address these biases. Some districts, including the MSIS, have developed professional learning opportunities (PLO) designed to lead to culturally responsive classroom practices. These PLO are supported by studies that indicate that culturally responsive classroom strategies are essential to reducing the achievement gap impacting African American students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Howard & Solberg, 2006; Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2009).

Citing the study of McCray, Webb-Johnson, and Neal (2003), McKenna (2013) noted the complex interaction among teachers' perceptions, their training, and student needs. McKenna maintained that teachers may lack the professional expertise to educate African American learners and may engage in deficit thinking about the ability of these students to achieve academic and social success. Thus, some teachers may seek to alter student behavior so that it more closely aligns with European American norms. Students who are unable to adjust to European-American cultural norms may be interpreted as having maladaptive behaviors which often result in teachers viewing the student's behavior as disruptive. McKenna's study also demonstrated that even a student's pattern of movement may influence teachers' perception of students' academic ability and behavioral needs. According to McKenna, culturally responsive teaching connects approved curricula to students' personal experiences and uses this connection to promote positive engagement and skill development.

Schmeichel (2012) suggested that a culturally responsive pedagogy is a good teaching strategy that is beneficial to all students. Culturally responsive pedagogy is also necessary to increase achievement of African American students. If culturally responsive teaching reduces the achievement gap, school districts may see culturally responsive interactions as a means to insure equity in assigning disciplinary consequences. This, in turn, may reduce the discipline gap. Few studies exist, however, that directly connect culturally responsive teaching to reducing disproportionate disciplinary actions, including suspensions, for African American students and students with disabilities.

In 2009, the MSIS school district identified, as a strategic priority, the need to reduce both discipline and achievement gaps for students with disabilities and those of racial minorities (MSIS, 2009). The efforts to reduce disproportionate suspension rates through culturally responsive teaching, however, have had an unintended effect. While the overall suspension rates within the district dropped significantly, the proportional rate of suspension for African American students with disabilities did not decrease (MSIS, 2013a); indeed, the gap widened as fewer White students were suspended. This literature review focuses on professional learning opportunities (PLO) designed to increase teacher self-efficacy that, when combined with PLO on culturally responsive teaching, serve as the foundation for intervention.

The Impact of Teacher Self-Efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy encompasses the skills necessary to teach a variety of learners and the ability to apply those skills under a variety of circumstances (Bandura, 1977). Furthermore, self-efficacy requires the ability to execute actions that lead to improved outcomes for students (Gallavan, 2007). The researcher, therefore, uses

teacher self-efficacy as the conceptual frame on which she bases the intervention. She posits that teacher self-efficacy must be considered when districts plan PLO that address disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for African American students with disabilities. By designing PLO that effectively enhance teachers' self-efficacy, teachers come to believe that they can positively impact student outcomes and work hard to do so.

Researchers have attempted to demonstrate a correlation between teacher self-efficacy and patterns of office referral. Teachers who establish and maintain learning environments conducive to learning enhance opportunities for positive student outcomes (Pedota, 2015). Pedota further suggests that when classrooms are structured with clear expectations for student behaviors and the teacher behaves in a caring and nonthreatening manner both teachers and students react positively to problems encountered. Gibbs and Powell (2012), expand on this idea and note that when culturally responsive teaching was combined with efforts to improve teacher self-efficacy in managing student behavior, student outcomes improved.

The peer-reviewed articles and other sources included in this section of the dissertation focus on teacher self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy is deemed important because, as noted by Alvarez (2007), teachers perceive children with behavior problems as the most challenging aspect of their job. The student researcher questions if teacher self-efficacy in addressing the behavior of African American students with disabilities can be predicted based on teacher demographic characteristics and experience. She also considers the way(s) that teacher self-efficacy influences pedagogical choices, including the way that high teacher self-efficaciousness adds value to the school experiences of African American students with disabilities.

Teacher Experience and Self-Efficacy

Numerous studies have focused on the correlation between teacher experience and self-efficacy. Alvarez (2007) and Dicker et al. (2014) found that managing student behavior was extremely challenging for teachers. Researchers have correlated self-efficacy with teachers' ability, willingness, and readiness to address student behavior in the classroom (Baker, 2005; Bordelon, Phillips, Parkison, Thomas, & Howell, 2012). More experienced teachers develop and refine skills that impact self-efficacy; these skills include the use of instructional strategies, classroom management strategies, and student engagement strategies (Klassen & Ming Ming, 2010). According to Gallavan (2007), teachers increased self-efficacy by building upon prior knowledge and experiences, gaining new information and insights, and filtering and interpreting phenomena and perceptions that influence classroom practice. Thus, it is important to recognize how teachers' experiences relate to their self-efficacy and important to build their capacity (Anfara & Mertens, 2012). Therefore, school districts should provide differentiated training and opportunities for teachers to practice new skills.

Henfield and Washington (2012) examined teacher self-efficacy in working with African American students in a middle school where more than 95% of the student population was White. Through surveys and interviews, these authors found that, for White teachers, years of experience teaching African American students positively impacted self-efficacy rather than years of teaching experience alone. Thus, the need for pre-service training programs and PLO designed to increase self-efficacy in applying culturally responsive strategies was supported.

In another empirical study, Siwatu (2011) explored the variance in culturally responsive teaching opportunities for pre-service teachers and its impact on teacher self-efficacy. Like Henfield and Washington (2012), Siwatu found that the level of experience in working with diverse student populations had a significant impact on teacher self-efficacy. However, Siwatu indicated that most of the pre-service teachers' experience came from their participation in after school programs, summer camps, and mentoring programs rather than opportunities in real classrooms.

Fives and Buehl (2010) compared self-efficacy in both practicing and pre-service teachers by using the *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale* developed by Tschannen- Moran and Woolfork-Hoy (2001). Fives and Buehl found that both experience and grade level impacted self-efficacy regarding student disciplinary practice. Specifically, these researchers found that teachers with 10 or more years of experience and those who taught elementary school students had significantly higher self-efficacy than those teaching in middle school and high schools. Citing Gorrell and Dharmalasa (1994), Fives and Buehl also found that pre-service teachers reported higher levels of self-efficacy in the implementation of new teaching strategies and in developing positive relationships with students, while experienced teachers reported higher self-efficacy for classroom management, organization of instruction, and impact on student outcomes.

To build positive relationships with students, teachers must know the content they teach and develop lessons accessible to diverse learners (Beatty-O'Ferrall, Green, & Hanna, 2010). But contrary to the findings of Fives and Buehl, De Jong et al. (2013) found that for pre-service teachers who were still in teacher training programs, self-efficacy was not related to relationships with students. It was related, instead, to the

management and discipline strategies used in the classroom with diverse learners; this supports the need to explicitly address cultural responsiveness in the use of behavior intervention strategies (Siwatu & Starker, 2010).

Gallavan (2007) noted that novice teachers, those with less than 3 years of professional experience, increased their cultural competence by understanding their own beliefs and perceptions about themselves, about education, and about themselves as educators. Gallavan also stated that novice teachers must begin to think critically about the implications of their beliefs on their personal, professional, and pedagogical growth. Her findings included the idea that, for novice teachers, the process of accepting, acquiring, and applying knowledge and skills increases equity and rigor for all students.

Leyser, Zieger, and Romi (2011) also addressed teacher experience. However, rather than considering the impact of teacher experience on African American students, they considered teacher experience in working with students eligible for special education services. These authors suggested that both work experience with students with disabilities and professional development in special education affected teacher self-efficacy. They determined that teachers who majored in special education were more self-efficacious in addressing the behavior of students with disabilities regardless of years of experience. This supported Hartwig and Rausch's (2000) summary of IDEA that embraced a student's right to an individualized education program (IEP) with well-designed and appropriate behavior intervention strategies. The findings supported the need for general education teachers to receive training in teaching students with diverse learning needs since students with disabilities are likely to be enrolled in their classes (West Virginia University, n.d.). Regardless of teachers' years of experience, studies

show that a teacher's experience working with students who are African American (Henfield & Washington, 2012; Siwatu, 2011) and eligible for special education services (Leyser et al., 2011) has a significant impact on a teacher's self-efficacy.

Low Teacher Self-Efficacy and Pedagogical Choices

The way in which a teacher responds to student behavior is affected by their feelings of self-efficacy; those with low self-efficacy engage in deficit thinking about students who are racially different and have disabilities (Gibbs & Powell, 2012).

Teachers' perceptions of African American students with disabilities as dangerous was correlated to office referrals for nonviolent behavior infractions (Fenning & Rose, 2007).

Teachers' levels of anxiety also correlated to office referrals for these infractions.

Furthermore, the assignment of more punitive and restrictive consequences was also correlated to teachers' perceptions and anxiety (Chu, 2011; Gebbie, Ceglowski, Taylor, & Miels (2012).

The correlation between lower teacher self-efficacy and teachers' reliance on harsh disciplinary action, including verbal and physical maltreatment of students, was confirmed in a study conducted in Israel by Khoury-Kassabri (2012). Khoury-Kassabri found that low self-efficacy perceptions of teachers correlated significantly with verbally and physically confrontational behavior toward students. Additionally, teachers' self-efficacy regarding behavior management and teachers' stereotypical beliefs about African American students and students with disabilities affected a teacher's tolerance of bullying and peer conflict. Such behavior was most prevalent when the victimized child belonged to a minority group and had social/emotional deficits (Garner, Moses, & Waajid, 2013).

Benefits of High Teacher Self-Efficacy

Teachers with greater self-efficacy are more apt to find solutions to complex problems (Gregory, Hardiman, Yarmolinskaya, Rinne, & Limb, 2013). One example of such a problem is addressing disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for African American students with disabilities. Teachers with higher self-efficacy are less likely to have negative perceptions of students and more likely to respond to students' actual needs (Tournaki & Podell, 2005). Teachers with high self-efficacy also use more positive intervention and reinforcement, and they try a variety of teaching and classroom management strategies (Chu, 2011). Gotshall and Stefanou (2011) found that teacher self-efficacy in applying a response-to-intervention framework resulted in increased access for students to research-based interventions and behavioral supports, as outlined in Individual Education Program of eligible students. Teachers with high self-efficacy believe that they can help a range of students. They increase their support of the inclusion of students with special education needs (Urton, Wilbert, & Hennemann, 2014). High self-efficacy also mediated stress and emotional exhaustion in teachers (Dicker et al., 2014) and influenced teachers' abilities to assess the social and emotional skills of the children they taught (Garner et al., 2013).

Meijer and Foster (1988) explored the relationship between teacher self-efficacy, teachers' ratings of students' behavior, and the likelihood that teachers would consider students with behavior challenges as requiring special education services. Their results suggested a relationship between higher teacher self-efficacy and teachers' ability to use appropriate intervention strategies. Meijer and Foster concluded that higher self-efficacy is correlated to lower ratings of students' problem behaviors.

Using a qualitative research design, Monroe (2009) considered the impact of teacher effectiveness and self-efficacy on disciplinary outcomes in an urban middle school where the majority of students were African American. Findings of this study suggest that student behavior is connected to teacher efficacy in providing quality instruction. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that teachers who are self-efficacious in teaching the curriculum content create stimulating and engaging learning activities that reduce student off-task behavior. Monroe further asserted that high teacher self-efficacy in content delivery allowed teachers to re-engage students, maintain class interest and enthusiasm in learning, foster solidarity, and segue to new instructional topics.

Planning Professional Learning Opportunities

Professional learning opportunities (PLO), previously known as professional development, are designed to allow teachers to learn new skills and un-learn previous beliefs and practices. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) suggested that, in order for professional learning to be effective, school districts must understand the conditions through which teachers acquire and use new knowledge to enhance skills. These authors further suggested that effective professional learning requires responses to the needs of both district and teachers.

Regarding district needs, consideration must be given to the prejudicial beliefs and instructional priorities of teacher educators, the professionals who plan and implement PLO. The strategies and processes teacher educators use to develop PLO are increasingly important. Livingston (2014) believes that, throughout a teacher's career, the role of teacher educators is constantly changing and needs to be better understood. As curriculum content increases in depth and breadth, and as school districts change in

culture and climate, teachers have changing professional needs and require PLO to be tailored to their needs and contexts. As such, teacher educators must have the knowledge, skills, and expertise to challenge and support teachers at different points in their careers (Livingston, 2014). Districts who value the contribution of teacher educators give greater attention to professional learning and to improving student outcomes.

District Policy and the Need for Professional Learning

Preparing teachers is an important endeavor, and within every school district there is a concept of professionalism (Day & Sachs, 2004). This concept of professionalism is communicated to teachers through PLO, from which teachers develop consistent practices that help them to form their collective identity at the school and district levels. In this way, as suggested by Day and Sachs (2004), components of professionalism are not mutually exclusive and are impacted by both learning and practice.

Designing effective PLO results from both complex and competing influences (Hardy, 2008). Hardy (2008) studied schools in Australia and found that professional learning was impacted by external, bureaucratic, management, and market-oriented forces; it was, in many ways, a political activity. As such, districts must determine what constitutes teacher learning and how to systematically measure it.

Hardy (2008) also referenced Pickering (2007) and determined that best practices in professional learning stem from approaches that reinforce teachers' active participation and collaborative learning. These approaches to PLO are those in which district leaders delivered and transferred knowledge, skills, and understanding to teachers. In addition, Hardy (2008) references Sugrue (2004) who identified professional learning as a means

to encourage school reform in response to pressures of globalization and marketplace priorities, information, and communication technologies. Thus, designers of PLO should consider systemic knowledge production as an important component for action research within schools and across districts.

Pedder and Opfer (2010) examined continuous professional learning in schools in England. Several themes emerged from the State of the Nation study that focused on leadership systems and the organizational culture and structure associated with PLO. Specific themes included (a) lack of strategic planning that balances individual and organizational learning needs and policy priorities; (b) identified roles and responsibilities that do not always support effective PLO planning and implementation; (c) little progress made in the promotion of new professional standards; and (d) lack of alignment between evaluation of PLO and planned outcomes (Pedder & Opfer, 2010). Pedder and Opfer, therefore, recommended that planners of PLO need a deep understanding of the district's strategic plan for professional learning within specific school contexts and they need to find an optimal balance between professional development needs, organizational development, and policy priorities.

In MSIS, preparing every child for college, career, and community readiness was closely aligned to England's Every Child Matters (ECM), a policy initiative related to children's services described by Mead (2011). In a study conducted in the United Kingdom, Mead (2011) focused on the induction of secondary teachers into a framework designed to improve the well-being of all students using PLO that focused on intra- and inter-professional expectations. Results of the study indicated a shift from PLO that emphasize a values-based understanding to PLO that stress a skills-based understanding

of professional knowledge. Mead argued that this change was related to implementation of social justice policies that may contribute to weakening the relationships between teachers' values, ownership of professional knowledge, and student well-being. Thus, teacher educators are challenged to identify key questions and establish pedagogical priorities that counter the view that PLO should simply be designed to allow teachers to acquire strategies and skills and to ensure accountability for the district (Mead, 2011).

Spillane, Healy, and Mesler Parise (2009) focused on PLO for district leaders and suggested that such focus was necessary in order to maximize a school district's investment in professional learning. In their study, conducted in a mid-sized urban district, Spillane et al. (2009) considered the training of principals and other district leaders from a distributed perspective. Citing the work of Knapp, Copland, and Talbert (2003) and that of Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), Spillane et al. (2009) found that an investment in PLO for school leaders improved their ability to influence the introduction of new policies and practices and improved the quality of PLO provided to teachers.

Professional Learning Planning and Teacher Needs

Main and Pendergast (2015) determined that professional learning benefits teachers by enhancing individual skills and personal development and, ultimately, creates professionals who take control of their environments. In addition, these authors cite Friedman and Phillips (2004), who stated that professional learning serves as a "means to train professionals to fulfill specific work roles and guarantee individual and professional competence" (p. 363). Main and Pendergast also determined that teacher self-efficacy was context-specific and could be affected by school-wide and classroom-specific

variables. In other words, a teacher who is self-efficacious in one area may not be self-efficacious across educational settings and subjects. These researchers further noted that teachers' sense of self-efficacy was directly linked to enacted practice and affected the learning environments they created. This causal relationship was further linked to investments in planning, organizing, and risk-taking of new pedagogies to meet student needs.

A significant relationship between professional learning, teacher self-efficacy, and “middle years” student outcomes was highlighted by Main and Pendergast (2015). These researchers defined middle-years learners as those between the ages of 10 and 15 years. These learners are in a period of learning in which knowledge of fundamental disciplines are developed and in which there is the greatest risk of disengagement. These learners align with American middle school students who are in grades 6 through 8 and generally between 11 and 14 years old. Main and Pendergast also considered the core features of effective professional learning to be content focused, have active participation, be coherent, be of some duration, and include collective participation.

Using the identified features of middle school students and their teachers, Main and Pendergast (2015) developed a tool that provides feedback to those who design and implement professional learning training. Through the use of this tool, planners of professional learning gain insight into teachers' attitudes and opinions about professional learning. These PLO planners also can better understand teachers' need for professional learning that focuses on learning how to move from theory to practice.

Cycles of Professional Learning Planning

Borko (2004) characterized learning as a process of “enculturation and construction” (p. 4) and pointed out that the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires that high quality professional learning opportunities be available to all teachers, as they are essential to helping teachers and their students meet new standards. Borko also found that those designing PLO engaged in research cycles to refine content of training plans to have an impact on both professional learning communities and individual teachers. Accordingly, the proposed intervention was designed as a research cycle to impact the professional learning planning process regarding decreasing disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for African American students with disabilities.

The part of the PLO planning most often ignored is the post-training evaluation. Smidt, Balandin, Sigafos, and Reed (2009) considered staff training programs as a means to provide support services to individuals with intellectual disabilities in residential programs. Their study focused on changing and improving interactions. These researchers used the measurement criteria developed by Kirkpatrick (1996) in a four-level model that includes reaction, learning, behavior, and results of post-training evaluations (Figure 8).

Description of Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model

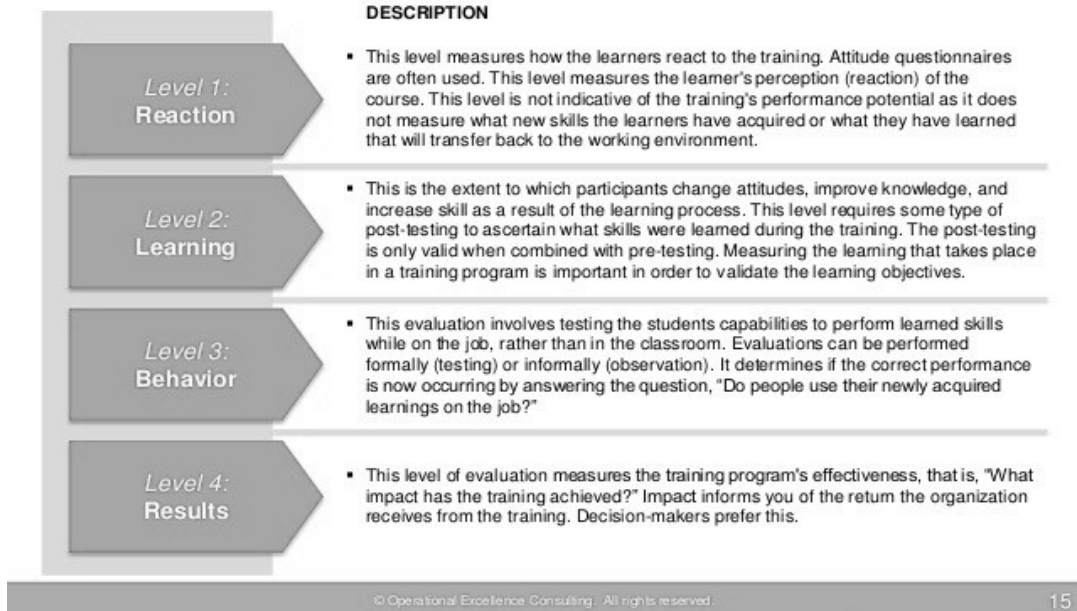


Figure 8: Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model. Image retrieved from <https://image.slidesharecdn.com/previewkirkpatrickmodel07-2016-160721221409/95/>

In the first level, the Kirkpatrick model measures interest, motivation, and attention to PLO. To evaluate learning, the second level, the model considers the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Evaluating learning involves assessment of the content knowledge presented in the training program. The change in behavior and performance, measured in level three, determines whether participants can implement newly acquired skills in the context of their work environment. The fourth level measures results or the impact of the training overall. Application of the Kirkpatrick model is an evidence-based method to determine if a training program meets the acceptable standard for results.

Teacher Self-Efficacy and Professional Learning on Behavioral Supports

Baker (2005) suggested that PLO and collaborative approaches improve teacher self-efficacy in behavior management. Baker further asserted that professional learning designed to support teacher self-efficacy and the problem of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes needs to include behavior management and culturally responsive teaching strategies and it must be tailored to the specific needs of teachers and their students. Kaufman and Ring (2011) suggested that professional development should be contextualized and relevant. Thus, the professional development recommendations related to the discipline gap in MSIS needs to focus specifically on the needs of middle school teachers and their students who are African American and eligible for special education services.

Morin and Battalio (2004) noted that student behavior improved as teachers' attitudes about remediating misbehavior become more positive through the implementation of positive behavior supports (PBS). Identifying misbehavior is subjective and complicated by the variety of school environments, including the classroom, hallways, and playgrounds. Morin and Battalio found that at times a teacher's attitudes and beliefs do not support initiatives for systemic change. Planners of PLO must then recognize that it is these attitudes and beliefs that need to be addressed through professional learning. Dunlap, Hieneman, Knoster, Fox, Anderson, and Albin (2000), suggested that teachers, especially those who are resistant, need technical assistance in implementing PBS since these teachers may be guided by impulsive subjectivity. With targeted PLO, teachers may move toward a more reasoned perspective that is grounded in the tenets of PBS.

Knowledge of the student, the depth and frequency of experience, the context of the environment, and self-efficacy define student behavior and teachers' reactions to it (Morin & Battalio, 2004). Morin and Battalio found that teachers with high efficacy look beyond surface-level behavior for the underlying causes, including external circumstances unrelated to school. Professional learning opportunities that give teachers effective strategies become even more relevant when the common roots of misbehavior and elements that drive it are included. Morin and Battalio concluded that professional learning in classroom behavior management must be highly individualized as such individualization may result in less resistance to change.

Snell, Voorhees, and Chen (2005) conducted a study based on the work of Dunlap et al. (2000). They determined that functional behavioral assessment data, designed to determine the reasons behind student behavior, identified escape and attention as the most often identified goals of student behavior. In their study, the research goal was to determine the fidelity and frequency with which teachers used components of positive behavior support (PBS). Results indicated that teachers were often not included in the analysis of student behavior. Snell et al. also suggested that, in order to advance implementation of PBS, research and subsequent teacher training programs are needed that address behavioral challenges in the classroom and that have a contextual fit.

Using a laboratory approach to professional learning, Haug and Sands (2013) identified three activities: planning and professional development days, laboratory experience and professional development days, and individual coaching. They found that these activities improved the ways that students make meaning from text and enhance their writing. This model allowed teachers to create effective structures, systems,

routines, and rituals necessary to create positive classroom cultures in which students meet task demands and respond in desired fashion to the teachers' authority.

Understanding Teacher Needs and Incorporating Teacher Voice

Rates of suspension for African American students with disabilities increase significantly upon entry to middle school (Arcia, 2007; MSIS 2013a). Additionally, teacher perceptions of student behavior in middle school can provide the focus for professional learning opportunities. Professional learning for this group of teachers should begin by providing an understanding of the early adolescent learner and the middle school environment (Clark & Clark, 2004).

Professional learning that allows teachers to consider their own knowledge and experience also supports the identification of personal goals and growth (Ross, Van Dusen, Sherman, & Otero, 2012). Teachers need to be able to describe their classroom situation and frustrations in order for training to be contextualized and relevant to the individual needs of teachers (Kaufman & Ring, 2011). Teachers who engaged in self-driven learning experiences (Ross et al., 2012) and metacognitive practice, as described by Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000), developed the adaptive expertise and flexibility necessary for creative problem solving. Anfara and Mertens (2012) also supported the idea of incorporating teacher needs into professional learning training plans in order to fill gaps in knowledge and skills.

In two related case studies, Slavit and McDuffie (2013) focused on the conditions that support teachers' professional learning. They found that, when teachers have a voice in professional learning planning, questions of practice are constructively negotiated and buy-in is nearly certain. Slavit and McDuffie also asserted that buy-in supports a change

in attitude that improves pedagogy. Further, in citing Weiss and Pasley (2009), Slavit and McDuffie suggested, “Teachers serve as the primary agents of change for classroom teaching and learning” (p. 98). Thus, aligning PLO with teachers’ self-identified learning needs is a powerful tool.

Large school districts are especially challenged to include the teacher’s voice in planning professional learning (Trantom & Reid, 2013). According to Gilrane, Russell, and Roberts (2008), when teachers are included they are more invested and work harder to apply new skills. When teachers identified the specific challenges associated with student discipline and cultural responsiveness, professional development can be targeted, tailored, and differentiated based on professional goals, teaching experience, and expertise (Opre, Zaharie, & Opre, 2008).

Professional Learning Communities and Networks

DeNeve, Devos, and Tuytens (2015) studied the experience and professional learning needs of novice teachers who were challenged to provide differentiated academic instruction and behavior intervention practices for students eligible for special education services. The challenge impacted teacher self-efficacy. However, as DeNeve et al. suggested, the reflective dialogue that is part of a professional learning community support system provides autonomy and collective responsibility which result in improved self-efficacy in differentiation. Snell et al. (2005) proposed that team collaboration has a positive impact on the effects of PBS and that, by focusing on collaborative processes, teachers can better focus on the environment in which behavior occurs rather than focusing narrowly on behavior reduction. As suggested by Mullen and Hutinger (2008), when PLO is provided to collaborative teams it can produce broad changes in how

teachers use pedagogy to modify school-wide learning environments to students' behavioral needs.

Although most of the articles reviewed in this section support a need for professional development, Gotshall and Stefanou (2011) took a different perspective. They suggested, in agreement with Woolfson and Brady (2009), that little positive effect is gained from training and professional development on teacher self-efficacy. Instead, these authors believe that professional development, combined with coaching and consultation, is a significant mediating factor in increasing teacher self-efficacy. The implication is that a professional learning community in which professionals use collective inquiry affects a change that cannot be accomplished independently. Dufour & Eaker (1998) suggested that targeted PLO may be more effective in increasing teacher self-efficacy than generalized professional learning on behavior strategies and interventions.

Application of Learning Sciences in Professional Learning Planning

Once professional learning topics are identified, the training plans developed for the professional learning require consideration of teachers as learners. Both research and neuroscience are important considerations. As suggested by Hardiman, Rinne, Gregory, and Yarmolinskaya (2012), misinterpretations of student behavior based on established biases and stereotypes can be modified through professional learning. Professional learning opportunities that include concepts from *Brain-Targeted Teaching for 21st Century Schools* (Hardiman, 2012) give teachers examples and strategies for making practical connections between establishing a positive learning environment and the

learning experiences of children. These connections move teachers from theoretical research to pedagogy and practice (Roediger & Pyc, 2012).

Another consideration for professional learning planning is the effect it has on teachers' emotional states. Emotional states vary and are affected by student behavior (Becker, Keller, Goetz, Frenzel, & Taxer, 2015). The behavior of students, as previously stated, is a cause of negative stress. As such, it slows the brain's ability to form memories and make decisions (ScienCentral, n.d.), which reduces teachers' ability to recognize the impact of disciplinary decisions made within the classroom context. Just as classrooms should be positive environments in which stress is reduced (Hardiman, 2012), professional learning experiences should be designed to build a sense of effectiveness in a learning community rather than to be perceived as stressful.

Brain plasticity and connectivity, cited in the work of Drs. Hebb and Hsiao (Johns Hopkins University, 2013), also have implications for planning PLO. Connecting concepts associated with the beliefs about student behavior, culturally responsive instruction, and special education law is likely to enhance the quality of disciplinary decision-making. According to Knowland & Thomas (2014), learning and plasticity are not dependent upon chronological age but on the experiences of the learner, and that makes an experiential design in professional development important for teachers.

Considerations for Developing the Research Intervention

The intended outcomes of the proposed study are 1) greater awareness of the differences among teachers' perceived needs for professional learning, 2) teachers' self-efficacy in addressing behaviors of African American students with disabilities, and 3) district leaders' perceptions of teacher needs for increased efficacy. It is proposed that,

when teacher educators understand these differences, they will change their beliefs and establish different priorities in the development of professional learning plans; plans will address classroom management and the implementation of PBS to reduce disproportionate disciplinary outcomes. Ultimately, it is expected that this research will contribute to the literature regarding ways to reduce disproportionate suspension rates for African American students with disabilities.

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

As described through the literature presented in Chapter 3, teacher self-efficacy in classroom disciplinary practice impacts both teacher's pedagogical choices and student outcomes. This study connects what is known about the influence of highly self-efficacious teachers on students' behavior with a school district's planning priorities for increasing teacher behavior, classroom skills, and self-efficacy. As such, this study is designed to support increased reflection on the ways that PLO are planned for teachers in the MSIS district and, possibly, for teachers in other school districts. Specifically, the student researcher seeks to find out the ways in which knowledge of teacher self-efficacy in behavior management for African American students with disabilities impact the beliefs and priorities of planners of professional learning activities targeting the discipline gap. The evaluation addresses the question: How do the beliefs and priorities of planners of PLO change after they are exposed to knowledge of study findings on teacher self-efficacy and teacher self-efficacy survey data? This chapter includes a discussion of the research design and methods.

Research Objective and Hypothesis

The research objective for this qualitative study is to discover if providing knowledge of teacher self-efficacy to designers of PLO leads to changes in teacher beliefs and priorities and if PLO planning becomes more focused on a differentiated approach for in-service teaching. Therefore, the null hypothesis is that there will be no difference in the beliefs and priorities of planners of PLO following exposure to information on teacher self-efficacy in managing behavior of African American students with disabilities. The researcher also expects to accomplish the short-term outcome of

influencing school district policy by demonstrating whether knowledge of teacher self-efficacy is an important consideration in PLO planning priorities.

Qualitative Evaluation Design

Given the complexity of a quantitative experiment, a large sample size of nearly 70 participants would be needed to achieve a power level of .80 with an α error probability of 0.5 and a small effect size. Thus, the student researcher determined that qualitative research was the better choice for the study. In addition to not depending on a large sample size, budgetary considerations also made a qualitative study more feasible. Considering teacher self-efficacy as a factor that contributes to disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for African American students with disabilities is a relatively new position. As Ladner (2007) suggests, if little research exists on a topic it is best to begin research using qualitative methods including in-depth interviewing with open-ended questions.

Method

Participants

Criterion-based sampling was used to recruit five planners of PLO who meet the following criteria:(a) at least 10 years of teaching experience, (b) current teaching certification in the state, (c) at least two-year's experience planning and developing PLO in the school district, and (d) expertise in culturally responsive instructional practices and/or positive behavior supports. The student researcher conducted pretest and posttest interviews with these participants. By using specific recruitment criteria, participants meeting these criteria were more likely to give credible responses to pre- and posttest interview questions. However, the planners of PLO often collaborate and constitute a

social network in the district. As such, a significant challenge was the possibility that these participants might be influenced by information previously brokered by district leaders (Finnigan & Daly, 2012). Since district priorities for planning PLO were already established, there was a risk of participants maintaining the status quo rather than focusing on the data gained from the teacher questionnaire.

Additional Stakeholders

Although not identified as study participants in the research intervention, members of the Board of Education (BoE) and the superintendent of schools were important stakeholders in the results of the data analysis and the creation of the district's strategic plan. These actors provide the balance between policy and practice for the common good of all students (McCarthy & Soodak, 2007). Under their direction, central office staff develop PLO for eliminating gaps in student outcomes.

Standardized Open-ended Interviews

The interviews conducted in this study are among the data sources displayed in Table 8. Interviews followed a standardized open-ended design, one of three interview designs summarized by Turner (2010) and the most popular form of interviewing used in research studies. Individuals selected for participation had knowledge and experience in planning PLO that was expected to add value to the research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). The use of standardized open-ended interviews required that the same interview questions be asked of each participant and that the questions be worded to encourage participants to fully express their points of view. The open-ended format also allowed follow-up questions. The student researcher used Turner's suggestion for pilot testing the

interview questions she deemed strong enough to illicit comprehensive responses from participants. Table 8 provides an overview of the data sources used in the study.

Table 8

Data Collection Matrix

Indicators	Role of Indicator	Data Sources	Frequency	Responsibility
Demographic Information: Certification area	Control variables	Survey Questionnaire	Once at the beginning of the program (October 2016)	Student researcher
Years of teaching				
Years of experience designing PLO				
Years of experience designing PLO w/in the district				
Knowledge of teacher self-efficacy in culturally responsive teaching and positive behavior supports	Moderating variable	Responses to Exit Card Probes As a result of this data/information, what are new learnings about teacher self-efficacy in the district? Rank your new learnings in order of importance for planning PLO.	Once, immediately after an information session, following the completion of the initial interviews (March 2017)	Student researcher
Change in the beliefs and priorities of planners of PLO on culturally responsive teaching and positive behavior supports	Outcome	Comparative analysis of pre-treatment and post-treatment standardized, open-ended interviews	Once following information session (May and June 2017)	Student researcher

Sampling

A purposive, or non-random, sampling strategy described by Shadish, Cook, & Campbell (2002) and O’Leary (2014) was used in this study. The use of specific criteria

increased the likelihood that participants would give credible responses to the interview questions (Creswell, 2007). In addition, this sampling strategy made sense because it did not require the time and expense needed for random sampling. O’Leary (2014) suggested that non-random sampling methods can be used by a researcher who seeks to increase knowledge by working with key informants. The participants in the proposed intervention were informants for the mid-term outcome of creating differentiated PLO as described in the introduction of this paper and in the logic model displayed in Figure 9.

One Group with Pretest and Posttest

The design of the proposed intervention is best described as a one-group, pretest-posttest design. Shadish et al. (2002) explained the one-group, pretest-posttest design by stating that this design is one in which “a single pretest observation is taken on a group of respondents, treatment then occurs, and a single posttest observation, on the same measure, follows” (p. 108). This description aligns with the proposed intervention because the study began with structured interviews with the participants (O_1), followed by a presentation designed to build knowledge of the effects of self-efficacy on classroom practice and of actual data from the teacher self-efficacy survey serve as the treatment (X), and, finally, a second interview, using similar questions with the same group of individuals after application of the treatment (O_2).

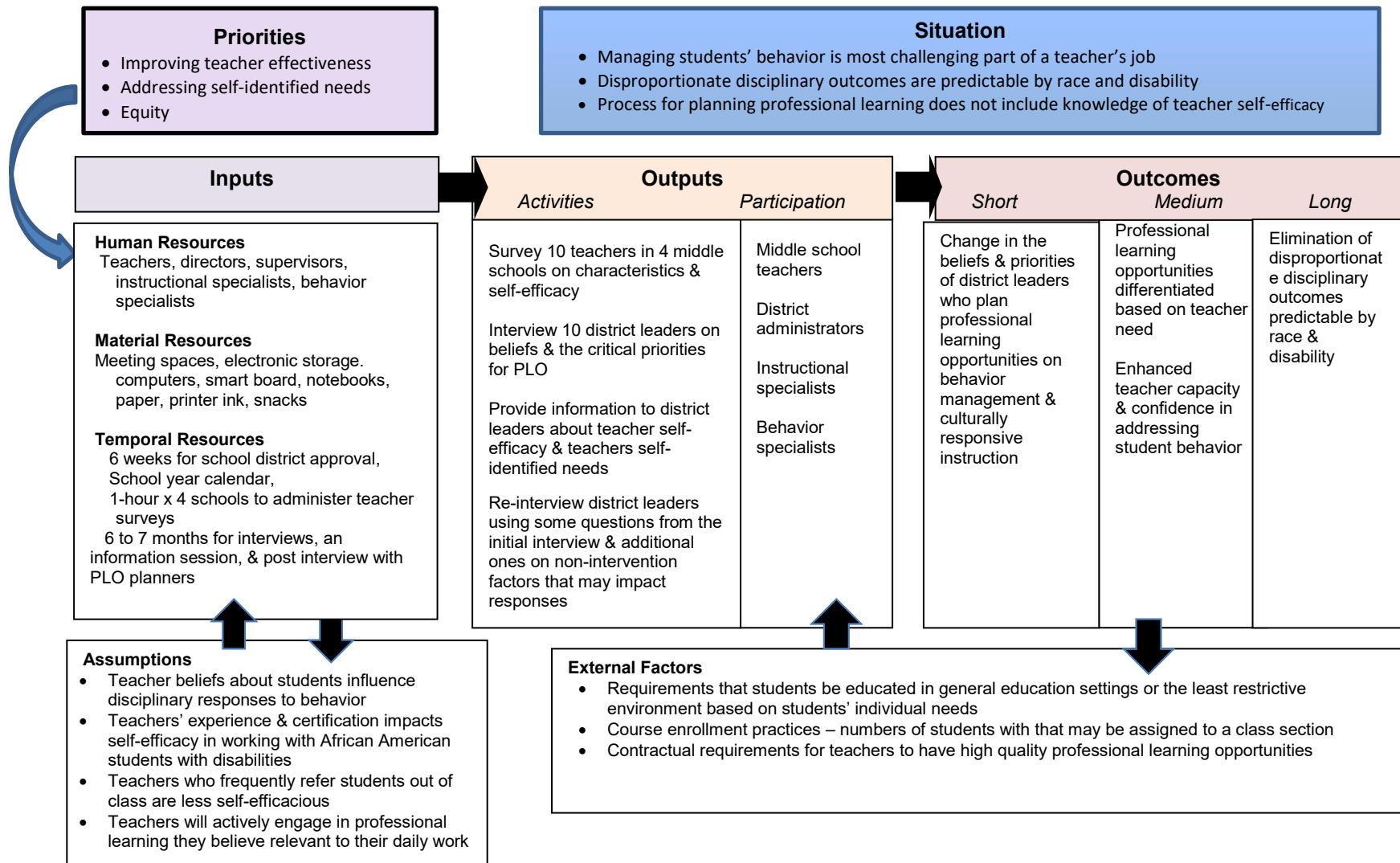


Figure 9. Logic Model. The influence of teacher self-efficacy on profession learning planning

Theory-Based Process Evaluation

The student researcher selected a one-group, pretest-posttest design based on the theory that knowledge impacts beliefs and priorities of planners of PLO and leads them to develop more appropriate and differentiated PLO. As Shadish et al. (2002) explained, a theory-based evaluation allows the researcher to “analyze the data to assess the extent to which the postulated relationships actually occurred” (p. 501). Shaddish et al. also implied that theory-based evaluation can be used to explain the effectiveness of current priorities in PLO design and to justify modifying those priorities to incorporate information on teacher self-efficacy data to improve PLO.

Coding

Saldana (2016) discussed the role of coding in the analysis of qualitative data and suggested streamlined coding methods. As a link between data collection and the explanation of the data (Charmaz, 2001), coding is essential. For this study, the student researcher applied grounded theory as a systematic approach to qualitative inquiry through multiple cycles of thematic coding. These cycles required multiple reviews of transcribed interviews.

In the first cycle of coding, the student researcher used reviews of the transcriptions of the semi-structured, open-ended interviews. She highlighted salient and summative words and phrases used by participants. This type of first-cycle coding gives voice to participants and allows the researcher to be attuned with participant perspectives (Saldana, 2016). The second cycle of coding is designed to organize the data coded in the first cycle. In this phase, the researcher organized the data by categories, themes, and theories. To conduct the second cycle of coding, the researcher identified and labelled

common themes. She identified themes with descriptive codes in the margins of each interview transcription.

Theory-Based Evaluation

The choice of a one group, pretest–posttest design was made based on the theory that knowledge impacts the beliefs and priorities of planners of PLO and leads them to develop more appropriate and differentiated PLO. As Shadish et al. (2002) explained, a theory-based evaluation allows the researcher to “analyze the data to assess the extent to which the postulated relationships actually occurred” (p. 501). Support for theory-based evaluation is further found in Shadish et al. (2002) who implied that theory-based evaluation can be used to explain the effectiveness of current priorities in PLO design and to justify modifying those priorities to improve PLO by incorporating knowledge of teacher self-efficacy data.

Data Analysis Plan

Using research to monitor a problem affects the impact of potential solutions on various actors in the social network, the organizational unit, and connections among them (Finnegan & Daly, 2014). As such, the plan for monitoring data, over time, includes consideration of participants, data sources, data collection, and data analysis. The student researcher, therefore, wanted to consider the analysis of the data and how the data may be used by MSIS to drive and sustain a change that expands teachers’ capacity to develop responsive strategies that address students’ classroom behavior.

The decision-making plan accounted for the fact that the participants had access to student outcome data but were not yet given teacher self-efficacy data on classroom disciplinary practices. The proposed action aligned with stated goals in the MSIS,

2013a). But as Honig (2006) noted, leaders control implementation of proposed changes. Finnigan and Daly (2012) further suggested that how leaders shape and adapt data support or constrain the use of research. The BoE members and superintendent should recognize how their positions in the social network of the school district can support or constrain effective data-driven decision making. Thus, planners of PLO must acknowledge that the data supporting their work may or may not confirm prior assumptions of the BoE and superintendent of schools.

Design Strengths

The choice of a qualitative study that follows a one group, pretest-posttest design using criterion-based sampling allowed for clearly discernable results regarding the differences in beliefs and priorities for planning PLO before and after treatment. Consideration was given to using a posttest only design with matching, which Shadish et al. (2002) stated might be used if treatment begins before a pretest can be conducted. There was, however, the opportunity to conduct a pretest earlier in the school year prior to beginning the intervention. A related consideration was that the population of planners of PLO with expertise in culturally responsive teaching and positive behavior supports was limited in the district. Finding qualified volunteers who met sampling criteria, five for each group, proved challenging. Most importantly, the posttest-only design with matching was rejected because the district does not have a systematic effort to ascertain the beliefs and priorities of planners of PLO related to teacher self-efficacy. Using a pretest to measure current beliefs and priorities was essential in determining if change occurred (Shadish et al., 2002).

The primary strength of the proposed study's design is that it was manageable for an applied dissertation in the context of a large, suburban school district. Being manageable requires sustained access to participants in terms of effort and time. Because the study had value to the school district and results could be immediately applied, the attrition rate was expected to be small. "Some attrition is inevitable" (Shadish et al., 2002, p. 228), but it is less likely if the period between the pretest, the treatment, and the posttest is shortened to a few months. Another strength of the intervention is that the design adhered to the standards for conducting external research and, thus, the results were likely to have value to district leaders and to impact district practices.

Generalizability and trustworthiness, which correspond to validity and reliability in quantitative studies, are essential in determining the quality of the design of the proposed intervention (Golafshani, 2003). The researcher sought to influence and persuade designers of PLO to shift their beliefs and priorities and to base future action on that shift. In this regard, the design of the intervention answered the question, "How can an inquirer persuade her audience that the findings are worth paying attention to and lead to changes in practice?" (Stenbacka, 2001, p. 553). If the intervention results in new practices for designing PLO, then generalizability (i.e., validity) was also a strength. Trustworthiness, aligned with the concept of reliability, was addressed through consideration of participants' previous use of teacher surveys in planning professional learning. The question regarding previous use of teacher surveys was part of the pretest (i.e., the pre-intervention interview) and, if answered affirmatively, would be an exclusionary factor in the selection process. Since reliability in qualitative research is a

consequence of trustworthiness, validity was also established for the proposed study (Golafshani, 2003).

Design Limitations

Design limitations include the small sample size—especially if the roles of participant members changed in the organization during the study (Golafshani, 2003). Unless the participants were in positions where they continued to engage in PLO development, the mid-term outcomes of differentiated professional learning may not happen. Also, according to Shadish et al. (2002), the one group, pretest-posttest design provides only limited assurance that the result is based on treatment rather than on other influences.

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As indicated in Chapter 1, African American students with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE), as are all other students. State and local data presented in prior chapters indicate that there is a problem of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for African American students with disabilities. In addition, teachers' classroom management and disciplinary practices are closely aligned with students' academic success (Butler et al., 2012; Gregory et al., 2010). Therefore, improving teachers' skills and self-efficacy in classroom discipline and culturally responsive teaching is determined to reduce disproportionate disciplinary outcomes. Thus, this study examined priorities and beliefs for planning PLO in these areas.

This chapter presents the results of the study that examined responses of planners of PLO before and after they were provided with knowledge of teacher self-efficacy in behavior management and classroom disciplinary practices for African American students with disabilities. Analysis of qualitative data addresses the research question and determines if there are changes in the priorities and beliefs of planners of PLO regarding both content and methodology for training activities. This determination is made based on comparisons of key ideas and themes emerging from the pre- and post-treatment interviews of participants.

Process for Implementation

Participant Recruitment

Originally targeted to begin in early October 2016, the study began in late November following delays in recruiting participants who met the sampling criteria described in Chapter 4. The researcher applied three primary strategies to recruit

participants. First, she scheduled a meeting with the Associate Superintendent for the Office of Special Education and the Director of Special Education Services to review the findings of the needs assessment and to identify potential participants. As a result of this meeting, the student researcher presented a brief description of the research proposal during a meeting of special education supervisors and instructional specialists. Following the presentation, the researcher verbally solicited participants who met study criteria. Second, the researcher posted signs, pre-approved by the Homewood Institutional Review Board (HIRB) and the associate superintendent for the MSIS Office of Special Education, and posted them on all floors and hallways of the district's central office. Third, the student researcher appealed for participants directly, via e-mail and in-person, to the director and instructional specialists in the Equity Initiatives Unit.

Participant Selection

Although MSIS has a large cadre of professionals who plan PLO, the group who focus their efforts on reducing disproportionality and increasing culturally responsive teaching and equity is, in comparison, quite small. Of approximately 20 professionals who could be identified by position and experience, five participants who met the sampling criteria described in Chapter 4 consented to participate in the study (see Appendix C). The selected participants worked for MSIS in the following capacities: behavior support teacher, director of the Equity and Diversity Unit, principal intern, special education supervisor, and staff development specialist.

Two of the five participants held elementary certifications and three held secondary certifications. Three participants were also certified in special education for both elementary and secondary schools. Two participants created the Equity and

Excellence in Education (EEE) graduate certificate program at a local university in partnership with MSIS. This noteworthy accomplishment lent additional credence to their expertise in planning instruction in cultural responsiveness and equity for adult learners. One other participant was an instructor for the EEE.

Three of the selected participants were female and two were male. Three self-identified as White and two as African American. Participants' experience in planning PLO on equity and cultural responsiveness within MSIS ranged from 10 to 17 years. The majority of the group (four participants) had at least 6 years in their current professional positions. The fifth participant moved from a position as a school-based staff development teacher (SDT) to positions that reflected the typical progression of someone seeking to become a principal within the district: 4 years, one each, as an assistant school administrator, a year-one assistant principal, a year-two assistant principal, and a principal intern. In June, just before completing the final interview, she was appointed principal of a MSIS middle school.

Pre-treatment Interviews

Over the course of two months, March and April, each participant met one time individually with the student researcher. Although it was anticipated that each interview would take approximately 30 minutes, no actual time limit was set or communicated to the participants. The semi-structured interviews consisted of a set of nine questions (see Table 9), most of which included imbedded probes. Depending upon the participant's responses, the student researcher encouraged the participant to elaborate on their responses. The amount of time spent on the pre-treatment interviews was longer than

expected and ranged between 26 and 72 minutes, with an average of 51 minutes.

Interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Table 9

Interview Questions Used During Pre- and Post-Treatment Interviews

Interview Questions
1. What is your current position in Mid-State Independent Schools; in what office do you currently work?
2. How long have you been involved in planning professional learning activities for the school district?
3. In what ways have you contributed to the goal of moving the district forward to a culturally responsive pedagogy in every classroom? Is this important to you personally? Why or why not?
4. How would you describe your vision for professional learning in the district? In what ways do you believe it aligns with the district's professional growth expectations?
5. Who do you think establishes the district's priorities for professional learning on equity, culturally responsive teaching, and behavior management? How close is this person(s) to what is happening in schools on a daily basis? Does that matter?
6. What information do you use to determine the objectives and expected outcomes for professional learning activities that you plan?
7. When you write a professional learning training plan, how do you establish which of the possible training activities are most likely to help you reach the expected outcomes? Does this help you determine how much time in the training session will be spent on each activity?
8. As far as you know, is adjusting the delivery of the training plan based on audience response to the activities typical? Why or why not? Was there a situation when you felt there was a need to making an adjustment during a training session? Did you? Why?
9. Do the professional learning activities that you deliver have an impact on teachers' professional growth and instructional practices? What data do you collect to answer that question?

Treatment

Prior to scheduling the post-treatment interviews, participants received the tables, figures, and a narrative description of the data presented in stages one and two of the needs assessment. The student researcher decided to present this data in advance of the information session and the post-treatment interviews so that participants could independently analyze the data, which effectively reduced the student researcher's influence and possible bias about the meaning of the data. Participants were, however, asked whether they had familiarity with the stage-one data which indicated high levels of disproportionality in exclusionary discipline for African American students with disabilities. All participants were familiar with the school district's disproportionality data based on race and disability. Two of the five participants indicated that they had not previously seen within-group special education disciplinary data based on race. There was no discussion or inquiry related to the teacher survey data prior to the post-treatment interviews because the study's findings and results depended on the participants' interpretation of the survey data.

Post-Treatment Interviews

All five original participants returned for a post-treatment interview. The interviews were spaced so that there was at least 1 month between each participant's pre- and post-treatment interviews. The student researcher needed the additional time between the pre- and post-treatment interviews to review her analysis and develop the presentation of the needs assessment data. Review of the pre-treatment interviews provided the researcher with insight regarding appropriate ways to present the assessment

data to participants. She decided that a presentation structure that relied most heavily on visual aids, i.e., figures and tables, rather than a narrative summary was best.

As with the pre-treatment interviews, participants met with the student researcher individually to revisit their responses to the questions posed (see Table 9). Each participant's previous responses were reviewed with him/her. For questions 1 through 3, the student researcher consistently used the language, "When we last met, you answered this question by stating _____." The respondent's response was read back to him/her. The student researcher then asked, "Has anything changed?"

Before moving on to questions 4 through 9, the student researcher asked the participants about their interpretation of the survey data. To ensure consistency in interpretation, the student researcher shared her analysis of the data, as described in Chapter 2. Participants were asked if anything in the data was unexpected or surprising. The researcher asked the participants to think about interpretations of the data as they responded to the next few questions. For questions 4 through 9, the student researcher used the phrase, "In response to this question: (the question was read aloud), you previously said _____. Do you have any new insights on this question? If so, does your answer change based on this new insight? In what ways?" As with the pre-treatment interviews, the post-treatment interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Findings

Saldana (2016) posited that the process in the first cycle of coding involves dividing the data into categories that result in "theming the data" (p. 69). The second cycle of coding requires conceptualizing and theory-building. Citing Spindler and Spindler (1992), Saldana also suggested that observations by the researcher are necessary

to determine divergences from and subtleties within categories that maybe as important as any of the predetermined categories. Thus, the student researcher elected to synthesize the data confirmed in first and second cycle coding for pretreatment and post-treatment into the same tables. Observations and extended explanation of components of the interviews are described and reported as part of the discussion later in this chapter.

Findings for this study focused on themes related to the following areas: district leadership, content priorities, instructional delivery methods, and planners' key beliefs for PLO. Attention was given to changes in these themes that emerged from pre-treatment to post-treatment interviews. Therefore, it was necessary to first consider the themes and associated concepts that emerged from the pre-treatment interviews. Table 10 includes the major results of the first and second cycles of coding analysis of the five pre-treatment interviews. It is noteworthy that all five participants referenced each theme and/or associated concepts.

Table 10

Major Themes and Associated Concepts in Pre-treatment Interviews

Themes	Associated Concepts/Words and Phrases Used by Participants	Number of Participants Referencing Theme
District Leadership	frequent changes; designating collaborative planning teams; top-down vision; exposure and increased opportunities; direct support to schools and offices; required and targeted professional growth; expectations for accountability; need honor planner's experiences	5
Content Priorities	cultural responsiveness; multiple-source data collection and analysis; equity; pedagogical choices; positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS), instruction for all; examining personal bias	5
Key Beliefs	continuous professional growth; collaborative approaches to planning; generations of underserved populations; equity as a school district vision; skillful teachers in every classroom; missed opportunities for on-boarding; combating elements of systemic 'Whiteness'	5
Instructional Delivery Elements	technology; hands-on; interpretation of audience needs; 'make and take' materials; opportunities to apply new learning	5

Although some participants used various words to frame their responses to questions 4 through 9, each discussed the same central themes referenced in the pre-treatment interviews. Whether this was due to clarity in the school district's articulated vision and in the messages communicated about reducing disproportionality and

increasing equity is unknown. In addition to addressing each of the major themes, all participant responses in the pre-treatment interviews implied that teachers' disciplinary practices can change and lead to better and less divergent student outcomes through participation in effective PLO.

Each participant's reflections on the needs assessment data and the answers given during the pre-treatment interview were affirmed. Post-treatment interview data, gathered using the coding methods described by Saldana (2016) and in previous paragraphs of this chapter, are highlighted in Table 11. These data comprise additions to the pre-treatment interview themes identified in Table 10. All participants indicated that no information from their pre-treatment interviews should be deleted because it was no longer relevant to their responses.

Table 11

New Themes and Associated Concepts in Post-Treatment Interviews

New Themes	Associated Concepts/Words and Phrases Used by Participants	No. of Participants Referencing Theme
Differentiation	Informing teachers about cultural priorities; front-loading PLO for certain groups of pre-service teachers; school-based needs; mixed groups and separate groupings; focus on individual needs based on data; required district-wide training and school-based training based on the needs in each school; collecting teacher voice data	5
Restorative Practices	Managing or punishing rather than teaching; harshness with children of color; lack opportunity to re-start – teachers and students	2
Accountability for Results	Differences not deficits; ‘all means all’; trainer of trainers model; manageable chunking of content with checks for application; more than curriculum indicators; issues with dissemination of new learning in a large school district; responsibility for using available data collection and analysis tools; school improvement plans; knowing that teachers are applying learning from PLO	5
Need for Imbedded Coaching for Individuals Teachers	Differences among discrete groups of teachers; untapped resource in staff development teachers; don’t have a training unit that targets verbal de-escalation strategies and behavior management; more collaboration between SDTs and and Dept. of Sp. Ed.	3
Challenging beliefs about Race and Disability	Continued disproportionality despite efforts; instruction is not culturally relevant for many; question self-reporting beliefs about race; teachers are more willing to say they need help with understanding the impact special education than in understanding the impact of race and bias; teachers advocating for what they need; more comfortable with race than disability; teaching willingness to engage in meaningful reflection	5
Content on Cognition and Brain Science	Processing speed; working memory; decision-making; need for predictable and equitable consequences; fight or flight responses in both teachers and students	3

Six new themes best summarized participants' responses to questions 4 through 9 during the post-treatment interviews. The following new themes encompass responses that at least three of the five participants referenced

- differentiation;
- restorative practices;
- accountability for results;
- need for imbedded, individualized coaching;
- teacher beliefs about race and disability; and
- cognition and brain science.

Because there was a change in the themes associated with planning PLO that emerged following exposure to teacher self-efficacy data, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected. Participants further demonstrated the ability to reflect upon teacher self-efficacy data and refine their beliefs and priorities for planning PLO. The new vision for PLO in MSIS is one that encompasses the additional considerations for context, content, and training practices (Friedman & Phillips, 2004) related to teachers' behavior management, cultural responsiveness, and equity in classroom disciplinary practice for African American students with disabilities.

Discussion

Three themes that emerged in the post-treatment interviews were dominant. Dominance was established when the responses of at least four participants aligned with a particular theme. The three themes were (a) accountability for results, (b) challenging teachers' beliefs about race and disability, and (c) differentiation. These themes

established the need for MSIS to reconsider both the content and context of future planning for PLO to reduce disproportionality in disciplinary outcomes.

Content of Professional Learning

Responses from participants indicated that the present content for PLO did not need significant changes based on knowledge of teacher self-efficacy. The exception, identified by three of the five participants, was a need to add content related to brain science. Thus, its inclusion bears additional consideration.

All three participants who added brain science as an important content addition discussed brain science in terms of understanding adolescent development, the impact of ADHD and learning disabilities on adolescent decision-making, and the potential of fight or flight responses of both students and their teachers. These participants opined that teachers who do not know and understand the profiles of the students they teach are less likely to implement effective disciplinary practices that would result in changes in student behavior. This opinion aligned with research on self-efficacy and student discipline (Beswick, 2014; Chu, 2011; Garner et al., 2013). One participant stated that teachers who don't understand their students are more likely to intervene after behavior had already escalated and then have little choice but to apply exclusionary discipline.

Two of the three participants who identified the need to consider brain science stated that increasing disability awareness should also be included in the content of PLO. These were the participants who, in addition to being experienced developers of PLO in the district, maintained special education certifications. Additionally, these participants suggested that teachers needed to reflect on the connections between brain science and culturally responsive classrooms, as suggested by Hammond (2015). These participants

noted that, when students experience learning environments that are culturally and cognitively comfortable, there is less conflict between students and their teachers. In this environment, students feel valued and are thus more engaged in academic tasks.

Context for Professional Learning

Context, as described by Aulls (2004), includes the relatedness of human action over time in meaningful situations and activity systems. In addition, Aulls stated that meaningfulness of a situation can be different for different people involved in it. Therefore, the PLO planned in MSIS needs to account for the various emotions and cognitive interpretations of district messages related to each of the newly identified dominant themes.

Accountability. The context for the theme of accountability for results is based on the messages given by district leadership, the data collected, and the methods by which post-training data are collected in the district. This study's participants suggested that, although student outcomes are essential in determining accountability, student outcomes should not be the only measure of accountability. Participants suggested that district leaders, specifically the planners of PLO, must know that strategies for improving equity and reducing disproportionate disciplinary referrals are being effectively implemented. Thus, they suggested, beyond district-wide training, the trainer of trainers (ToT) model could be adopted so that every school had a team that includes the principal and staff development teacher (SDT). This team would be responsible for continuous staff development and imbedded coaching for grade-level teams, departments, and individual teachers.

Accountability for PLO requires that school administrators and SDTs become expert not only in the content for school-based PLO on behavior management, culturally responsive teaching, and equity but also on the strategies schools can implement to create a context conducive to adult learning designed to increase teacher self-efficacy. Accountability measures, therefore, extend to creating documentation in the form of staff, department, and grade-level team meeting agendas, walk-throughs using consistent checklists, teacher observations, and team discussion logs.

Challenges to Teachers' Beliefs. Participants were surprised that, in general, teachers reported greater self-efficacy in addressing student behaviors associated with race than with disability. Additionally, they questioned the survey data that suggested that African American teachers, teachers with 11 to 15 years of experience, and male teachers reported being more self-efficacious. This suggestion represents a misinterpretation of the data since responses of male teachers did not reflect significantly greater self-efficacy for the entire survey, the questions on race, or the questions on special education.

The four participants who identified challenging teacher beliefs as a theme to be addressed in the context of professional learning believed that the district should consider whether African American and male teachers are more self-efficacious because they have characteristics in common with the targeted student group—African American students with disabilities. In addition to identifying as African American, these participants noted that the majority of students receiving special education services are male and students subjected to exclusionary discipline are also male. Is this group of teachers truly

efficacious in reducing disproportionate disciplinary consequences or are they reporting self-efficaciousness because of an affinity with the identified group of students?

Teachers with between 11 and 15 years of experience, regardless of race or gender, reported being the most self-efficacious group. Participants noted that challenging teacher beliefs about race and disability is difficult when working with staff who are not yet ready to engage in the conversation. Perhaps, after some years of teaching experience in a school district where disproportionate student outcomes are openly discussed, teachers were more confident in their abilities to meet the needs of targeted student populations.

Four participants recalled that nearly 10 years ago the district maintained a two-year focus on how to talk about race and its impact on student outcomes. However, it was noted by one participant that since that time there has been a turnover of 60% of the teachers in the district. As such, the majority of teachers may not have learned to reflect on and openly discuss their own experiences with race and racism and are unaware of the impact of teacher bias on structures and practices in the classroom (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Differentiation. The final dominant theme that emerged from post-treatment interviews was described as the need for differentiation. Over the past decade, as previously stated, MSIS developed and sustained a climate in which bias, disproportionality, and equity are openly discussed. This does not mean, as indicated by the teacher self-efficacy data, that teachers are all at the same level of confidence in addressing these issues at the classroom level. Planners of PLO who expect to move teachers forward, collectively and individually, need to plan differentiated development

activities based on teachers' self-perceived strengths and needs. Planning for differentiated PLO requires that the context for professional growth change from one in which standardization is considered the one best way to accomplish its goals to a context that is designed to meet the needs of every person (Rose, 2016).

The differentiation theme is further explained through interview responses that highlight the need to identify those key concepts that all teachers must learn regardless of their level of self-efficacy and those that should be presented to more self-efficacious teachers in order to extend, rather than develop, capacity. Differentiation was also supported through participants' references to required, system-wide PLO, PLO that is specifically targeted to individual schools based on school improvement plans, and PLO and coaching for individual teachers based on their office referral data. In planning differentiated PLO, the participants suggested that MSIS consider ways to gather teacher data so that it is manageable for the large number of teachers in a large school district and meaningful to the planning process.

Implications

As a result of this study, the student researcher identified several implications for planning PLO in MSIS. These implications, stated as recommendations, impact professional learning at the system, school, and individual levels. Likewise, other large school districts with comparable demographics may find that this study yields useful information that leads to reductions in patterns of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for students who are African American and have disabilities within their organization.

Systems-Level Leadership

Mid-State Independent Schools and other school districts seeking to make a systems-level change in planning professional learning might begin by considering how they will lead the work of changing disciplinary outcomes. District leaders will need to determine the leadership style that best communicates a vision for reducing disproportionate disciplinary patterns in the context of their school district and the organizational climate in which planners of PLO will be expected to operate. By recognizing that achieving the desired results is hard work and requires sustained effort in multiple areas, leaders must apply compensatory strategies (e.g., emotional regulation, self-reflection, forecasting, and information integration) that are most effective when facing complex situations. Additionally, district leaders must be aware of the sensitive, ethical implications of allowing disproportionality in disciplinary consequences to remain (Theil, Bagdasarov, Harkrider, Johnson, & Mumford, 2012). It is, therefore, important for district leaders to analyze data and determine the salient factors associated with disproportionate disciplinary outcomes.

School Level Guidance and Coaching

Change in disciplinary practices at the school level can drive the collective data for the school district. Therefore, it is essential that every school have a plan to address discrepant and ineffective classroom disciplinary practices. These plans should be reviewed by district leaders so that it can be confirmed that every school's plan focuses on the essential elements targeted in the MSIS vision for reducing disproportionality. School-based professional learning also requires that administrators know their teachers' strengths, needs, and biases. Administrators need to be reflective and develop the skills

necessary to challenge the questionable beliefs of teachers. As evaluators of teachers' performance, school administrators must understand the ways that disproportionate disciplinary outcomes impact student learning and student outcomes addressed through professional standards and evaluation systems.

Professional learning activities at the school level, led by the school-based administrator, can facilitate teachers' practice in using the common language associated with cultural responsiveness and equity within small group settings with trusted peers. Incorporating discussions about disciplinary practices into existing collaborative planning structures provides opportunities for job-embedded coaching and encourages teachers to be reflective and to try new strategies.

Individual Level

Ultimately, each educator in the school district is responsible for student outcomes, be they academic or otherwise. To contribute to the district's goal of reducing disproportionate disciplinary outcomes predicted by disability and race, individual teachers must be encouraged to learn more than they currently know. Each educator needs to understand how his/her own beliefs and experiences influence expectations for students and how these beliefs and expectations affect student behavior. The school system leaders and building administrators need to establish climates in which each educator has a forum to express his/her level of knowledge, skill, and confidence so that the options for PLO can meet them where they are and actually move them forward.

Conclusion

Mid-State Independent Schools can use this study, and specifically the planning processes for PLO, to mobilize and direct reforms that change disciplinary outcomes for

African American students with disabilities. By modifying a message from Tyack and Cuban (1995), the school district can hybridize its professional learning practices to take advantage of opportunities to address a significant problem. The researcher suggests that MSIS and other districts begin by focusing on how teachers engage with a specific group of students and on classroom disciplinary practices rather than focusing primarily on administrators' dispensation of exclusionary consequences.

The impetus to find a better response to the problem of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes is great, both in MSIS and nationwide. In a nation with over 74 million children and in school district where there are nearly 5000 African American students with disabilities, we can no longer accept the slow rate of progress for reducing the discipline gap. And, the school systems are not in this alone. Disproportionate disciplinary outcomes are the doorway to disproportionately incarcerated minority males. Every stakeholder in the community, public safety, business, and government must all participate in changing this situation. Let's end disproportionate disciplinary outcomes in school and, at the same time, close the door on the school-to-prison pipeline.

It is not acceptable for this school district, or other school districts, to patiently wait for educators to change their pedagogical choices once their beliefs about students based on the students' race and/or disability change. There must be an immediate change in the way the school district attacks the problem, beginning with how teachers are prepared and developed for effective teaching and classroom management. As stated by President Barack Obama, "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

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APPENDIX A SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Survey Organization

There are two sections in this survey. The first section asks questions that help the researcher verify that participants represent the diversity of teachers in MSIS. The second section seeks to gain information about teachers' beliefs, perceptions, understandings, and self-efficacy in managing the behavior of African American students and students with disabilities.

Section I – Teacher Demographics

Directions: Please circle the response that best completes the sentence and describes you.

1. My age is _____. between 21 and 25 years old between 26 and 30 years old
 between 31 and 35 years old between 36 and 40 years old
 over 40 years old

2. I am a _____. Female Male

2. I describe my race as _____. Asian Black Hispanic White two or more races

4. I have a total of ____ years of teaching experience.
 between 0 to 5 between 6 and 10 between 11 and 15 between 16 and 20 over 20

5. I have worked for Montgomery County Public Schools for ____ consecutive years.
 between 0 and 5 between 6 and 10 between 11 and 15 between 16 and 20 over 20

Section 2 – Student Discipline

Directions: There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Your opinion, based on your own experience and understanding, is what matters. Please circle the response that indicates the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement, 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree.

1. I know how to effectively implement strategies to de-escalate student behavior.
1 2 3 4 5

2. In my school, students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) are expected to follow the same rules as other students.
1 2 3 4 5

3. African American students respect my authority as a teacher.
1 2 3 4 5

4. Students in my class who have an IEP meet my behavior expectations.
1 2 3 4 5

5. Home and school expectations for African American behavior are aligned.
- 1 2 3 4 5
6. Consequences for inappropriate behavior are applied equally in my classroom.
- 1 2 3 4 5
7. All of the students in my class get along with each other.
- 1 2 3 4 5
8. I know which of my students with IEPs have specific goals and supports to address behavior.
- 1 2 3 4 5
9. I have received formal training through the Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) and know how and when to provide various levels of behavior support to students.
- 1 2 3 4 5
10. I have participated in the development of a functional behavior assessment (FBA).
- 1 2 3 4 5
11. I consistently implement the behavior strategies suggested in the individual student's IEP and behavior intervention program (BIP).
- 1 2 3 4 5
12. I understand the difference between an FBA and a BIP.
- 1 2 3 4 5
13. Providing behavior support to a special education student with behavior goals is primarily the responsibility of the special education teacher.
- 1 2 3 4 5
14. African American students adhere to established routines and expectations.
- 1 2 3 4 5
15. I and my students operate in a climate of mutual respect.
- 1 2 3 4 5
16. African American students are able to self-correct behavior with no more than one reminder from the teacher.
- 1 2 3 4 5

17. African American students accept correction and assigned consequences.
- 1 2 3 4 5
18. I am able to engage all student's parents in a manner that facilitates support of my efforts to maintain an orderly classroom.
- 1 2 3 4 5
19. I understand the antecedents to negative student behavior.
- 1 2 3 4 5
20. I often need the support of other staff members to address the behavior of students with IEPs.
- 1 2 3 4 5
21. I take pride in developing and maintaining a positive relationship African American students.
- 1 2 3 4 5
22. I only refer African American students to the office after exhausting all classroom behavior management strategies.
- 1 2 3 4 5
23. I can manage students with IEP's level of activity, attention, and impulsivity in my classroom.
- 1 2 3 4 5
24. I am fearful of how African American students may respond to correction and disciplinary consequences.
- 1 2 3 4 5
25. I respond calmly when African American students question my behavior management practices.
- 1 2 3 4 5
26. I can calm a student with an IEP who is anxious, disruptive, or noisy.
- 1 2 3 4 5
27. I am able to analyze student behavior in terms of its communicative function.
- 1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX B TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Johns Hopkins University Homewood Institutional Review Board (HIRB)

Title: Knowledge of Teacher Self-Efficacy: Designing Professional Learning Opportunities to Reduce the Discipline Gap for African American Students with Disabilities - Mid-State Independent Schools

Principal Investigator: Dr. Henry M. Smith, Johns Hopkins University, School of Education

Student Researcher: Cynthia M. Webb, doctoral candidate

Date: September 15, 2016

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH STUDY:

The purpose of this research study is to determine the impact of teachers' self-efficacy on rates of suspension when a student is categorized as being eligible for special education services and is African American. Per extensive review of the literature, these patterns of suspension are not caused by students' differential participation in negative behavior. As such, the problem cannot be effectively addressed without considering the whether there is a difference in the reasons for teachers make disciplinary referrals. Specifically, the researcher questions whether teacher self-efficacy in addressing behaviors of the identified population in the classroom increases the risk and rate of suspension.

We anticipate that approximately 10 teachers from each of four middle schools will participate in the study in a one-hour session held in October 2016.

PROCEDURES:

There will be several components for this study:

- Suspension data from the State Schools Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights will be reviewed to determine rates of suspension for students who have disabilities and are identified as African American as well as for students who have disabilities and are White. Schools and student names will not be attached to these data.
- You will be asked to complete one paper survey. The survey will ask questions about your perceptions of student behavior and your self-efficacy in addressing it.
- You will be asked to participate in 2 professional learning activities associated with disability and race.

- You will be asked to identify the strengths of and considerations for professional learning activities.

Time required: If you choose to participate in this study you will be asked to spend approximately 20 minutes completing each survey questionnaire and an additional 90 minutes in two 45 minute professional development sessions.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:

Although there are no personal or professional risks associated with this study, the some of the survey questions pertaining to your views of student behavior, special education, and race may be emotionally challenging. We ask that you answer questions honestly so that we will be able to determine the best course of intervention to address the problem of disproportionate rates of suspension for students with disabilities within the Mid-State Independent Schools.

BENEFITS:

Potential benefits are the increased understanding of special education disciplinary requirements and improved strategies to address student behavior. It is believed that once teachers have a better understanding of the legal requirements for discipline of students with disabilities and recognize patterns of behavior associated with race, they will better understand and feel more comfortable implementing a wider array of behavior intervention strategies. Students will benefit from increased time focused instruction.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATON AND RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you decided to participate, or choose not to participate, there are no penalties and you will not lose any benefits or standing to which you would otherwise be entitled.

You may stop participation in the study at any time, without any penalty or loss of benefits. Should you decide to stop participating, please contact Ms. Cynthia M. Webb by phone or by email: 240-620-4253, cwebb16@jhu.edu.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Any study records, including your name and survey responses, will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. People responsible for making sure that research is properly conducted, including members of the Johns Hopkins University Homewood Instructional Review Board and officials from agencies such as the Office for Human Research Protections, may review records from your participation. (These people are required to maintain high levels of professionalism and to keep your identity confidential.) Otherwise, the records of your responses and participation will be available only to those persons working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

All measures and videotapes will be examined by the principal investigator and research affiliates only. No identifiable information will be included in any reports of the research published or provided to school or district administration. Participant numbers will be assigned to all surveys and school suspension data.

Surveys will be collected in electronic format and will be password protected via Survey Monkey. If a participant is not able to complete surveys electronically, paper copies will be provided that do not include identifiable information. All data, including paper surveys, associated with this research project will be stored in files that are locked or password projected. All materials associated with this project will be shredded or erased 10 years after collection.

Only group data will be included in publication. No individual participant or student information will ever be published.

COMPENSATION:

Beyond the benefits of the professional learning that occurs through participation, you will not receive any payment or compensation for participating in this study.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS:

You may ask questions or express concerns about this study at any time by contacting Ms. Cynthia M. Webb. She may be reached by phone or email: 240-620-4253, cwebb16@jhu.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a study participant or feel that you have not been treated fairly, call the Homewood Instructional Review Board at Johns Hopkins University at (410) 516-6580.

SIGNATURES:

Your signature means:

- You understand the information presented in this consent form.
- You agree to participate in this study.

By signing this consent form, you have not waived any of your legal rights that you would otherwise have as a participant of a research study.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent
(Investigator or HIRB - Approved Designee)**

Date

APPENDIX C INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

Johns Hopkins University Homewood Institutional Review Board (HIRB)

Title: Knowledge of Teacher Self-Efficacy: Designing Professional Learning Opportunities to Reduce the Discipline Gap for African American Students with Disabilities - Mid-State Independent Schools

Principal Investigator: Dr. Henry M. Smith, Johns Hopkins University, School of Education

Student Researcher: Cynthia M. Webb, doctoral candidate

Date: September 15, 2016

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH STUDY:

Per review of the literature and existing data from Mid-State Independent Schools (MSIS), disproportionate patterns of office referral and suspension are not caused by students' differential participation in negative behavior. District efforts to reduce race and disability bias have not resulted in the reduction of a disproportionate rates suspension. The purpose of this research study is to consider the ways in which the planning priorities for a professional learning training plan on behavior support and strategies changes following the infusion of knowledge of middle school teachers' attitudes and feelings of self-efficacy in addressing the behavior of students who are African American and eligible for special education.

PROCEDURES:

There will be several components of this study affected by your participation:

- During an information session held at central office, you will receive a synopsis of the status of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for African American students with disabilities in Maryland as well as an explanation of the proposed research.
- As a central office employee with responsibility for planning professional learning opportunities that focus on culturally responsive teaching, equity, and/or behavior and classroom management you will be asked to participate in two, 30 minute interviews and one additional information session on teacher self-efficacy in addressing the behavior of African American students and students with disabilities. The interviews will focus on your professional beliefs and priorities for planning professional learning activities.
- The differences in your interview responses and those of other participants, before and after you receive knowledge of teacher self-efficacy, will be analyzed, summarized, and presented as group data in the findings of the research.

Time required: If you choose to participate in this study you will be asked to spend approximately 15 minutes listening to the historical background of the problem of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes and a summary of existing school district data. The research project is expected to run from September 2016 through June 2017, but your participation is requested for a 30-minute interview in the month of February 2017, a 30 to 45-minute information session in March 2017 and a 30 minute interview in May 2017.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:

Although there are no personal or professional risks associated with this study, the some of the interview questions pertaining to your views on the professional learning topics of culturally responsive teaching, equity, student behavior, special education, and race may be emotionally challenging. Please answer questions honestly so that impact of your professional learning priorities can be clearly reported.

BENEFITS:

Potential long-term benefits to teachers and the school district are the creation of differentiated professional learning opportunities that increase teachers' skills in applying strategies to manage student behavior, their understanding of culturally responsive classrooms and their knowledge of special education disciplinary requirements based on federal and state law. It is believed that when professional learning training plans address teachers' self-identified needs, teachers will feel more comfortable implementing a wider array of behavior intervention strategies for African American students with disabilities.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATON AND RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you decide to participate, or choose not to participate, there are no penalties. You will not lose any benefits or standing to which you would otherwise be entitled.

You may stop participation in the study at any time, without any penalty or loss of benefits. Should you decide to stop participating by having your survey data excluded, please contact Ms. Cynthia M. Webb by phone or by email: 240-620-4253, cwebb16@jhu.edu.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Any study records, including your name and interview responses, will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. People responsible for making sure that research is properly conducted, including members of the Johns Hopkins University Homewood Instructional Review Board and officials from agencies such as the Office for Human Research Protections, may review records from your participation. (These people are required to maintain high levels of professionalism and to keep your identity confidential.) Otherwise, the records of your responses and participation will be available only to those persons working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

All measures will be examined by the principal investigator and research affiliates only. No identifiable information will be included in any reports of the research published or provided to school or district administration. Participant numbers will be assigned to all interviews. All data associated with this research project will be stored in files that are locked or password projected. All materials associated with this project will be shredded or erased three years after

collection. Only group data will be included in publication. No individual participant will ever be published.

COMPENSATION:

You will not receive any payment or compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation may result in improved practices in which there is consideration of teachers' self-identified needs in planning professional learning.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS:

You may ask questions or express concerns about this study at any time by contacting Ms. Cynthia M. Webb. She may be reached by phone or email: 240-620-4253, cwebb16@jhu.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a study participant or feel that you have not been treated fairly, call the Homewood Instructional Review Board at Johns Hopkins University at (410) 516-6580.

SIGNATURES:

Your signature means:

- You understand the information presented in this consent form.
- You agree to participate in this study.

By signing this consent form, you have not waived any of your legal rights that you would otherwise have as a participant of a research study.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent
(Investigator or HIRB - Approved Designee)**

Date

APPENDIX D STUDENT INVESTIGATOR'S CURRICULUM VITAE

Cynthia M. Webb

12905 Northampton Drive
Beltsville, Maryland 20705
7cyn981@gmail.com

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Cynthia M. Webb was born in Washington, DC and raised in Silver Spring, Maryland where she attended school, kindergarten through 12th grade. Since completing her undergraduate studies in special education, she has more than 30 years in service as an educator in public schools.

VISION

To establish and sustain a learning communities in which all students' have equitable opportunities to access rigorous instruction and achieve outcomes leading to college, career, and/or community readiness.

EDUCATION

Master of Science, Educational Leadership, Hood College, Frederick, MD
Bachelor of Arts, Special Education, Hood College, Frederick, MD

PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATIONS/ENDORSEMENTS

School Administrator I

Pupil Personnel Worker

Maryland State Advanced Professional Teaching Certificate: Special Education, K-12;

MSDE "Highly Qualified" in English, Science, and Social Studies for Secondary Special Education

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

Supervisor, Department of Special Education Services

Supports and advises 31 schools and works closely and collaboratively with the associate superintendent, Office of Special Education; the associate superintendents of elementary, middle and high schools, the Office of School Support and Improvement, and the director, Department of Special Education Services to ensure the provision of appropriate special education services for students with disabilities within comprehensive and special school settings.

Instructional Specialist, Department of Special Education Services

Provides centralized professional development and support to identified clusters of schools, under the direction of the special education supervisor. Her duties are focused on improving teaching and learning for students receiving specialized instruction.

Student Support Specialist

The student support specialist is a school-based administrator who participates as a member of the School Improvement and Instructional Leadership Teams. In this capacity she serves as a grade level administrator and provides support on student behavior.

Resource Teacher in Special Education

The resource teacher in special education is the department chairman for special education teachers and is a member of the school's Instructional Leadership Team.

Resource Program Teacher

The resource program teacher delivers direct instruction to special education students and instructional and consultative support to general education teachers and counselors.

Gifted and Talented Coordinator

The gifted and talented coordinator administers assessments and leads the school-based selection process for the identification of gifted students. She reviews the instructional program design for gifted students and collaborates with school administrators to ensure that curriculum enrichment meets the needs of these students

Teacher, 6th Grade Reading

The 6th grade reading teacher is a member of the interdisciplinary teaching team for approximately 150 students. She uses an integrated approach to teaching the reading, writing, listening and speaking skills necessary for students to be successful in higher level, content specific courses. In addition to teaching reading to students, the 6th grade reading teacher is also responsible for designing and teaching a differentiated reading programs for highly gifted grade 6 students and adapting instruction for students challenged with acquiring basic reading skills.

Special Education Classroom Teacher

The special education classroom teacher teaches adapted and/or English, Reading, Mathematics, Science, and/or Social Studies curricula to grades 6 - 8 students with disabilities in a self-contained or co-teaching learning environments.

ADDITIONAL TRAINING

Active Listening, Analysis of Classroom Instruction, Character Education, Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention, Classroom Learning Centers, Comprehensive Behavior Management, Confidence Course Instructors' Workshop, Crisis Prevention Institute (certified trainer), Data Warehouse, First-Aid, Gifted and Talented Differentiation, Observing and Analyzing Teaching I and II, Serving Students with Autism in Comprehensive School Settings, Teaching Adult Learners, Project Team Management, Woodcock – Johnson IV

ASSOCIATIONS/AFFILIATIONS

Kappa Delta Pi, Education Honor Society
Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges
Beta Beta Beta, Biological Honor Society
Council for Exceptional Children
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Montgomery County Association of Administrators and Principals
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated
Ivy Vine Charities, Incorporated