

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PRINCIPAL
DISCIPLINE DECISION-MAKING

By

AMY S. MCLAUGHLIN

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Educational Leadership and Sport Management

DECEMBER 2023

© Copyright by AMY S. MCLAUGHLIN, 2023
All Rights Reserved

© Copyright by AMY S. MCLAUGHLIN, 2023
All Rights Reserved

To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of AMY S. MCLAUGHLIN find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

Sharon Kruse, Ph.D., Chair

Jeffrey Walls, Ph.D.

Richard McBride, Ed.D.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Sharon Kruse, my Committee Chair. My success and the completion of my dissertation would not have been possible without your unwavering support and profound belief in my abilities. I am extremely grateful for your unparalleled mentoring, invaluable guidance, and constant encouragement. Because of you, I believed I could do this. Most of all, I appreciate the generous time you devoted to coaching me, stretching my thinking, and helping me continuously improve. The opportunity to team up with you and Dr. Walls on your existing study was incredible, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

Additionally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Drs. Glenys Hill, Richard McBride, and Jeffrey Walls for serving on my committee. I am deeply grateful for your insightful suggestions and helpful contributions you provided throughout my journey. To my committee as a whole, thank you for sharing your wisdom and for your outstanding leadership in this important pursuit of equitable discipline practices.

To the principals who participated in this study, thank you for sharing your stories and experiences. May your voices provide valuable insight that sparks positive change. Thank you for allowing me to learn from you.

To my family and friends, thank you for supporting me throughout this crazy journey. You believed in me, and for that, I am extremely grateful. Each one of you contributed to my ability to persevere. To my daughter, Emily, thank you for encouraging me to see this endeavor come to completion. It hasn't been easy, but you never doubted me. You kept me focused on the light at the end of the tunnel.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following scholarship donors, without whom I would not have been able to complete this research. Sincere appreciation to Delta Kappa Gamma International Society for Key Women Educators, Washington State Organization (Rachel Royston Permanent Foundation Scholarship, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022, 2022-2023); Finley School District (School Scholarship, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022, 2023-2024); Herb and Paula Berg (Herb & Paula Berg Scholarship in Educational Leadership, 2021-2022, 2022-2023); Kirk Kassner and Carol Scott-Kassner; Jeannine Rogel; and Mark Rogel (Dorothy B. Cook Scholarship Award, 2020-2021); Michael and Marylou Seeman (George B. and Harriet Brain Admin Leadership Award, 2022-2023); Washington Association of School Administrators and Piper Sandler (Dr. Doyle E. Winter Scholarship for Administrative Leadership in Education, 2020-2021); Washington State University (College of Education Scholarship Award, 2020-2021, 2021-2022, 2022-2023); and Zeno and Shannon Katterle (Zeno and Kay Katterle Scholarship Award, 2021-2022). I greatly appreciate your generosity and support.

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PRINCIPAL
DISCIPLINE DECISION-MAKING

Abstract

by Amy S. McLaughlin, Ed.D.
Washington State University
December 2023

Chair: Sharon D. Kruse

Disproportionality in school discipline (i.e., disparities in exclusionary discipline for certain subgroups) represents one of the most significant problems in education today (Losen et al, 2015; Welsh & Little, 2018). This qualitative study investigated how school principals described their concerns, pressures, and tensions when making student discipline decisions and explored how principals described a good discipline decision. The findings in this study provide insight concerning how to support school leaders in their efforts to close the discipline equity gap. Study results highlight the principals' concerns including ensuring safety, adhering to laws, policies, and procedures, maintaining positive and healthy relationships, and upholding internal consistency as decisions get made. Principals' pressures consisted of keeping everyone safe, performing in a public arena under scrutiny, and incorporating the added complexities of the principalship. The tensions principals faced included tensions related to navigating organizational contexts, balancing core values and beliefs, and following laws, policies, and procedures. Importantly, results shed light on how principals describe what makes a discipline

decision good. Principals in this study suggested that good discipline decisions produce results, keep relationships intact, get resolved at the lowest level, and address root causes. Generally, principals in this study attempted to resolve the issues they faced by employing a discipline decision-making cycle consisting of three phases including learning, planning, and enacting.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
ABSTRACT.....	v
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
CHAPTERS	
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Discipline Disproportionality	2
Decision-Making.....	7
Present Study.....	12
Summary	13
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	14
History of School Discipline.....	14
Issues of Practice.....	20
Principal Decision-Making and Student Discipline	23
Enumeration of Tensions, Pressures, and Concerns	32
Implications for Current Practice and Principal Work.....	35
Conclusion.....	39
CHAPTER III: METHODS	41
Qualitative Research Approach.....	41
Present Study.....	45
Positionality.....	56

Study Limitations	57
Summary	57
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS.....	58
Aspirations and Practice Disconnect.....	61
Concerns.....	69
Pressures.....	76
Tensions	82
What Makes a Good Discipline Decision?	87
Summary	102
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION.....	104
Learning	108
Planning.....	117
Enacting.....	126
Implications.....	142
Conclusion.....	145
REFERENCES	148
APPENDIX A.....	187
APPENDIX B	190

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
1. Table 1: Research Participants	48
2. Table 2: Research Questions and Key Interview Question Alignment	52
3. Table 3: Tensions: Discipline Decision-Making Cycle	108

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
1. Figure 1: Aspirations and Practice Disconnect.....	60
2. Figure 2: What Makes a Discipline Decision Good?	61
3. Figure 3: Discipline Decision-Making Cycle of Tensions	107

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my daughter, Emily, for her encouragement and support throughout this journey. In loving memory of Eric D. McLaughlin, who always believed in me and inspired me to pursue my dreams.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

School discipline is at a pivotal moment characterized by mixed results of alternative approaches to exclusionary discipline and multilayered disagreements on the direction of policy and practice (Welsh & Little, 2018). In general, school discipline refers to the rules and strategies applied in school to manage student behavior and support students in developing self-management skills (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, n.d.). Disciplinary practices in schools range from those that are positive and evidenced-based in supporting holistic development, such as restorative justice and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (Wriston & Duchesneau, 2023), to practices that include punitive and exclusionary measures as a means of enforcing student compliance with school rules and behavioral expectations (Allman & Slate, 2011). Examples of exclusionary measures often include office discipline referrals (e.g., removing students from the classroom; Anyon et al., 2018), in-school suspensions (e.g., placing students in alternative settings within the school; Cholewa et al., 2018), out-of-school suspensions (e.g., removing students from the school temporarily; Griffin et al., 2020), and expulsions (e.g., removing students from school permanently; Camacho & Krezmien, 2020). How school discipline is handled has a great impact on learning environments in schools (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, n.d.).

Research has consistently shown that exclusionary discipline is ineffective and potentially harmful (American Psychological Association, 2008). For example, studies have shown students who receive one suspension will receive many more after that (Fabelo et al., 2011). Additionally, research has suggested that discipline enactment does not improve school safety and climate (Gregory et al., 2011). Importantly, several studies have indicated that students who are suspended from school, relative to their peers, have a greater likelihood of

performing poorly academically, repeating a grade, dropping out of school, abusing substances, or becoming incarcerated (Anderson et al., 2019; Dong & Krohn, 2020; Hwang, 2018; Lacoé & Steinberg, 2019; Rosenbaum, 2020).

Despite evidence of harm and consistent differential impacts, exclusionary discipline is used at extraordinarily high rates in public schools, with some top-suspending districts suspending 45 to 62 percent of their entire secondary school student enrollments in a given year (Losen, 2015). In addition, the disparities in the use of exclusionary discipline have been well documented for several decades (Huang, 2020). For example, as Gregory et al. (2021) contend, Black students are suspended at double the rate (8%) of their White peers (3.8%), and students with disabilities are suspended at twice the rate (8.6%) of their peers without disabilities (4.1%). Schools across the country have been struggling to reduce the use of exclusionary disciplinary practices as well as eliminate these disparities (Losen & Martinez, 2020). As a result, exclusionary discipline has been critiqued for both mirroring and contributing to societal injustices (Gregory et al., 2021).

Discipline Disproportionality

Disproportionality in school discipline (i.e., disparities in exclusionary discipline for certain subgroups) represents one of the most significant problems in education today (Losen, 2015; Welsh & Little, 2018). Significantly, the percentage of school-age children who are White decreased by 34 percent in the last five decades (Irwin et al., 2022). By 2030, the percentage is expected to decrease an additional three percent (Irwin et al., 2022). In contrast, the percentages of school-age children from other racial/ethnic groups are expected to continue to rise in the next decade: Hispanic children, from 28 to 30 percent; Asian children, from 5 to 6 percent; and children of Two or more races, from 5 to 6 percent (Irwin et al., 2022). The census population

projections confirm the importance of racial minorities as the primary demographic engine of the nation's future growth (Frey, 2018).

Measuring diversity and population growth is important for anticipating the needs of schools and teachers (de Brey et al., 2019). An awareness of the shifting demographics of the U.S. population can help ensure educators are prepared to work with diverse groups of students (Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2008). As Frey (2020) stated, "One fact is already clear: As the nation becomes even more racially diverse from the 'bottom up' of the age structure, more attention needs to be given to the needs and opportunities for America's highly diverse younger generations. The demography alone dictates that this will be necessary to ensure success for these youth and the nation as a whole" (Frey, 2020, p. 7).

Implicit Bias

Discipline disparities may be at least partially the result of implicit bias (Girvan et al., 2017; Gullo & Beachum, 2020; Staats, 2015). As opposed to explicit bias, implicit bias operates below conscious awareness and without intentional control (Gullo & Beachum, 2020). For instance, recent research has shown discipline disparities are driven by classroom teachers' decisions to refer a student for disciplinary action (Chin et al., 2020; Skiba et al., 2002) and by school administrators' decisions in response to those referrals (Skiba et al., 2011). Additionally, studies have shown that racial stereotyping can influence these referrals (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). For instance, Black students are more likely than White students to be referred for disciplinary action for *subjective* infractions such as disruption or defiance compared to *objective* infractions such as tardiness or truancy (Skiba et al., 2002). In addition, Black students are more likely than White students to receive harsher consequences for disciplinary infractions, even when committing similar offenses (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Moreover, county and

community-level rates of racial bias have been linked with discipline disparities in school (Girvan et al., 2021; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019), which suggests that school discipline reforms must address decision-making and implicit bias in school communities and the larger community as a whole.

Adding to the complexity, current social, economic, and demographic changes have placed “tremendous pressure on educational systems to respond to the accompanying growth in the diversity of student enrollment” (Anisef & Kilbride, 2004, p. 10). It is school leaders who are called upon to meet the demands of this transformation (Goddard & Hart, 2007). Attempting to address the complexity of a changing demographic landscape and discipline inequities, Gullo and Beachum (2020) studied the links between implicit bias and the overall decision-making process. As Gullo and Beachum (2020) recommended, further research on school leaders’ decision-making processes is needed to advance disciplinary equity for all students. This study will add to the current body of literature by exploring the ways in which school principals navigate discipline decision-making in increasingly complex environments.

External Mandates

In the last several years, the role of school principal has taken on added significance in educational reform and accountability mandates (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019). Accountability mandates tell public schools what they are required to do, how they must do it, and how much money they will spend to get it done (Pennsylvania School Boards Association [PBSA], 2020). Mandates come from several sources including the federal government; state laws and regulations; and other types of guidance from state agencies (PBSA, 2020). On one hand, many mandates can be defended as implementing important policy objectives or as sincere efforts to enhance health, safety, and wellness; the quality of education; student achievement;

accountability; and transparency (PBSA, 2020). On the other hand, mandates can create burdensome requirements that impact local decision-making because they either dictate actions or severely limit available options (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Kennedy et al., 2017; Larsen & Hunter, 2014).

Accountability policies and the way they are mediated at the local level can lead to unintended consequences (Mandinach & Schildkamp, 2021). For example, enactment of accountability policies can potentially threaten the self-integrity of educational professionals and push them into deficit thinking (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2017; Lasater et al., 2021).

Additionally, high stakes accountability measures can raise questions of autonomy, institutional identity, and individual responsibility in schools (Datnow et al., 2012; DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Spillane, 2012). Moreover, processing data can be a struggle for educational professionals, and information that challenges one's self- image can trigger emotional responses and strategic framing (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Falabella, 2020). The datafication of education, according to a growing subfield of education researchers, occurs when every aspect of schooling is rendered as data to be collected, analyzed, surveilled, and controlled (Bradbury 2019; Bradbury & Roberts-Homes, 2018; Buchanan & McPherson, 2019; Williamson, 2017). Datafication trends, according to Falabella (2020, p. 34), have led to what she refers to as “the accountability trap.”

Inequitable Distribution of Resources

Compounding the problem, most accountability mandates are unfunded, in that the state imposes a requirement on schools, but does not contribute funding to specifically assist schools in paying the costs associated with compliance (PBSA, 2020). Across the country, districts with the most students of color on average receive substantially less (16%) state and local revenue

than districts with the fewest students of color (Morgan, 2022). That’s about \$2,700 less per student, and in a district with 5,000 students, that gap could mean \$13.5 million in missing resources. In a single year, that missing funding could translate to increased and improved resources, such as expert-recommended smaller student-to-school counselor ratios, increased access to targeted intensive tutoring, and other key resources that improve student outcomes (Morgan, 2022).

Impacts of COVID-19

The effects of COVID-19 have also added to job complexity for school principals. Long before the onset of the pandemic in 2020, students from historically marginalized communities already faced challenges in accessing basic educational resources including well-trained, well-paid teachers and staff, adequate buildings, and books (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021). For these students, there was already a crisis of educational opportunity—a crisis that COVID-19 appears to have made worse (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021).

Although three years have passed since the start of the pandemic, academic normalcy remains out of reach for many students, educators, and parents (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). In addition, schools have weathered severe staff shortages, high rates of absenteeism and quarantines, and rolling school closures (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Furthermore, students and educators continue to struggle with mental health challenges, higher rates of violence and misbehavior, and concerns about lost instructional time (Kuhfeld et al., 2020).

Wicked Problems

Racial/ethnic discipline disparities are wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973) and they can seem resistant to solutions (Churchman, 1967). Wicked problems are “those that are

complex, unpredictable, open ended, or intractable” (Head & Alford, 2015, p. 712). In this context, wicked refers to the challenges these problems present for anyone hoping to solve them (Head, 2008). Wicked problems are not easily defined, persist over time, and can shift in nature and scope, therefore, finding a successful solution remains challenging (Coyne, 2005).

Furthermore, attempts to resolve such complicated problems can often result in *more* problems (i.e., iatrogenic effects) via unexpected negative consequences, which can discourage attempts at reform (Sarason, 1971; Weick, 1984). As Head and Alford (2015) stated, “For complex social problems, precise measures of bureaucratic performance may not be possible. Add complex policies to the competing and contradictory goals that characterize public programs, and the task becomes Herculean” (p. 174). Rational-technical approaches often miss the complexity and systems of problems as well as potential solutions that are integral to improving a total situation (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019).

Decision-Making

Despite the growing needs of students and a lack of resources to meet those needs, school principals must make important decisions that impact student outcomes. A decision is a *conscious choice* between *two* or *more* competing alternatives made by an individual or group (Johnson & Kruse, 2009, p. 13). Decision-making is a cognitive process that guides human thought and action, and the decisions we make shape our lives (Johnson & Kruse, 2009). Driven by the need to eliminate the dissonance created by a problem or perceived inconsistency, decision-making consists of the following cognitive activities: Data search, data collection, data analysis, data synthesis, and multiple inferential leaps (Dewey, 1933, 1938). Importantly, decision-making lies at the heart of leadership and effective leaders are defined and distinguished by their decision-making skills (Johnson & Kruse, 2009).

School leaders make countless decisions every day, and their decisions are then executed through their behavior (Wang, 2019). It is particularly important for school leaders to be able to make the right decisions about school practices in their decision-making processes (Doğan & Demirbolat, 2021). This can lead to tensions because school leaders often make decisions with limited time in ever-changing contexts based on incomplete data, uncertainty, ambiguity, conflicting perspectives from stakeholders (Wang, 2019).

Data-Based Decision-Making

Data-based decision-making is a key component of interventions to improve student outcomes (Hattie, 2009), but school teams lack guidance in data-based decision-making for disproportionality (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2013). Despite policymakers' efforts and seemingly best intentions, studies have shed light on several barriers and challenges school leaders face when implementing data-based decision-making processes (Grissom et al., 2017). Research has shown that many principals distrust the validity and reliability of some data streams due to the *gotcha* tactics associated with high-stakes accountability reform (Fullan et al., 2015; Grissom et al., 2017). An additional barrier is the sheer volume of available data, which can be overwhelming (Mandinach & Schildkamp, 2021; Reeves, 2006; Schildkamp et al., 2014). Furthermore, many schools have no organizational routines in place to foster regular examinations of the data (Spillane et al., 2002). This is problematic because research shows that schools are lacking in the necessary knowledge and skills needed for managing, retrieving, and analyzing data (Reeves, 2006; Williamson, 2017).

For example, educational professionals may overly rely on their intuition when interpreting results and making decisions on formal achievement data (Vanlommel et al., 2017; Vanlommel & Schildkamp, 2019) or lack the capacity to understand reports and turn data into

actionable information (van der Kleij & Eggen, 2013; Mandinach & Gummer, 2016; Vanhoof et al., 2011). Furthermore, a lack of time to collect, analyze, or use data to inform instructional decisions proves to be a major challenge of data use (Albiladi et al., 2020; Mandinach, 2012; Marsh et al., 2006; Reeves, 2006). Unfortunately, most school leaders are not taught or trained to deal with sociopolitical or sociocultural matters; nor are they knowledgeable of their role and influence in shaping and defining meaning on issues of race, class, gender, and other areas of difference for and with other school members (Giroux, 1992; Young & Laible, 2000). In order to further understand the issues principals face when making decisions about student discipline, this study will explore how principals describe the concerns, pressures, and tensions that inform student discipline decisions.

Decision-Making: Sensemaking Processes

Although decision-making and sensemaking are seemingly dissimilar and divergent in nature, they are both “intimately related to the human being as an actor” (Boland, 2008, p. 55). For example, decision-making is objective and analytical, whereas sensemaking is subjective and form-giving (Simon, 1969). Additionally, decision-making is concerned with choosing a course of action *prior to acting*, while sensemaking is concerned with making sense of things *after the action* has occurred (Boland, 2008). Although many aspects of the two are in direct opposition to one another, human activity, or design science, brings them together at a point of convergence (Simon, 1969). Thus, human action becomes the point of convergence.

Sensemaking processes occur on an everyday basis as individuals interact within their environments (Weick et al., 1995a). Making sense of data does not happen in isolation (Mandinach & Schildkamp, 2021). Interpretive sensemaking processes shape and are shaped by the social and contextual surroundings of the sense maker(s) (Coburn et al., 2009; Coburn &

Turner, 2011; Lasater et al., 2021; Spillane, 2012). To get a sense of how sensemaking unfolds for school leaders, both on an individual and on a collective level, and how it contributes to eliminating opportunity gaps, it needs to be studied as it takes place in day-to-day practice (Datnow et al., 2012; Spillane, 2012), embedded in a specific organizational and political context (Coburn & Turner, 2011).

Importantly, sensemaking processes are particularly activated in ambiguous situations that challenge established knowledge and practices. (Weick et al., 2005). Furthermore, an actor's interpretation and enactment of extracted cues relies on contextually dependent conditions, traditions, and values, which interrelate to the beliefs, experience, and values of the individual actor, providing meaning to the situation (Weick, 1995b). While leaders shape the sensemaking of teachers in their buildings, leaders' sensemaking is strongly influenced by the perceptions of the organization's beliefs, values, ideologies, and practices (Evans, 2007). This interplay is particularly important in understanding how sensemaking can be shaped and reshaped under certain conditions.

Finally, sensemaking is rooted in identity construction (Weick, 2005). Data use for data-based decision-making may lead to perceived threats against professional identities (Connolly et al., 2018). Sensemaking of data prompts a constant re-examination of identity, and people are naturally inclined to try and validate their pre-existing beliefs and preserve their identity (Lasater et al., 2021). When examining discipline data, mental models with hidden biases may be lurking unknowingly (Wang, 2021). Therefore, to achieve equitable outcomes for all students, it becomes clear that principals must use their influence in shaping or reshaping the mental models of stakeholders (Conolly et al., 2018).

Moral and Ethical Decision-Making

School leadership, by its nature, is an ethical and moral undertaking (Begley, 2000; Furman, 2004; Greenfield, 2004; Langlois & Lapointe, 2010; Starratt, 1994). There is convincing empirical evidence of the interrelatedness of values, beliefs, language, action, management, and leadership behaviors (Greenfield, 2004). Additionally, ethical educational leadership expects K-12 administrators to think rationally, empathetically, and comprehensively before making an important ethical decision that may affect faculty, staff, parents, and especially students (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). Although, many studies have investigated ethical leadership (Arar et al., 2016; Dempster et al., 2004; Langlois & Lapointe, 2010; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005), there has been little research that correlates ethical leadership with ethical dilemmas in school leaders' decision-making around student discipline (Arar & Saiti, 2022).

School leaders face tensions when making ethical decisions (Lowery, 2018; Frick, 2008; Frick et al., 2012; Larsen & Hunter, 2014). In all situations and in all communities, regardless of their ethical and religious descriptors, there are conflicts between individuals as stakeholders and the educational institution (Lowery, 2018). The public interests that school leaders deal with daily represent a spectrum of individual moral systems that do not always align with the institution of the school (Lowery, 2018). The struggle can be characterized as a phenomenon of intrapersonal moral discord they experience as part of the process of deciding ethically when faced with difficult moral choices (Frick, 2008). School leaders grapple with tension between equality and equity, and they make a clear distinction between the best interests of the individual student and those of the collective student body, depending on context and circumstance (Frick

et al., 2012). This view adds a much-needed dimension to the ethical issue of individualism versus collectivism in classrooms (Frick et al., 2012).

Present Study

This qualitative study is a subset of the Kruse/Walls study. The study sought to understand how principals describe their concerns, pressures, and tensions when making discipline decisions. Additionally, the study investigated the ways in which principals delineate what makes a student discipline decision good.

Participants

This study included a large sample of fifty school principals responsible for administering student discipline across the state of Washington. A balanced representation of women and men; white school leaders and leaders of color; and new and veteran principals were included in the sample. Additionally, a balance of elementary, middle school, and high school principals working in urban, suburban, and rural communities were included in the sample.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted from February 2021 to June 2023. A five-part interview protocol consisting of fifteen principal discipline decision-making questions was utilized. The five parts included I) introductory questions, II) policy/organizational framing questions, III) examples/thinking on discipline decisions, IV) concluding questions, and V) luxury/backup questions.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed in two phases. First, recording and notes were transcribed, edited to remove potential identifiers, and coded for potential student discipline decision-making themes.

In the second phase, inductive and deductive coding processes were employed aligned with the study's theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Four major concerns surfaced including ensuring safety, maintaining positive relationships, upholding internal consistency, and adhering to laws, policies, and procedures. Safety was identified as both a concern and a pressure. Other pressures including performing in a public arena under scrutiny and incorporating the increasing complexities of the principalship were unveiled. Likewise, adhering to laws, policies, and procedures surfaced as both a concern and a tension. Additional tensions including negotiating organizational contexts and balancing core values and beliefs were illuminated. Furthermore, this study provided insight on how principals describe good discipline decisions. Results showed that principals define good discipline decisions as those that keep relationships intact, produce results, get resolved at the lowest level, and address the root cause. Finally, analyses led to a discipline decision-making cycle of tensions which included planning, learning, and enacting.

Summary

Chapter one provided an overview of school discipline and described the harmful effects of exclusionary discipline. Additionally, added complexities to the principalship including discipline disproportionality, implicit bias, external mandates, resource inequities, impacts of COVID-19, and wicked problems were featured. Moreover, decision-making elements such as data-based decision-making, sensemaking processes, and moral and ethical decision-making were described. Finally, an overview of the present study highlighting participants, data collection, and data analysis was provided.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, principals are viewed as key agents in decision-making. Given the high importance and interwoven complexities of school leaders' decision-making within schools and the charge to eliminate discipline inequities, this study sought to understand how principals describe their concerns, pressures, and tensions when making discipline decisions. Additionally, this study sought to understand how principals describe what makes a student discipline decision good.

To date, few studies make direct correlations between principal decision-making and more equitable outcomes for diverse student populations. Research suggests that educational equity for marginalized populations cannot be attained without first eliminating disparities in school discipline practices (Beck & Muschkin, 2012; Gregory et al., 2010; Losen & Martinez, 2020; Pflieger & Wiley, 2012). For discipline outcomes to change and for equity to be established, understanding how principals make decisions around student discipline can provide valuable insight and may hold the key in achieving equitable learning opportunities for all students.

History of School Discipline

Prior to the 1900s, corporal punishment was the most common form of discipline in schools (Raichle, 1977). As the use of corporal punishment (CP) declined over the years, schools' use of exclusionary discipline tactics increased (Owens & McLanahan, 2020). Although CP use is declining, it remains legal in nineteen states, where more than 125,000 students per year get paddled for breaking school rules (Broussard et al. 2013; Gagnon et al. 2014). While the use of CP is isolated to certain geographical regions, support for its use exists within the same national context as the excessive use of suspensions, expulsions, and youth adjudication

(Kennedy et al., 2017). Although research has documented the negative effects of CP, suspension, and expulsion in schools (American Academy of Pediatrics 2013; American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Zamani and Farmer, 2009), educators persist in using these harsh punishments.

Over the last four decades, suspensions and expulsions rates have increased significantly (Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2018; Owens & McLanahan, 2020). In the late 80s and 90s, the onset of school shootings and violence led to concerns of safety nationwide, thus zero tolerance policies and gun-free schools were initiated (Gjelten, 2015). These policies assigned explicit, predetermined punishments to specific violations of school rules, regardless of the situation or the context of the behavior (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Kang-Brown et al., 2013). The shifts in school discipline mandates through the decades have sparked and continue to spark rigorous debates between proponents of a softer means of managing behavior and critics who believed harsh punishments are necessary to minimize disruption (Raichle, 1977).

Nationwide, more than 2.7 million K–12 public school students received one or more out-of-school suspensions in the 2015–2016 academic year (Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2018). Students with disabilities, non-heterosexual youth, low socioeconomic status students, low-performing students, Black, Latinx, and male students experience exclusionary discipline (e.g., suspensions and expulsions) at higher rates than their peers (Shores et al., 2020; Skiba et al., 2014; Welsh & Little, 2018). Although vulnerable populations experience suspensions and expulsions at higher rates than their peers, these differences cannot be solely attributed to socioeconomic status or increased misbehavior (Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Welsh & Little, 2018).

Disparities appear to be driven in part by bias and differential disciplinary policies across schools rather than being fully explainable by differences in underlying behavior across subgroups (Barrett et al., 2017; Curran, 2017; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Skiba et al., 2011; Welch & Payne, 2010). Additionally, the use of out-of-school suspension is not restricted to serious, safety-threatening behaviors, but rather is distributed across a wide range of infractions (Skiba et al., 2014). The majority of offenses for which students are suspended appear to be non-violent, minor to moderate infractions, such as disobedience and disrespect (Raffaele Mendez, 2003; Skiba et al., 1997), defiance (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008), attendance problems (Morgan-D'Atrio et al., 1996), failing to report to detention (Rosen, 1997), and general classroom disruption (Brooks et al., 2000). Expulsion appears to be used more selectively, and more likely to be reserved for seriously disruptive, violent, or criminal behavior (Heaviside et al., 1998). It is racial minorities, particularly Black students, boys, students in special education, and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds that tend to be disproportionately disciplined the most (Gregory et al., 2010; Losen, 2015; Pearman et al., 2019).

In 2014, to shine a light on the above disparity issues, the Obama administration issued regulatory guidance to eliminate discriminatory school disciplinary practices and promote more equitable school climates. As a result, educators and policy makers across the United States responded to calls by revising school discipline policies, limiting, or prohibiting the use of suspensions for younger students and minor misbehavior (Anderson et al., 2019). To assist educators, researchers are seeking to identify promising, proactive practices likely to reduce student misbehavior and the need for exclusionary discipline (Bradshaw et al., 2012; Gregory et al., 2014). Additionally, researchers are examining how school leaders with discipline decision-making power can eliminate harmful discipline practices (Riordan, 2006). Multiple studies have

shown that principals' attitudes, beliefs, and practices relevant to discipline influence the rates of suspension and expulsion in their schools (Heilbrun et al, 2015; Wu et al., 1982). The leadership of principals, including their expectations about student performance and attitudes about student behavior, meaningfully influence school outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Marks & Printy, 2003; Youngs & King, 2002).

Despite the advances in research on promising and more educationally sound practices to both reduce instances of misconduct and respond with less punitive approaches, discipline disparity gaps remain (Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021). For example, the most recent Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) report on exclusionary discipline, released June 2021, showed that in 2017-2018, Black boys received both in-school suspensions (20.1%) and out-of-school suspensions (24.9%) at rates more than three times their share of total student enrollment (7.7%), the largest disparity across all race/ethnicity and sex groupings. Disparities worsen when you examine the intersection between race and sex. According to the 2017-18 CRDC data, Black girls were the only group across all races or ethnicities for girls where a disparity in school suspensions was observed. Black girls accounted for 11.1 percent of in-school suspensions and 13.3 percent of out-of-school suspensions, which is almost two times their share of total student enrollment of 7.4 percent. Additionally, students with disabilities were also overrepresented in exclusionary disciplinary actions as shown by CRDC data from 2017-18. Despite representing only 13 percent of the student population, they represented 25 percent of all students who received one or more out-of-school suspensions and 15 percent of those who were expelled without educational services in 2017-18.

While civil rights groups praised the actions of the Obama administration for addressing longstanding concerns about racial equity, some conservative critics of the approach said it led

schools to adopt ineffective disciplinary alternatives, leading to disruptive classroom environments (Blad, 2021). Following a shooting at a Parkland, Florida high school in which a former student shot and killed 17 students and staff members in 2018, the Trump administration established the Federal Commission on School Safety to “review safety practices and make meaningful and actionable recommendations of best practices to keep students safe” (Devos et al., 2018, p. 6). This action was prompted by survivors’ families and GOP members of Congress claiming an alternative discipline program created by the Broward County district was to blame (Blad, 2021). The report, which included a review of the Obama Administration’s 2014 guidance on reducing discriminatory discipline in schools, concluded, “The Commission is deeply troubled that the Guidance, while well-intentioned, may have paradoxically contributed to making schools less safe” (Devos et al., 2018, p. 72). Furthermore, the report concluded that “maintaining order in schools is a key to keeping schools safe” and “federal policies that adversely impact maintaining order in schools should be corrected” (p. 67). In 2018, the Trump administration rescinded the Obama’s 2014 regulatory guidance on school discipline (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights & U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, 2018).

Civil rights groups argued the Commission’s justification distracted from needed debates about maintaining school safety, supporting vulnerable students, and supporting students of color (Blad, 2021). However, according to surveys, school administrators did not attribute changes in their school discipline policies to the Obama directive (Blad, 2021). Throughout the debate, federal data showed that students of color and students with disabilities continued to be disciplined at higher rates than their peers, even though overall rates of suspensions and expulsions showed declines in some areas (Blad, 2021).

While some reports nationwide showed a reduction in discipline disparities, a report issued by Losen et al. (2022) concluded that in the 2020-2021 school year, interrupted data collection due to COVID-19 school closures, resulted in “potentially misleading data” (p. 5). Upon an analysis of the data, Losen et al. (2022) concluded that many school districts in California were, in fact, on course for substantially higher rates of school suspension and larger racial disparities among those suspended. As stated by Losen et al. (2022), “With the reduced pressure that comes with a lack of troubling information, some districts may not recognize the need to invest in discipline reform measures” (p. 6).

Upon the presidential inauguration in 2021, President Biden issued an Executive Order including a call to explore fairness in school discipline, reopening one of the most contentious education civil rights debates in recent years (Blad, 2021). As a result, the government solicited public comment on discipline and school climate and “how best to support and build schools’ capacity to promote positive, inclusive, safe, and supportive school climates in a nondiscriminatory manner” (Department of Commerce; U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The decision to reopen the debate on school discipline followed dramatic contrasts in how the Obama and Trump administrations handled the issue (Blad, 2021). It also came after state attorneys general urged the Biden administration to revisit the issue and as the nation continues painful debates about the realities of systemic racism (Blad, 2021).

In 2022, the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR), and Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) issued six guidance documents focused on behavior support and discipline of students with disabilities, renewing the expectation that school districts must find ways to support behavior related needs without first resorting to suspension and/or expulsion due to the increased mental health related concerns for our nation’s students, caused,

in part by the COVID-19 pandemic. Both OCR and OSEP cited concerns about the statistics surrounding suspension and expulsion of students with disabilities in comparison to their nondisabled peers (Williams, 2022). For example, in OSEP’s Dear Colleague letter (2022), the agency notes, “school-age students with disabilities served under IDEA represented 13.2 percent of total student enrollment but received 20.5 percent of one or more in-school suspensions and 24.5 percent of one or more out-of-school suspensions.” To address these concerns, OSEP and OCR both strongly encourage use of proactive, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support practices that are focused on the whole child and inclusive of academic, behavioral, social, and emotional support (Williams, 2022). In addition, both agencies continue to remind school districts of their ongoing obligations to hold timely and thorough manifestation determinations for students with disabilities, under both Section 504 and IDEA, prior to enacting any disciplinary change in placement (Williams, 2022).

Issues of Practice

Despite the American promise of equal educational opportunity for all students outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), persistent achievement gaps among more and less advantaged groups of students remain, along with the opportunity gaps that create disparate outcomes (Chu & Ready, 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2022; Cook-Harvey et al., 2016). To advance equity and excellence throughout our nation’s schools for students of color, low-income students, English learners, students with disabilities, and those who are homeless or in foster care, Cook-Harvey et al. (2016) encourage states, districts, communities, and schools to leverage educational opportunity through four major provisions contained in the Every Student Succeeds Act: (1) access to learning opportunities focused on higher-order thinking skills; (2) multiple measures of equity; (3) resource equity; and (4) evidence-based interventions. As Cook-Harvey

et al (2016) states, “If federal and state officials approach ESSA through an equity lens, and if communities and stakeholders are informed and engaged, we could make serious progress toward the values of fairness and equity we espouse as a nation but have had so much difficulty realizing” (p. 21).

Educational Equity

Educational equity can be defined as when educational policies, practices, interactions, and resources are representative of, constructed by, and responsive to all people so that each individual has access to, meaningfully participates in, and has positive outcomes from high quality learning experiences, regardless of individual characteristics and group memberships (Fraser, 2008). Equity requires remedies to redress historic injustices that have prevented or diminished access to quality learning experiences for children and youth (Kranich, 2001). In schools, equity indicators include school climate, chronic absenteeism, extended-year graduation rates, access to college and career-ready curriculum, and student discipline (Kostyo et al., 2018). These equity indicators can reveal the disparities that undermine opportunity because they must be reported for all student groups—by student race and ethnicity, economic disadvantage, language status, and special education status (Kostyo et al., 2018).

School Discipline Disparities

School discipline inequities are evidenced by rates of in-school and out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, school-related arrests, referrals to law enforcement, and incidences of school violence (including bullying and harassment) (Kostyo et al., 2018). Over the past several decades, researchers have found that the overuse of suspensions and expulsions, particularly for students of color, has contributed significantly to dropout rates and the perpetuation of the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Kim et al., 2010). Further, students of color and those with

disabilities are suspended at a rate that is disproportionate to that of their White and nondisabled peers for comparable behaviors (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021). Additionally, research (e.g., Huang & Cornell, 2018; Lacoé & Steinberg, 2019) has shown exclusionary discipline deprives students of a positive school environment and harms academic achievement, even for non-disciplined students. As a result, many school leaders have turned to alternative discipline practices such as restorative justice and PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) in an effort to achieve more equitable discipline outcomes (Gregory et al., 2021).

This is of particular importance as educators, researchers, and policymakers seeking to provide equitable opportunities in public schools are increasingly concerned about exclusionary practices and their harmful consequences (Fabelo et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2010; Skiba & Losen, 2015; Losen & Martinez, 2020; Mittleman, 2018; Rodriguez & Welsh, 2022; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). A growing body of research has concluded that disparate levels of exclusionary discipline contribute to large inequities in educational opportunity, especially for students historically marginalized and left behind (Gregory et al., 2010; Losen & Martinez, 2020; Sullivan et al., 2014). To address persistent inequity and disparate outcomes between more and less advantaged students, in part caused by exclusionary discipline practices, educational policy and research is shifting efforts towards eliminating opportunity gaps for all students (Cardichon & Darling-Hammond 2020; Curran, 2016, 2020; Green et al., 2020; Losen & Martinez, 2020). Opportunity gaps result when high and disparate levels of exclusionary discipline as measured by days of lost instructional time contribute to large inequities in educational opportunity (Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Losen & Martinez, 2020; Marcotte, 2008). The disproportionate use of

exclusionary discipline is one factor that deprives groups of students of their opportunity to learn (Darling-Hammond, 2022; Jones et al., 2018; Kostyo et al., 2018).

Accountability Models

Professional accountability models expanded to include school climate and discipline measures with the passage of ESSA (2015). Professional accountability models are largely intended to encourage educators to remain committed to, and accountable for, student achievement and learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Asher, 1991; Erdağ & Karadağ, 2017; Klinger et al., 2011; O'Day, 2002; Rahmatollahi & Zenouzagh, 2021; Snyder & Bristol, 2015). Additionally, current accountability models come with the expectation that decision makers use multiple sources of data to identify appropriate interventions, support, and opportunities for students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014; Cardichon & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Therefore, these accountability models create complex, multi-faceted operational decision-making work environments for principals to navigate through (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Although there is a growing body of research on data-informed decision-making (Shen et al., 2012), there is relatively little known regarding the ways in which principals use available data to inform decision-making around student discipline and continuous school improvement.

Principal Decision-Making and Student Discipline

In the paragraphs below, findings from studies conducted by Larsen and Hunter (2014); DeMatthews and Serafini (2019); Gullo and Beachum (2020); and Kennedy et al. (2017) are highlighted. While there is limited research focusing on student discipline decision-making from the school principal's perspective, the studies below provide some important insight on principal decision-making in an era of high stakes performance accountability models. Managerial and

leadership aspects; organizational contexts; laws, policies, and procedures; and core values and beliefs are often at odds with one another and can lead to tensions for principals when making decisions.

Larsen and Hunter (2014)

In a study conducted by Larsen and Hunter (2014), the researchers explore how secondary school principals form decisions relevant to mandated change and school improvement that are simultaneously in tension with their core values and espoused beliefs. Through surveys and focused interviews with secondary school administrators in the Pacific Northwest, this study examines and describes how principals manage conflicting demands, where they must meet moral obligations to implement mandated change, and yet remain true to their core values and beliefs when mandates create internal disequilibrium. Larsen and Hunter (2014) conclude that while student discipline decisions emerge as black-and-white decisions, they may be, in fact, tinged with ambiguity if they require the usage of personal/professional values in lieu of relying on law, policy, or procedure. Additional results show secondary administrators think about and consider their core values related to students and relationships as they navigate the “political” issues in mandates. Specific to student discipline, principals in the Larsen and Hunter’s (2014) study report decision-making tensions with personal beliefs and values; gray areas that don’t fit the mold; complications with social media; navigating around athletic codes and special circumstances; consistency as every situation is different; a range of possible consequences prescribed by policy or the school handbook; IEP constraints; and fear of legal or political backlash.

In the responses of the participants, Larsen and Hunter (2014) note three major core values expressed: (1) students’ needs should be first; the expectations of mandates should be

second; (2) the organization must maintain flexibility to meet the demands of variability; and (3) relationships are of primary importance. Moreover, results show administrators believe that they should have the flexibility and authority to decide what parts of mandates match their context, and what parts do not. Importantly, they consider variability as the rule and standardization as the exception. In sum, they believe all mandates and decisions should not be rigid, and they should have the flexibility to make decisions guided by context.

This reveals the deep cognitive process of a principal attempting to internally create meaningful decisions that balance a commitment to core values, while managing the pressure to respond to mandates (Larsen & Hunter, 2014). Additional findings from Larsen and Hunter's (2014) study show secondary principals weigh how students and relationships will be impacted in their final decision choices. Furthermore, they consider the potential backlash that may ensue if their decisions prioritize students and relationships at the expense of the requirements of mandates. While this study gives us a glimpse of administrator cognition related to mandate leadership, it also reveals that more research is needed to better understand how administrators balance moral leadership in an age of centralized mandates (Larsen & Hunter, 2014).

DeMatthews and Serafini (2019)

In a study conducted by DeMatthews and Serafini (2019), the researchers examine the manner in which the principals in the study were impacted by high stakes accountability policies and pressures and how their ethical decision-making processes were bounded by time and available information; job demands; district and state culture; competition and self-interest; and a belief in quantitative measurements to evaluate performance. DeMatthews and Serafini (2019) conclude principals do not work in a vacuum. Instead, they are social individuals impacted by the organizational contexts of their schools and districts as well as through social interactions

that lead to opportunities for self-enhancement or perceived self-threat. In this context, ethical leadership emerges from a dynamic process where a principal can handle a similar ethical decision differently on different occasions. While principals in the study varied in beliefs about high-stakes accountability, they shared common feelings about pressure, self-legitimacy, and factors that contribute to ethical and unethical behavior. Participants reported feeling compelled to compete with peers on simplistic and unfair measures and looking to escape their positions for personal gain or to improve their physical and mental health. “These findings have important implications for future research and how principals are professionally prepared” (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019, p. 16).

Additionally, DeMatthews & Serafini (2019) assert additional research is needed to explore the ways principals make sense of high-stakes accountability policies and their roles as ethical and moral stewards. “The field would benefit from additional research observing and interviewing principals, assistant principals, teachers, and district administrators on a broad range of accountability policies as well as a focus on ethical leadership dilemmas associated with the principalship” (p. 16). Moreover, “research focused on other high-stakes accountability policies and in different contexts would also add to the literature and understandings of ethical leadership” (p. 16). However, DeMatthews and Serafini (2019) caution that “the sensitivity of investigating unethical behavior creates significant barriers for researchers to gain access, build trust, and protect participants,” thus, “researchers must design studies that allow for the building rapport and relationships with local districts and principals” (pp. 16-17).

Gullo and Beachum (2020)

A study conducted by Gullo and Beachum (2020) aimed to better understand how principals make discipline decisions and how implicit bias might interfere in these decisions.

This qualitative study used in-depth interviews and document analysis with six mid-Atlantic principals to explore their student discipline decision-making processes. The data revealed principals make student discipline decisions in a four-part recursive process relevant to student individualization and equity. In step one, relationships influence communication and the gathering of data/information. In step two, principals consider policy and utilize flexibility to influence options. In step three, morality influences the choice selection based on the goal of discipline. Finally, in step four, principals utilize experiences to evaluate their efficacy in a recursive loop.

The findings “allow for targeted research of the decision-making process and potential consideration of practical interventions and curricular design for principal preparation programs that would allow for greater equity in discipline following office referrals” (Gullo & Beachum, 2020, p. 1). Gullo and Beachum (2020) assert, “To bridge the gap between research and current school practices, scholars much communicate with school leaders to understand the contextualized practices that occur in schools and how practitioners face the challenges of leading 21st century learning communities (p. 2). Gullo and Beachum (2020) task educational leaders to “continue to reflect upon this decision-making process in ways that will increase disciplinary equity for students and create inclusive and equitable schools” (p. 10).

Kennedy et al. (2017)

Kennedy et al. (2017) conducted a grounded theory study of how Title I middle school administrators determine students’ punishments using interviews with 27 Florida administrators from schools allowing corporal punishment. Results show administrators’ choices were shaped by their upbringings, their experiences as parents, their job requirements, the expectations of students’ parents, and fears of reprisal. Administrators in the study expressed simultaneous

desires to develop the child while deterring future misbehavior. Considering the students as individuals and developing relationships created disciplinary inconsistencies and often violated school codes of conduct but resulted in more instructional and effective discipline. Principals sometimes did not believe in certain forms of punishment and were forced to compromise on values by following the student code of conduct. When paired with academic outcomes, these compromises left principals with feelings of guilt or pride depending on the situation. They described the outcomes of their decision-making as emotional work that entailed contradictions and compromises.

Findings from this study suggest that a two-pronged approach providing both pressure and support for change (Fullan & Fullan, 1993) might dissuade educators from using harmful practices and encourage them to replace these practices with more positive ones (Kennedy et al, 2017). This approach would include policy overhauls banning punitive practices and supporting job-embedded professional development to teach educators new approaches that could work in their contexts (Croft et al., 2010). Kennedy et al. (2017) conclude, “To encourage positive preventive and responsive school discipline practices, policies must address administrators’ misconceptions about ineffective practices by providing both pressure and support for change” p. 243). However, without sufficient positive alternatives, educators are likely to replace one ineffective harmful practice with another, particularly if their underlying beliefs and biases are not addressed (Broussard et al. 2013).

Kennedy et al. (2017) assert, “Future research should examine and evaluate how administrators’ beliefs and practices change from punitive to responsive orientations with a particular focus on the relationship between pressure and support in motivating these changes” (p. 272). Additionally, “Future studies should also target the impact of belief change on

discipline disparities, inquiring into the types of pressure and support necessary to eliminate educators' disproportionate coding and punishing of indiscipline among students of color and those from low-income backgrounds" (p. 272). In sum, "Providing a more supportive learning environment for all students requires shifts in educators' beliefs and practices toward safe and positive discipline strategies (p. 272).

Summary of Commonalities

Principal leadership is believed to be the second most influential school-based factor that influences student performance after classroom instruction (Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2008). However, principals do not operate as isolated actors in decision-making processes separated from outside influences or events (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Kennedy et al., 2017; Larsen & Hunter, 2014). Leadership and decision-making occur in complex organizations and are guided by influence, advice, and pressure emanating from multiple stakeholders including teachers, parents, students, and community members (Larsen & Hunter, 2014; Shaked & Schechter, 2019).

School principals and members of their leadership team (i.e., assistant principals) are primarily responsible for making decisions about disciplinary responses to behavioral issues in a school (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019; Hartzell & Petrie, 1992). Although assistant principals make the day-to-day decisions around student conduct and behavior, it is often clear that the authority for decisions comes from the principals (Williams et al., 2023). Even in cases where decision-making processes are often collaborative and participatory, the principal's role in formal decision-making remains the driver the disciplinary environment (Levin & Datnow, 2012).

Furthermore, when infractions occur, administrators typically have a wide range of discipline options to consider including speaking to the student/parents, suspending students

from the classroom, expelling students from school (if approved by the school district), or even reporting students to the police (DeMatthews et al., 2017, Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001; Skiba et al., 2014). Principals' attitudes towards discipline tend to be reflected in their behavior; principals who favor exclusion rather than prevention were more likely to assign out-of-school suspension or expulsion (Kennedy et al., 2017; Skiba et al., 2014). To a large extent, evidence shows that principals can, and do, ignore state and district policies (Anderson, 2018; Steinberg & Lacoë, 2018). In that sense, principals act as the policymakers (Koyama, 2013; Sorenson et al., 2022).

With the passage of ESSA (2015), school principals were charged with leading school discipline change initiatives as a result of new student discipline mandates attached to performance accountability models. Decision-making regarding discipline warrants its own challenges inclusive of school safety, student education, equity, behavior modification, and policy adherence (Guillo & Beachum, 2020). The decision-maker must ensure the education of all students, including innocents, offenders, and victims, remains equitable in a safe and supportive environment while considering how to best modify behavior and attend to policy requirements (Guillo & Beachum, 2020). For a school principal, the security of clearly articulated mandates is often challenged by the reality of values-laden questions as to whether externally imposed requirements are congruent with the administrator's fundamental beliefs (Gullo & Beachum, 2020; Larsen & Hunter, 2014).

Although principals' decision-making seems to be informed by commonly held core values and beliefs, not all principals use similar strategies to resolve cognitive dissonance related to implementing mandates (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Larsen & Hunter, 2014). Studies have shown that leaders must consider local context while managing mandates; organizational

variability is expected, and rigid adherence to mandates is unrealistic (e.g., DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Larsen & Hunter, 2014). Supporting this conclusion, prior RAND change agent studies conducted in the 1970s showed change initiatives must be adapted to fit the organizational context, and nonrational aspects of change impact outcomes (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975). Additional studies have shown that context and variability are key leadership issues in managing change and school organizations, thus, school leaders must design actions that balance mandate demands and deeply held values and beliefs (e.g., Fullan, 1996, 1999, 2001).

Moreover, studies have found that individuals' judgments and behaviors are dependent on the organizational conditions and situational forces in which they work (e.g., DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019). The likelihood of individuals' unethical behavior and feelings of depletion may increase when excessively difficult goals are assigned (Zhang et al., 2015). Principals work in a context where districts and state education agencies set goals and narrow accountability measures (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019). The use of narrow measures for complex social and educational issues creates significant challenges to principals (Churchman, 1967). These goals are further complicated by a lack of resources, which can make achieving goals "Herculean" and "wicked problems that are resistant to solutions" (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019, p. 6). Such challenging problems coupled with a narrow focus on measurable goals, can create powerful threats to principals (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019).

Additionally, while prescriptive discipline, or the school code of conduct that defines specific outcomes for specific behavioral infractions, might influence choices made by school principals when selecting appropriate discipline, studies have shown it is not the only factor influencing decisions-especially for subjective discipline decisions (e.g., Girvan et al., 2016;

Kennedy et al., 2017). When principals receive office disciplinary referrals with limited or vague information, they are faced with complex decision-making. McIntosh et al. (2014) refer to this kind of a scenario as a “vulnerable decision point” and hence, an opportunistic point for implicit bias to influence the decision. “In general, implicit biases tend to affect decisions that involve more uncertainty, ambiguity, or discretion . . . there is more likely to be disproportionality (particularly for African American students) in ODRs and suspensions for more subjective problem behaviors” (McIntosh et al., 2014, p. 10). As such, as stated by Gullo and Beachum (2020), “It is important to consider the code of conduct as a guide but also the entire decision-making process employed by school principals when ascertaining how implicit bias might play a role” (p. 4).

Enumeration of Tensions, Pressures, and Concerns

Studies have shown that external mandates with high stakes accountability measures impact the decision-making and actions of school principals, under the penalty of non-compliance (e.g., Koyama, 2013; DeMatthews & Serafini, 2017; Larsen & Hunter, 2014). For example, research (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Pollock et al., 2015) has suggested high stakes accountability measures may moderate the way that principals carry out their work and limit their choices in exercising their professional autonomy. As Knapp and Feldman (2012) described, accountability provisions are an “array of political, bureaucratic, and market-driven supports and constraints aimed at defining what educators in the school should be doing and producing” (p. 2). Moreover, as observed by Koyama (2013), accountability is much “messier and more complex and contested than supporters might lead one to believe” (p. 22). With the implementation of school discipline mandates, researchers have found principal discipline decision-making tensions with (1) managerial and leadership aspects of the principalship (Frick

et al., 2011; Kennedy et al., 2017; Tobin, 2014); (2) organizational contexts (Findlay, 2015; Larsen & Hunter, 2014); (3) laws, policies, and procedures (Findlay, 2015; Kafka, 2011; Kennedy et al., 2017; Larsen & Hunter, 2014); and (4) core values and beliefs (Kennedy et al., 2017; Larsen & Hunter, 2014).

Managerial and Leadership Aspects

Research has shown that tensions between the managerial and leadership aspects of the principalship may arise with the pressures of external discipline mandates (e.g., Frick, 2011). Managerial aspects of the principalship require technical skills of managing resources (including people) and activities while leadership aspects involve taking initiative and risks, transforming existing goals, and even adding new ones (Cuban, 1988). Managers direct the workforce to complete the required tasks the most efficient way, and leaders tend to inspire or venture into new ways of doing things (Catano & Stronge, 2007). Principals must be both managers and leaders simultaneously (Tobin, 2014). As Tobin (2014) concluded, today's school principal is confronted with an enormous task of trying to not only do the right thing, but to do it the right way.

Organizational Contexts

Additionally, studies have shown that the organizational contexts in which principals work may impact discipline decision-making, thereby causing tension (e.g., Kennedy et al., 2017; Larsen & Hunter, 2014). Researchers have found that handling student discipline and determining consequences may cause administrators to negotiate contradictions between their beliefs and practices and to make compromises they are not always comfortable making (e.g., Kennedy et al., 2017; Larsen & Hunter, 2017). For example, studies have shown that concerns about keeping their jobs (Kennedy et al., 2017); satisfying the demands of students' parents

(Findlay, 2015; Kenney et al., 2017), and avoiding lawsuits (Kennedy et al., 2017; Larsen & Hunter, 2014) may cause internal conflict and impact decision-making (Kennedy et al., 2017). Furthermore, balancing supportive and punitive approaches to student behavior and negotiating tensions between parental and bureaucratic orientations may lead to what principals in a study conducted by Kennedy et al. (2017) refer to as “emotional work” (p. 265).

Laws, Policies, and Procedures

In addition, administrators may experience tensions when they compromise and assign punishments they do not believe in (Kennedy et al., 2017). Studies have shown that administrators operate within defined parameters at the federal, state, district, and school levels when determining disciplinary consequences, illustrating the centralization of mandating these consequences (e.g., Kafka 2011). As observed by Larsen & Hunter (2017), the existence of guidelines provides an easy and widely accepted range of possible consequences prescribed by policy or the code of conduct, which may be included in a discipline matrix or school handbook. Researchers have found that administrators simultaneously adhere to the code of conduct while choosing a punishment they deem to be most appropriate in each case (e.g., Findlay, 2015; Kennedy et al., 2017; Larsen & Hunter, 2014), which may lead to internal conflict when making decisions around student discipline.

Core Values and Beliefs

Moreover, studies have shown that principals face internal conflicts with discipline mandates that don't always mesh with their core values (Kennedy et al., 2017; Larsen & Hunter, 2014). For example, administrators in a study conducted by Kennedy et al. (2017) often felt pressured to use corporal punishment (CP), even if they disagreed with it. In these instances, CP was not used as a tool believed to contribute to children's moral development but rather as a

punitive response that some administrators, as bureaucratic enforcers of school- or district-level policies, felt required to use. In a separate study, administrators identified clashes with implementing discipline mandates and prioritizing relationships with students (Larsen & Hunter, 2014). Principals weigh how students and relationships will be impacted in their final decision choices. Furthermore, they consider the potential backlash that may ensue if their decisions prioritize students and relationships at the expense of the requirements of mandates (Larsen & Hunter, 2014). Additional studies have shown that administrators face tensions when determining appropriate consequences for students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (Frick et al., 2013; Larsen & Hunter, 2014). For example, a behavioral infraction may warrant a ten-day suspension on a discipline matrix for a typical student, but if ten days have already been reached by a student on an IEP, decision-making is no longer black and white and may be at odds with core values and beliefs (Larsen & Hunter, 2014). In sum, principals weigh mandates, compare those against their core values, and then consider how to meet the prescribed requirement while maintaining their commitment to their core values (Larsen & Hunter, 2014). Importantly, principals grapple with these tensions in a political arena under watchful eyes and public scrutiny.

Implications for Current Practice and Principal Work

The work of contemporary school principals is intensifying in terms of its complexity and volume (Pollock et al., 2015, p. 537). School principals are experiencing increased expectations at work in terms of the number of tasks they are expected to undertake, the duration of time they are required to complete those tasks, and the many challenges they face at their work (Pollock et al., 2015, p. 537). As a result, researchers have called for policy overhauls (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019), alternative discipline strategies (Sorenson et al., 2022), and modifications to

principal preparation programs (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Kennedy et al., 2017; Tamadoni et al., 2021) to meet the needs of the changing landscape in schools.

Policy

New policies with alternative evaluation and accountability processes, such as community-based accountability models (Vasquez et al., 2014), are necessary to advance equity and achievement for all. As DeMatthews and Serafini (2019) asserted, “Educating a diverse student population within a country with a troubling history of racism, classism, ableism, sexism, xenophobia and other forms of marginalization suggest that simplistic measures and top-down policies will not provide principals and schools with the foci needed to enact change” (p.17). The perpetuation of traditional policies will continue to “put principals in a position of difficulty and in doing so, contribute to their burnout and ethical lapses” (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019, p.17). In order to increase equitable outcomes for all students, policies must evolve.

Alternative Discipline Strategies

Additionally, researchers have observed a need for further study and an increase in resources to support the successful implementation of alternative discipline strategies (e.g., Kennedy et al., 2017). Results from a study conducted by Sorenson (2022) support efforts to find alternative strategies to reduce minor behavioral offenses. Researchers and practitioners are hard at work implementing, studying, and scaling-up alternative approaches to discipline that emphasize prevention through positive behavioral support and social and emotional learning (e.g., Osher et al., 2010). Importantly, a recent meta-analysis shows that discipline alternatives, or non-punitive school interventions, have the potential to effectively eliminate the need for exclusionary discipline (Valdebenito et al., 2019). Without sufficient positive alternatives to exclusionary discipline and the resources and support necessary to successfully implement such

alternatives, principals are likely to replace one ineffective harmful practice with another (Broussard et al., 2013).

Leadership Preparatory Programs

As a result of the increasing demands and complexity of the job of school principal, researchers have concluded modifications to leadership preparatory programs are necessary to prepare individuals for the principalship (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Golann & Jones, 2021; Gullo & Beachum, 2020; Tamadoni et al., 2021). Studies have shown philosophical beliefs shape administrators' decisions regarding student discipline (Gullo & Beachum, 2020; Mukuria 2002; Smith & Hains, 2012). Importantly, these implicit and explicit beliefs lead to differential treatment of students (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Because of these factors, Gullo and Beachum (2020) assert that to reduce the impacts of implicit bias, professional development for current and future school principals is necessary.

Furthermore, studies have suggested a need to build principal capacity in understanding the decision-making process in relation to school discipline (Gullo & Beachum, 2020). Practitioner beliefs and attitudes, which may be highly context dependent, play an important role in how policies such as discipline mandates, will be implemented (Anderson & McKenzie, 2022; Golann & Jones, 2021; Spillane et al., 2002). Moreover, individuals do not rely only on their personal identities, school contexts, and social networks, as prior work has demonstrated (Coburn, 2001, 2005; Golan & Jones, 2021; Spillane et al., 2002), but also draw from broader societal logics (e.g., patterns of practices, assumptions, and values) in making decisions. Additionally, in a study conducted by Kennedy et al. (2017), results showed that administrators most often attributed their ultimate decisions for consequences of student misconduct to their own experiences from childhood or as parents. Given the relationship between administrator

attitudes and exclusionary discipline use (Mukuria, 2002; Skiba et al., 2014), such beliefs and attitudes are nontrivial. Because discipline decision-making is impacted by these important factors, Gullo and Beachum (2020) task school leaders to “continue to reflect upon the decision-making process in ways that will increase disciplinary equity for students and create inclusive and equitable schools” (p. 10).

Disconnects Between Aspirational Practices and Reality of the School

Importantly, there may be local factors that prevent full implementation of external discipline mandates, aspirational practices, and discipline reform. Studies have shown that successful policy implementation requires resources and capacity, and if a policy’s demands outweigh the ability or will of local actors, implementation fidelity may suffer (e.g., Cohen et al., 2007; Hill & Hupe, 2003; Matland, 1995; McLaughlin, 1987). As conveyed by Darling-Hammond (2022), schools need resources to address educational inequities and inequalities. According to Darling-Hammond (2022), the anatomy of inequality includes dysfunctional schools; unequal access to a thinking curriculum; unequal access to well-prepared educators; inadequate and unequal school resources; and poverty and segregation. Compounding the problem of the current reality in schools, researchers have found a disconnect between policy intent (at the state-level) and perception (at the local level) may create implementation issues, as policy makers have been characterized as “ignorant of practice” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 522).

Moreover, Kennedy et al. (2017) asserted, “School administrators face the triple challenge of negotiating cultural orientations toward punitive discipline, needing logistically feasible and legally defensible consequences for students’ challenging behaviors when prevention strategies prove insufficient, and lacking training and infrastructural support to successfully implement alternatives to current rigid and punitive discipline matrices” (p. 267). In

addition, DeMatthews & Serafini (2019) found that despite the best intentions of socially conscious leaders, a decision option that is equitable for all students may not be immediately available in struggling schools that have not had the previous leadership or district support to establish systems and practices that meet the diverse social and emotional needs of students and their families. Furthermore, researchers have found school administrators attribute a lack of staffing and space for in-school options (Gray et al., 2017); unawareness or impracticality of alternative approaches (Anderson & McKenzie, 2022); and lack of buy-in due to local preferences and needs (Anderson & McKenzie, 2022) as further barriers to discipline reform. Policy implementation suffers when there is more conflict with local practice, or when requirements outweigh the capabilities/resources of local actors (Belansky et al., 2009; Cohen et al., 2007; Matland, 1995; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). To fulfill the promise of a quality education for each and every child, public schooling in the United States must change. (Darling-Hammond, 2022). As Darling-Hammond (2022) asserted, “It will do no good to exhort educators to change their beliefs and practices so long as their schools are constrained by the factory-model designs of a century ago, rooted in layers of laws and regulations that hold them in place (p. 1). “To create better and more equitable schools for the future, and to do so at scale, we will also need to change the many *policies* that keep public education tied to its past and prevent educators from solving the pressing problems we face” (Darling-Hammond, 2022, p. 1).

Conclusion

The job expectations for school principals are enormous and compel principals to take on many roles, including the role of teacher, psychologist, social worker, facilities manager, assessment expert, educational visionary, diplomat, mentor, PR director coach, and cheerleader

(Davis, et.al. 2005). This ever-increasing variety of roles makes their daily work inherently complex and the demands on them are increasingly fragmented, rapid fire, and voluminous (Lunenburg, 2010). Additionally, the principal's role has been altered by the advent of school or site-based management which has led to decentralization of control, transferring considerable decision-making from district office to individual schools as a way to give principals more authority over what happens in schools (Wohlstetter & Briggs, 1994). All of this makes the roles that building principals face every day more complex than ever (Tobin, 2014). As Tobin (2013) stated, "The demands of increased accountability, the variety of social issues that confront communities today, the lack of funding to meet the increasing number of mandates imposed on schools, and the expanding demands that society is asking schools to address certainly makes the job of tomorrow's school principals formidable" (p. 4). In spite of these challenges research informs us that "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (Leithwood, et.al., 2004). Therefore, in order for outcomes to change, we must align policy, principal preparation programs, and alternative discipline strategies with the reality of the changing landscape we see in schools today.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

This study sought to understand how principals describe their concerns, pressures, and tensions when making discipline decisions. Additionally, it investigated the ways in which principals describe what makes a student discipline decision good. Prior research suggests that principals treat students in different ways and that this different treatment results in disparities in type and duration of punishment. The study answered the following research questions: (1) How do school principals describe their concerns, pressures, and tensions when making student discipline decisions? (2) How do principals describe what makes a discipline decision good?

Qualitative Research Approach

According to Stringer (2014), research is “systematic and rigorous inquiry or investigation that enables people to understand the nature of problematic events or phenomena” (p. 5). Researchers identify a problem and seek *answers* or *truths* (Creswell, 2014; Stringer, 2014). How researchers arrive at truths or answers depends on the philosophical question and context for which they seek the answer to.

To determine the methodological approach for this study, I gave careful consideration to the nature of my research questions and context; my ontological and epistemological beliefs; and the merits, values, strengths, and limitations of research designs. Given my inquiry, I selected a qualitative research design because provided me with the robust participant elaboration I needed to discern the themes, patterns, and truth. Additionally, a qualitative approach enabled me to dig deeper into data with principal interviews, and this provided greater insight on principal decision-making that otherwise would not have been known or fully understood.

Qualitative research, according to Crawford (2020), can be defined as “an exploratory investigation of a complex social phenomenon conducted in a natural setting through

observation, description, and thematic analysis of participants' behaviors and perspectives for the purpose of explaining and/or understanding the phenomenon" (p. 83). Qualitative researchers use various terms to designate the structure of qualitative research including *genre* (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), *approach* (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), *strategy* (Robson & McCartan, 2016), and *tradition* (Creswell, 1998). All qualitative research is descriptive, but different research designs accomplish description in different ways (Glesne, 2016).

Importantly, qualitative research draws from interpretivist and constructivist paradigms, seeking to deeply understand a research subject rather than predict outcomes, as in the positivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Interpretivism seeks to build knowledge from understanding individuals' unique viewpoints and the meaning attached to those viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The constructivism paradigm asserts people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences (Cashman et al, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hein, 1991; Honebein, 1996). Thus, to the constructivist, constructing meaning is learning; there is no other kind (Adom et al., 2016).

Relatedly, qualitative research requires the researcher to engage in inductive and deductive data analysis; interpretive meaning; emergent design; and reflexivity (Creswell, 2014). In qualitative research, deductive analysis often means applying predetermined codes to the data (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). The codes can be developed as strictly organizational tools, or they can be created from concepts drawn from the literature, from theory, or from propositions that the researcher has developed (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). Inductive analysis, on the other hand, is a more emergent strategy, where the researcher reads through the data and allows codes to emerge/names concepts as they emerge (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). It's more of a "bottom-up" analytic strategy (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). There are many forms of

inductive analysis, but some common practices are open coding (sometimes called initial coding), in vivo coding (codes developed from participants' own words), and constant comparative analysis (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). Qualitative researchers investigate patterns, themes, trends, and categories that emerge with participants to make sense of the data (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022; Patton, 2005). Data collection may also include specific quotations from interview participants; experiences; perceptions; and observations of behaviors, activities, and actions (Patton, 2005).

Of importance, Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that trustworthiness of a research study is important to evaluating its worth. Trustworthiness involves credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), refers to confidence in the *truth* and the findings. Credibility standards encompass accuracy of descriptions; comprehensive and detailed information; triangulation of methods; linkage to a prior theory; and accurate conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yilmaz, 2013). The second proposed evaluative criterion is transferability. Transferability can be defined as showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moving on, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) third proposed evaluative criterion is dependability. Dependability refers to showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated. The dependability standards incorporate clearly defined features of the research design; clarity of paradigms and analytic constructs; clear description of the researcher's role; and multiple points of convergence, observations, and data (Yilmaz, 2013). Lastly, confirmability is Lincoln and Guba's (1985) fourth proposed standard to evaluate trustworthiness of qualitative research. Confirmability can be defined as a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest. Confirmability is when the

“findings are based on the analysis of the collected data and examined via an auditing process” (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 320).

Strengths

There are many benefits to selecting a qualitative research design. First, a qualitative approach produces a detailed description of participants’ feelings, opinions, and experiences (Denzin, 1989). The detailed descriptions and interpretivist approach, according to some scholars (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2002), provide a holistic understanding of human experience in specific settings. The interpretivist approach, also regarded as ideographic research, or the study of individual cases or events (Klein & Myers, 1999), allows for the capability to understand different people’s voices, meanings, and events.

Moreover, a qualitative approach provides a window into participants’ inner experiences and enables researchers to discover how meanings are shaped through and in culture (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Because researchers interact with the participants directly throughout the data collection process, data collection is subjective and elaborately detailed. Also, the interactive research approach provides a flexible structure as the design can be constructed and reconstructed to a greater extent (Maxwell, 2012). The nature of qualitative research allows for the capability to understand complex problems.

Challenges

Beyond the above advantages, some limitations are present. First, according to Silverman (2010), qualitative research approaches potentially leave out contextual sensitivities and focus more on meanings and experiences. Second, policymakers may give low credibility to results from a qualitative approach (Sallee & Flood, 2012). Conversely, quantitative orientations are frequently given more regard (Berg, 2009). Third, in terms of research method, smaller sample

sizes raise the issue of generalizability to the whole population of the research (Harry & Lipsky, 2014; Thompson, 2011). Additionally, data interpretation and analysis may be more difficult and complex (Richards & Richards, 1994). As Berg and Lune (2012) assert, “Qualitative research is a long hard road, with elusive data on one side and stringent requirements for analysis on the other” (p. 4). Lastly, the analyses of the cases take a considerable amount of time, and one can generalize the results to the larger population in only a very limited way (Flick, 2011).

In sum, qualitative research values people’s lived experiences and is inherently subjective and sensitive to the biases of both researchers and participants (Tomaszewski1 et al., 2020). Because people possess a range of different experiences and perspectives, social reality is considered subjective (Saldaña and Omasta, 2022). Importantly, these constructions are merely temporary as “nothing remains stable, and consequently, neither can knowledge” (Chamberlain, 2015, p. 20). While considered a serious flaw from the positivist perspective, that subjectivity speaks to the core value of qualitative research and the interpretivist/constructivist paradigms (Tomaszewski1 et al., 2020). Conducted thoughtfully, qualitative research is consistent, rigorous, and helps us answer important questions about people and their lives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These fundamental epistemological foundations are key for developing the right research mindset before designing and conducting qualitative research (Tomaszewski1 et al., 2020).

Present Study

This research was part of a larger study conducted by Drs. Kruse and Walls. The study examined how fifty practicing school principals in Washington describe their concerns, pressures, and tensions when making student discipline decisions. Additionally, the study investigated how principals describe a good student discipline decision.

A qualitative research approach was selected to describe principal discipline decision-making in an era of advancing equity and excellence for all students. This research design allowed for the gathering of in-depth information about principals' behaviors, emotions, desires, routines, feelings, experiences, and variety of other information (Madrigal & McClain, 2012). By adopting qualitative methodology, the examination fine-tuned the pre-conceived notions as well as extrapolated the thought process, analyzing and estimating the issues from an in-depth perspective (Nasreen, 2019). Qualitative methods have been recognized as providing key insights and social behavior theories for social policy research that contribute to policy decisions (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). An interpretive paradigm helped to understand the social world from the experiences and subjective meanings that people attach to it (Nasreen, 2019). Because of the subjectivity of human views and experiences, social reality may also change its nature and form (Hennink et al. 2011). Working from the interpretive tradition, experience and perspective were valued as important sources of knowledge (Nasreen, 2019).

Because my work is a subset of the Kruse/Walls study, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained in January 2021. Under the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations, an Institutional Review Board is a group that has been formally designated to review and monitor biomedical research involving human subjects. In accordance with FDA regulations, an IRB has the authority to approve, require modifications, in (to secure approval), or disapprove research. This group review is important in protecting the rights and welfare of human research subjects.

After IRB approval, participants were recruited with the cooperation of the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP), member institutions of the Washington Council of Educational Administration Programs (WCEAP), and via Washington State University (WSU)

social media (e.g., Twitter announcements/calls for participation). This study sought to include a large sample of elementary, middle, and high school principals currently responsible for administering student discipline across the state of Washington. Study participants included new and veteran principals working in urban, rural, and suburban communities. Importantly, a balanced representation of women and men were included in the sample.

Participants

Fifty school principals were selected using a purposeful sampling strategy (Maxwell, 2012). The sample included twenty-seven females and twenty-three males with experience ranging from two to thirty-two years. Twelve participants worked in a rural community, thirteen worked in an urban community, and twenty-five worked in a suburban community.

Representation included seventeen elementary principals, fourteen middle school principals, fourteen high school principals, two K-8 principals, and three K-12 principals.

Table 1*Research Participants*

Levels	Number of Principals
K-5	17
6-8	14
9-12	14
K-8	2
K-12	3
Gender	Number of Principals
Male	23
Female	27
Years of Experience	Number of Principals
1-5	17
6-9	16
10+	17
Rural, Urban, Suburban	Number of Principals
Rural	12
Urban	13
Suburban	25

Data Collection

Data collection began in February 2021 and concluded in June 2023. Data collection consisted of conducting semi-structured interviews with fifty school leaders across the state of

Washington. While there is no clear agreement about how many participants are necessary to conduct a qualitative study, multiple researchers (Creswell, 2014; Glesne, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) suggest a small number of participants is feasible and adequate for in-depth responses. Guest et al. (2006) suggests that saturation has been achieved at the point when no new information emerges. Our research team determined that saturation was reached with fifty semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews occurred over the course of the study, and each interview lasted on average forty minutes. However, the length of interviews ranged from thirty to seventy minutes. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to respond to questions while providing researchers with opportunities to follow-up and probe for additional in-depth responses (Creswell, 2014). All interviews were audio recorded and conducted as conversations focused on (a) the principal's orientations, values, and beliefs about student discipline decision-making; (b) how policy and school organization impact their decision-making around student discipline; (c) the principal's past experiences with decision-making around student discipline; and (d) the challenges of school discipline.

All fifty participants were interviewed to foster a deep understanding of their values, beliefs, and assumptions regarding student discipline decision-making (Creswell, 2014). Participation was voluntary, and interactions were handled via Washington State University secure email and Zoom accounts. Participants had the opportunity to choose a location for their participation that was most comfortable and private for them. The interviews lasted no longer than seventy minutes, and follow-up interviews were scheduled as needed to confirm data with participants. The follow-up interviews were voluntary and followed the same procedures.

Prior to each interview, participants were provided with a Washington State University College of Education Research Study Consent Form. The consent form provided potential research subjects sufficient written information to decide whether to participate in a research study or not based on an explanation of the proposed research and the nature of the participation that is requested of them. The form was easily identifiable as the words “Research Study Consent Form” were typed in bold text at the top of the first page. The form included the study title, which was intentionally descriptive and not overly technical. Additionally, section headings were used to identify the basic and any additional elements of informed consent.

Even though prior written consent was obtained, I reviewed the consent form with the participants at the beginning of each interview. This was to ensure participants were aware they could skip any questions they were not comfortable answering and reminded that they could exit the study at any time. Additionally, it reassured participants that confidentiality would be maintained as pseudonyms for names, districts, and buildings would be used. Also, it ensured participants were fully aware of the parameters consenting to the study. Moreover, it served as an ice breaker and built rapport.

Interview Protocol

As I mentioned above, this study is a subset of a larger Kruse and Walls study. Because of this, Drs. Kruse and Walls had previously developed the interview protocol with principal discipline decision-making questions. The interview protocol consisted of five parts including I) introductory questions, II) policy/organizational framing questions, III) examples/thinking on discipline decisions, IV) concluding questions, and V) luxury/backup questions (to be asked if time allowed or if those themes had not already surfaced in prior responses). Each of these parts aligned with the conceptual framework and research questions the study sought to answer.

Importantly, the protocol ensured consistency and continuity with information that was gathered (Creswell, 2014; Gall et al., 2003).

The protocol embedded a variation of question types (Patton, 2002) including background, behavioral, value-based, and feeling-based questions designed to answer the research questions. The guiding questions on the interview protocol enabled me to focus on listening to participants, rather than thinking about what I might ask next. Additionally, the guiding questions afforded me the opportunity to dig deeper to gather important information for the study (Glesne, 2011). Probing further provided me with greater insight into principal decision-making that otherwise would not have been known or fully understood.

Table 2*Research Questions and Key Interview Question Alignment*

<i>Part I.) Introductory Questions</i>	RQ #1	RQ #2
What led you to become a school administrator? What did your journey to that job look like?		
What is the best part of your job?		
<i>Part II.) Policy/Organizational Framing Questions</i>		
Can you explain your role in disciplinary actions in this school?	✓	
To what extent do you feel like you have the latitude to make whatever disciplinary decision is best and to what extent are you constrained by policy and procedure?	✓	
<i>Part III.) Examples/Thinking on Discipline Decisions</i>		
What are the most common discipline issues you address?	✓	
What does your approach to gathering information look like when you need to make a disciplinary decision?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the people you generally talk to? • How do you decide if the sources are trustworthy? Are there narratives you give greater weight to? 	✓	
Can you walk us through a recent discipline decision you had to make? What were the circumstances and what was the outcome?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who were the people you thought about in this decision, and why? • How do parents and parent interaction fit into your decision-making? • Is this the sort of decision you make often, or not very often? 	✓	
Is there a time when you had to make a disciplinary decision that you think resulted in the “best case scenario”? What happened/what did that look like? Why?	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the key lesson you took from this? • How did you use your learning the next time? 		
In general, how confident do you feel that you have made the “right” decision?	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What gives you confidence (or causes you to lack confidence)? 		
When you are making decisions, are you thinking about the student’s future schooling experiences and their future teachers and principals?	✓	

- What about their past experiences and the folks who have come before?

Part IV.) Concluding Questions

How has your thinking about discipline shifted over time? ✓

Part V.) Luxury/Backup Questions

Is there a person you look up to who you feel handles disciplinary decisions well? What is it that you admire about their/her/his approach? ✓

What might you want to know to decide if the decision is a “horse” or a “zebra”? ✓ ✓

Can you think of an example of a time when you knew a decision would have “downstream” effects- it wouldn’t just be a one off? ✓ ✓

- What did this look like?
- How was your approach different with this as opposed to “day-to-day” decisions?

Data Analysis

The study timeframe allowed sufficient time for data collection and analysis as collection and analysis occurred simultaneously during the study. Data collected and analyzed early in the study directed further data collection and analysis. Data were analyzed in two phases. First, recording and notes were transcribed, edited to remove potential identifiers, and coded for potential student discipline decision-making themes. In the second phase, inductive and deductive coding processes were employed aligned with the study’s theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

As open coding method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used in phase one. I read through each transcription and noted potential themes. In phase two of the data analysis, I employed a focused coding method to condense and narrow themes into more defined categories (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2009). Utilizing key ideas and categories from the literature review as a framework, common themes emerged. Major categories and themes appear in the findings, and they “display multiple perspectives from individuals and be supported by diverse quotations and

specific evidence” (Creswell, 2014, pp. 199-200). These themes affirmed prior research findings and unveiled new findings that extend the literature base.

There are several ways to interpret findings from a qualitative research study (Creswell, 2014; Glesne, 2011; Miles et al., 2014). As stated by Creswell, (2014), “Interpretation in qualitative research can take many forms; be adapted for different types of designs, and be flexible to convey personal, research-based, and action meanings” (p. 201). To convey my findings, I used a narrative passage approach aligned with principals’ experiences and the conceptual framework. This approach included a detailed discussion of several themes including subthemes, multiple perspectives from individuals, and a discussion with interconnecting themes (Creswell, 2014).

Data Triangulation

Triangulation is a method used to increase the credibility and validity of research findings (Cohen et al., 2011). Credibility refers to trustworthiness and how believable a study is; validity is concerned with the extent to which a study accurately reflects or evaluates the concept or ideas being investigated (Joppe, 2000). Triangulation, by combining theories, methods, or observers in a research study, can help ensure that fundamental biases arising from the use of a single method, or a single observer are overcome (Noble & Heale, 2019). It is a procedure that enables validation of data and can be used in qualitative studies (Noble & Heale, 2019).

This study utilized (1) data triangulation (Denzin, 2017), which includes matters such as periods of time, space, and people and (2) investigator triangulation (Denzin, 2017), which includes the use of several researchers in the study. For example, school leaders from a variety of Washington school districts (e.g., urban/rural, elementary/middle/high school) at a variety of career stages (e.g., new, veteran) were included in the study. Additionally, a balanced

representation of women and men and White school leaders and leaders of color were included in the sample. Moreover, three different researchers interviewed participants and analyzed data. Importantly, participant interview questions with the corresponding research questions enabled a robust collection of relevant data. This alignment is shown in Table 2.

Categories and Themes

The initial thematic coding came from two sources. First, many are derived from prior literature (Ball, 1987; French & Raven, 1959). A second group of categories (e.g., traditional and new structures of schooling; caring leadership; instructional leadership; safety; relationships; tied hands) come from early analysis of the existing data and were posited by Drs. Kruse and Walls. From those ideas, larger categories (e.g., managerial and leadership aspects; organizational contexts; law, policies, and procedures; core values and beliefs; changing landscape) were developed. As analysis unfolded, new themes and categories were descriptively altered to add specificity.

Four major concerns including safety, internal consistency, relationships, and laws, policies, and procedures were illuminated. Safety was identified as both a concern and a pressure. Other pressures included public scrutiny and increasing complexities of the principalship. Likewise, laws, policies, and procedures surfaced as both a concern and a tension. Additional tensions included organizational contexts and core values and beliefs. Importantly, this study provided insight on how principals describe good discipline decisions. Results showed that principals define good discipline decisions as those that keep relationships intact, produce results, get resolved at the lowest level, and address the root cause. Finally, analyses revealed principals in this study generally attempted to resolve issues they faced by employing a

discipline decision-making cycle consisting of three phases including planning, learning, and enacting.

Positionality

My positionality lends itself to potential biases. I work in a district office in a small, rural district as the Director of Special Programs. In this role, I oversee special education; Title I, Part A; Learning Assistance Program (LAP), Dual Language Planning, Bilingual, Title III, Highly Capable, Foster Care, and Section 504. Additionally, I support principals with school improvement planning and improving student outcomes. Part of my job responsibilities include grant writing, managing budgets, conducting needs assessments, and aligning resources with goals. Because of this, I review and share student performance data with stakeholders on a daily basis. As a result, I am focusing on continuous improvement the majority of my workday.

As an advocate for marginalized populations, I am interested in principal discipline decision-making to better understand how I can support improving student outcomes. Additionally, I seek to improve our schools and systems for staff and students as I see a misalignment with student needs and resources to meet those needs. Ultimately, my aim is to make a positive impact on a larger scale with policy, principal preparation programs, and relationship-based responses to student misbehavior.

My lens is political as is the nature of my position. I am entrenched in policies, federal laws, and state mandates as my position revolves around mandates. Additionally, I frequently observe principals' tensions with student discipline decision-making as discipline laws and accountability mandates are sometimes at odds with principals' core values and beliefs; organizational contexts; perceived duties (management versus leadership); and the reality of the changing landscape in schools. With increasing complexities associated with the principalship

combined with accountability mandates, researchers are called to shed light on what changes need to occur if we are to achieve equitable outcomes for all students.

Study Limitations

This study is not without limitations. First, data collection began in February 2021, so over two years have passed since the data collection began. Also, the data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, so some of the concerns principals talked about were influenced by their experiences during COVID. We are aware that things have changed. Additionally, existing research on this topic is limited and more narrowed in focus than the nature of this study. Finally, the researcher's presence during data gathering, which is often unavoidable in qualitative research, may have affected the participants' responses.

Summary

Chapter three began with an overview of the research questions that guided this research study. Next, the qualitative research approach was described, including strengths and challenges. Following that, the present study was described, pointing out that this study is a subset of a larger study. Descriptions of participants and data collection methods were discussed, including the interview protocol and the alignment between the guiding research and interview questions. Next, data analysis was explained along with triangulation methods and expected categories and themes. Finally, the chapter concluded with a positionality statement and an overview of study limitations.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This study sought to understand how principals describe their concerns, pressures, and tensions when making student discipline decisions. Additionally, it investigated how principals evaluate the quality of their student discipline decisions (i.e., what makes a decision “good”). This study was a subset of a larger study conducted by Drs. Kruse and Walls. Fifty interviews of Washington state school principals who currently administer student discipline were conducted. The participants’ interviews reflected their descriptions, experiences, and challenges of making student discipline decisions in an era of discipline reform and accountability. Chapter four answers the research questions that framed this study. Expanding those findings, chapter five explores how the principals in this study described how they managed the tensions that arose from and during discipline decision-making.

New discipline laws were instituted in Washington state in 2015 with the passage of ESSA (2015). Inequities in how discipline is administered, particularly related to expulsion and suspension of marginalized populations, have been well documented in the literature (Gullo & Beachum, 2020; Kennedy et al., 2017; Losen et al., 2022). The laws were intended to address these inequities in discipline outcomes. Schools were mandated to attempt multiple interventions to address behavioral infractions before excluding students. Awareness of the harmful effects of exclusionary discipline including the school to prison pipeline widened, and principals began to shift their practices to be in alignment with the reformed discipline laws.

Within this context, participants’ stories illuminated several findings related to principals’ concerns, pressures, and tensions when making student discipline decisions. Importantly, the big picture that unfolded from the principals’ accounts is a disconnect between aspirations and practice. When making decisions around student discipline, principals in this study could

articulate what they should *not* be doing and *why*. Although principals could describe what they *should* be doing, they struggled knowing *how* to do the right things. Furthermore, the accounts illustrated participants did not know if the *right* things proved to be right for everyone or what it would look like to do the *right* thing for all students. This was especially true when applying discipline logic in multiple contexts. Additionally, concerns, pressures, and tensions related to discipline decision-making were unveiled. Principals' concerns included ensuring safety, adhering to laws, policies, and procedures, maintaining positive and healthy relationships, and upholding internal consistency as decisions get made. Participants' pressures consisted of keeping everyone safe, performing in a public arena under scrutiny, and incorporating the added complexities of the principalship in their daily work emerged. The tensions principals faced included tensions related to navigating organizational contexts, balancing core values and beliefs, and following laws, policies, and procedures. Finally, participants' stories illuminated principals' thinking about what makes a good discipline decision. Principals defined good decisions as those that produce results, keep relationships intact, get resolved at the lowest level, and address root causes. Figures 1 and 2 below display the research findings.

Figure 1

Aspirations and Practice Disconnect

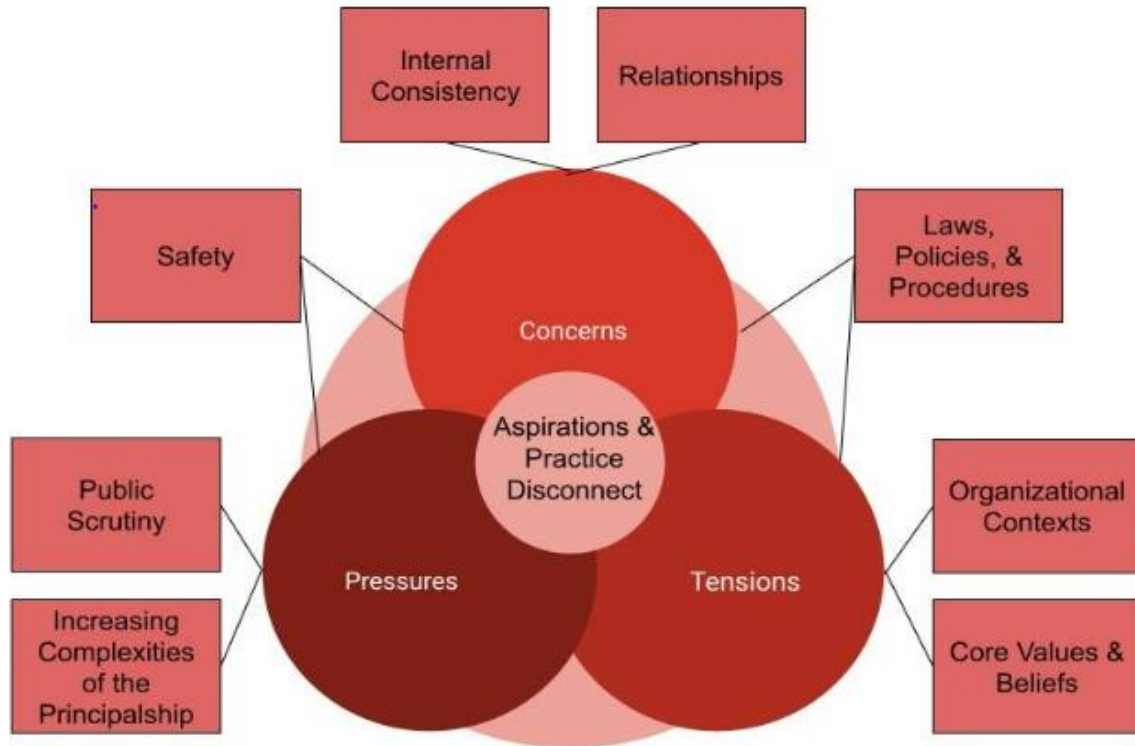
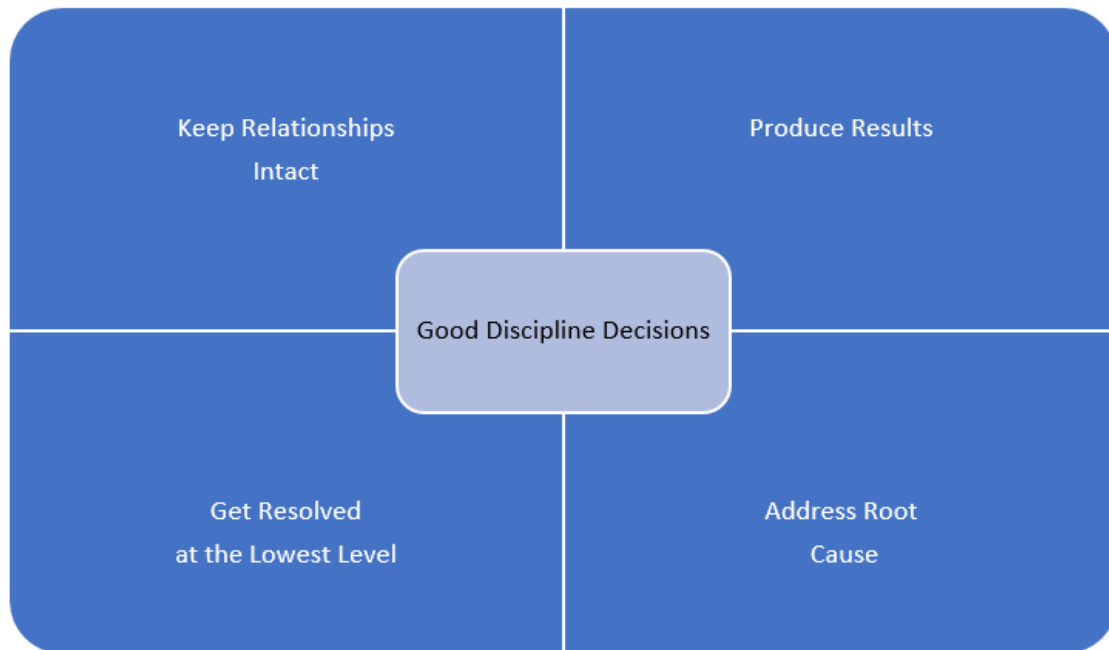


Figure 2

What Makes a Discipline Decision Good?



Aspirations and Practice Disconnect

Participants' accounts painted a rich picture of insights concerning disconnects between aspirations and practice when implementing student discipline. Most interview participants included the importance of addressing the root cause and providing individualized support. Several participants also mentioned their personal experiences with zero tolerance policies and acknowledgement of improvements with the new discipline laws. The following subsections elaborate on these themes.

Knowing What Should Not Be Done

Many of the study's participants clearly articulated what should *not* be done when administering student discipline. For example, most principals mentioned classroom exclusions

should not be done until all interventions have been exhausted or until a non-negotiable threshold has been reached. Additionally, many participants discussed discipline in terms of traditional, or *old*, ways in comparison to their personal evolution with new discipline laws. When discussing the *new* ways, several participants stressed the importance of not rushing and taking sufficient time to make discipline decisions.

Representative of the population sample, Adam, an assistant high school principal, conveyed what should not be done by describing how the new discipline laws have shifted discipline decision-making from a "black and white" approach to a more nuanced process with multiple interventions precluding a classroom exclusion.

When I started out, I saw it as black and white. You just adhere to the code of conduct, you adhere to the discipline matrix, you assign the discipline, wash your hands, you're done. . . . And I think ultimately what helped the most is the new law that was passed at the state level that says you cannot throw a kid out unless you've exhausted all of the resources, all of the interventions. Because before, it used to be really, really easy to throw someone out for three to five, 10 days. And now we have to go through a series of steps before we can get to that. And we have to show that we intervened with the student. Similarly, Nick, a middle school assistant principal, compared the *old* and *new* ways of administering student discipline.

I definitely think early in my career, it was probably a lot more about almost being like an assembly line, taking the information, you know, handling the discipline, getting things done as quickly and as efficiently as possible. I definitely think you take more into mind right now worrying about the kids. Like the future, with classes, with grades, with what's

up next. You want to make sure that they still know that you care, even though you may be the one handing down discipline.

Across the sample, principals stressed that they understood their older practices were not serving students equitably nor were they making school a caring and inclusive place for kids.

Knowing Why it is Wrong

In keeping with the notion that principals knew older practices were inequitable, they were also able to articulate *why* certain disciplinary decisions are wrong. For example, Kelly, a middle school principal, articulated why it is wrong to make decisions before getting all the information.

I think when I first started out in administration, I would make decisions before I got all of the information. And I learned trial by fire that it's not always what it appears to be, and you've got time to investigate and make decisions. You don't have to react, just all of a sudden. I know a couple instances where I suspended some kids without knowing the full story. . . . One kid, for instance, his mother was just killed in an auto accident, and I didn't know that. Had I known that, I probably would have talked to him more and maybe gotten [him] some counseling. I regret doing [it like I did]. But when I did find out, I kind of teamed up with him and watched after him and had the counselors watch after him too. You just don't know everything that's going on in a kid's life and they're not going to come right out and tell you. Most of the time.

Additionally, Matt, a middle school principal, discussed why it is wrong for students to miss educational opportunities.

One day is too much out of the classroom for the majority of our kids because they're not at grade level as it is. How do we catch those kids up? How do we provide them with the

educational services that they need? I guess I am confident that when they go home, they are not going to do anything. . . . Keeping them here means we provide them with two meals a day. It's the most organized piece of a lot of our kids' lives. . . . We know those kids come from a tough situation, we know that they aren't getting sleep at night, we know they aren't getting fed, we know they don't have the basic needs being met. And yet, we expect them to come to school and be model citizens and do whatever they're told when they haven't been taught any of that. And it's frustrating because they come to us as 11- to 14-year-olds, and they're raising siblings, they're making their own meals, washing their own clothes. They're having to be adults. And sometimes I think we forget that they are 11 to 14 years old, and they don't make the best decisions.

Moreover, Todd, a high school assistant principal, elaborated on why it is wrong to discipline if it is ineffective at changing behavior.

I think as a district, and myself as an individual, we've come a long way because again, there was a time when I was really comfortable with putting kids out for 10 days for fighting and putting kids out for five days for their first drug offense. Because I think that in some ways that punishment fits the crime. But now I look back on it, and I'm thinking to myself, anytime we suspend a kid, does that really do any good? Or is it just making the people that were impacted by it maybe feel better because they know that kid got a suspension? So, I'm a fan of PBIS and restorative justice and trying to be more proactive in helping students make better decisions, more so than just throwing a suspension out and thinking that that's going to save or fix the problem. Excuse me because I don't know that suspending students, unless it's really an extreme safety issue where they can't be in the building because they might hurt themselves or somebody, I don't know that

suspension really even applies at all as far as effectiveness of stopping or changing behavior.

Across the study, several participants expressed concerns about the harmful impacts and lack of effectiveness of exclusionary discipline. Additionally, many participants discussed regret for rushing through decision-making without determining the root cause of the misbehavior. Getting to the root cause was reported by many as an essential step for improving student outcomes.

Knowing What is Right

Importantly, participants in the study clearly articulated what disciplinary decisions are the right decisions to make. The right decisions encompassed keeping students in school, handling infractions closest to where the behavior occurred, individualizing discipline, and using discipline as a learning tool. Melissa, a middle school assistant principal, described the importance of keeping students in school.

. . . looking back over past years, we grow, and we learn. In addition to that, laws change, and I do absolutely see the need for us to have discipline laws that really do, in some ways, create constraints for us that are intended to keep kids in school and make sure that we aren't excluding them from their education. So, I guess looking back, you know, in the past, and recognizing that we have students who needed different supports. And we were trying, but not at the same level that now I think we try to find other ways to help and support students while trying to keep things safe and productive in the classroom . . . How do we support students who struggle with behaviors that are going to get them in trouble at school? How do we be creative, devote resources, devote staff, find ways to create relationships with those kids and their families and build a support system to help them?

Similarly, Todd, a high school assistant principal, discussed the importance of individualizing interventions to best meet the needs of the students.

. . . trying to keep students in school because that is really the safest, best place in a lot of circumstances for a lot of our students for them to be. We can more positively impact them the more they're here. . . . That's why I've been able to do it for so long - it's because I'm not the basic cookie cutter administrator. Trying to reach kids, trying to do things that maybe nobody else has done to try to get a different solution or a different result. . . . I really like the restorative justice idea. I like identifying positive behaviors and trying to build on those rather than focusing on the negatives and working on things with students from a strength aspect rather than deficit aspects. What are they good at? And what can we talk them up on [what they are good at] versus what [they are not good at and] just hammering all the time on all the negative stuff that's going on.

Additionally, Cory, an elementary principal, elaborated on discipline as a learning tool.

I truly believe that discipline is a learning tool, and just like teachers have learning tools in their classroom to teach kids math and social studies, oftentimes, when students are sent to me, my learning tool is discipline.

Across the sample, principals indicated aspirations to serve students equitably and to make school a caring and inclusive place for kids. Additionally, they defined the right decisions as those decisions that kept these purposes at the heart of their decision-making.

Struggling With How to Do the Right Things

Importantly, while participants could articulate what is right, they struggled with knowing *how* to do what is right. Several challenges were identified including teacher and parent pushback, lack of resources, challenges with students receiving special education services, and

difficulty navigating systems changes. Lance, a middle school principal, described challenges with pushback from teachers.

[With] some of the new rules around, we suspend kids far less, which I think is a good thing. I think we're moving in the right direction. And looking back, nine years ago when I started, I felt like suspensions could be handed out for just about anything they needed it to. And now they really cut back on that, so I appreciate the tightened accountability around that. Getting that taught to teachers, sometimes, is difficult to understand because they're like, "Whoa, wait a minute. With the previous principal, when we did this, this kid would've been suspended for . . . " You know, that type of stuff. So, I'm like, "Okay, I understand, but here are the rules." And so, we tried our best to teach teachers and bring them up to speed on the new discipline rules, even around the classroom exclusions and things like that. Sometimes that's difficult for people to fully understand and others [to] adapt immediately to.

Similarly, Adam, a high school assistant principal, discussed struggles with teachers' perceptions.

And as soon as you don't go the way that they [teachers] want you to go with the decision on discipline, then they tell you, and I quote, "I don't feel supported." That's code for, "You're not throwing the kid out, which is what I want."

Additionally, Beth, an elementary principal, shared about challenges with a lack of resources and parent support.

We do our best to support them [the students] and we'll do everything we can to help them, but sometimes we need the parents to step up their responsibility, and that's really hard. I mean, when you talk to parents about kids needing therapy and the outside

counseling that's necessary for them to be successful adults later in life, they need some help now. Parents aren't always very accepting of that.

Expanding on Beth's accounts, Aaron, an elementary principal, discussed the challenges with a lack of resources and students in special education.

Where I feel my hands get tied with the interactions [is] when you get multiple entities involved. For instance, when special education students engage in repeated behaviors to that we don't have an answer. That's more at the middle school. I'm like, "I just don't know what to do." Either we don't have the resources to help the students out or they're doing such extreme behaviors that we can't keep them here. Therefore, they're out there at home or in that setting, and I feel so helpless at that point. I know immediately. I've got 10 kids that come to mind where sending them back home is not going to help them out at all, but yet, we can't keep them here behaving that way. That's where being in a rural setting, our resources are limited. As a district, we have some resources, but what we don't have are the numbers of people that you would find in [other] cities. I grow frustrated with that. That's my big thing. Dang, man, if we just had a person to do this.

Moreover, Jessica, a middle school assistant principal, elaborated on the struggles with violators repeating behaviors despite the school's best efforts.

I've had these times where I've had these great conversations with kids and I'm like, "I had a breakthrough. They're going to make it the rest of the day. It's going to be great." Then 10 minutes later, they're back in my office for the same thing. That is like, "Well, shoot. Let's try something new."

Lastly, Adam, high school assistant principal, discussed the challenges with navigating systems change.

. . . any changes that are aimed at teachers working harder, working longer, working more collaboratively have not been successful. You've got pockets of change, but it's hard to change old systems.

Across the sample, principals expressed they experienced common concerns, pressures, and tensions when striving for equity in discipline while simultaneously creating a caring and inclusive school climate for all students. I now turn to discussion about these concerns, pressures, and tensions.

Concerns

In addition to knowing what should not be done in terms of discipline, knowing why it is wrong, knowing what is right, and struggling with how to do what is right, participants' accounts shed light on overarching concerns of policy, relationships, internal consistency, and safety. In the following subsections, I will elaborate on each concern that surfaced.

Policy

Several participants expressed concerns around local, state, and federal policies. Special education, athletic, and dress code policies were referenced across the sample. Specific concerns included bias embedded in policies or policies that mandated consequences that were too soft or too harsh. For example, Scott, a high school assistant principal discussed concerns about state and federal student discipline policies being too lenient for students with an IEP.

I feel constrained a lot of times with discipline because of OSPI and the situations that arose like last year with [student on an IEP]. I felt like the discipline should have been more. And the whole manifestation determination process and the way that it's written [is constraining].

Conversely, Andy, a high school principal, shared his concerns about discipline policies outlined in his school's Athletic Code of Conduct being too harsh and too constraining.

Recently, [two kids] walked off campus while they were puffing on a vape. It was pretty sad, actually. [One student] got suspended for three days, and he was also removed from the football team because of the Code of Conduct. "But that's the only thing I play." And he was crushed, right. Well, guess what? Football season starts in August again, so here is the plan. In [our district], it's 20 days or half the season, whatever is longer. So, we said. "Here's the plan, bud. You get to be on the track team now so you can use your suspension up for your mistake, so you are eligible again for the fall in football and you don't have to use up your suspended games or half your season in the sport that you love."

Additionally, several principals shared concerns about unfair dress code policies. For example, Adam, a high school assistant principal, described a time when he realized his building's dress code policy was sexist. As a result, he initiated a process to change the policy he determined to be inequitable.

And I'm trying to explain to the girl and the mom that here is the dress code, and you're in violation of our current dress code, so I told them the rules exist for a reason, and if we're both going to have an orderly learning environment for everybody, including herself, then we needed to uphold those dress code rules. . . . But I think at that point in time, I had the realization that the dress code was sexist. . . . I made the decision as a principal at that point in time that that dress code needed to change. So, I went about changing that with focus groups, parents, and students because I knew that I needed to get everybody on the

same page if I was going to change it and not have any pushback. . . . I knew that the fight was going to be with teachers.

Similarly, Renee, an assistant high school principal, discussed her concerns about unintentional bias embedded into her district's dress code policy. She elaborated on the importance of examining and revising policies for inequity.

I just think that anything else, unintentional bias just will sit there unless it's called out. Unless we intentionally make space to examine it and call it out, it's just going to sit there forever. . . . I just met with one of our school newspaper reporters around some work that we've done as a district to redo our dress code policy. Which is like, how many years has this archaic dress code policy been sitting here? It's not how we practice, but it still says no spaghetti straps on. It's just that idea of what you permit, you promote.

Across all participants, concerns about policies were prevalent in the day-to-day student discipline. On the one hand, principals reported a fair amount of latitude with student discipline decision-making. On the other hand, certain policies were described as constraining. Many principals exercised leadership by taking action to change policy or leveraging latitude to work around what they perceived to be an unjust policy.

Relationships

In addition to expressing concerns over local, state, and federal policies, principals articulated concerns about building and maintaining positive relationships with students, staff, and families. Aaron, an elementary principal, discussed how his concern and emphasis on relationships shapes the way he thinks about student discipline.

. . . I was never interested, even as a teacher, [in] kicking kids out of class. In my mind, I need to teach a student how to handle whatever's going on. Just my general interactions

and my desire to have relationships with my kids always worked to my benefit because the kids knew I cared more about them than the behavior that they were displaying at that time. Again, it was like, "This is how you're acting? Why are you acting this way? Let me help you solve your problems so that we get along." That relational approach really took care of just about all my discipline. I almost never had discipline problems, and if I did, I knew it was something serious. That has always been my philosophy and I carried it with me into administration.

Similarly, Taylor, a K-12 assistant principal, expressed concerns around building relationships, establishing trust, and maximizing opportunities to teach students as opposed to administering quick, disconnected, and punitive discipline.

So often discipline should not just be about slapping a hand and moving forward. It should always start with teaching, and it has to start with relationships. I can't help a kiddo that's doing behaviors that I don't find school appropriate and fix it if he won't trust me enough to work through the problem with him. . . . Most of the time, I take on Mama Taylor role, I bring the kiddo into my office, I have a giant bowl of chocolate next to me, and I say, "Okay, look. We got to talk about what just happened here."

Whereas, Scott, an assistant high school principal, discussed concerns about maintaining relationships with his teachers and finding a middle ground where teachers feel supported by the discipline decisions he makes.

I think about, obviously, the teacher, whoever felt disrespected, and what the harshness of the behavior was because we want to set the bar for our teachers. They feel like this kid needs to be disciplined, and we want to make sure that we're supporting them as much as we can. I would rather my teachers feel like I'm supporting them and maybe the state tells

me I'm doing things wrong versus the other way around. . . . As far as what the state wants us to do, I think there's a happy medium in between . . . you feel your teachers want to work for you and they feel like you're disciplining correctly. But you also know, and they also know, that there's things that we want to do with kids, it's not 10 years ago, it's not five years ago. We want to work with kids.

Concerning relationships with parents, Amanda, an elementary assistant principal, discussed how she utilizes an empathetic approach with parents.

No parent wants to hear something negative about their kid. . . . So, you approach it so parents and make them understand that you're on their side, that you want what's best for them [the student], and you're trying to figure this out together. Whenever I said, "I'm having these conflicting stories, I need you, I need your help." And whenever I have a parent come along with me on that journey, it's been a much better thing than me calling going, "Hey, your son screwed up. Sorry. He's out." So, I think whenever you can work together as a partnership with a parent, it works 100% better. They know that you actually care for their kid. I think everybody wants a person who's working with their child to like their child.

Similarly, Madison, an elementary principal, discussed her concerns about building positive relationships with families as a proactive strategy.

Forming those relationships with families goes a really long way when you have something hard to say or when there's something big that needs to come up, or you have just even a small, like a fight, on the playground. When you have those relationships built with families, that really does a lot, so I really try to get to know parents. At all of our open houses and everything, I go, and I introduce myself, I try to be visible.

I know all of my students' names, and so when I see them with their parents out and about I can say, "Oh my gosh, it's so good to see you. I love so-and-so when they do this, so this is something that I'm really proud of them for." Then when you do have some kind of [discipline], even if it's a small blip in the radar, and you call that family, then you're taken more seriously and it's not just another phone call. I try to learn about their backgrounds, and a lot of families come from backgrounds where school wasn't a really popular thing for them or something that was easy, and that can easily overshadow even their child's time at school. Learning if a mom or a dad had a really bad experience in school is really important so then you can make sure that the way that you treat them and their child works within what their experience is and make sure that you're trying to override that negative experience. I think really what I'm trying to say is that everything boils down to relationships.

Lastly, Sandy, a middle school principal summed up concerns about her role in explicitly teaching all stakeholders the art of repairing relationships.

It's all about relationships, I guess. I mean, I know we throw that around as a cliché in education, but it's true. Where I think it's particularly true is dealing with discipline issues. It's about explicitly teaching all stakeholders the art of repairing relationships.

Across the sample, participants used a variety of techniques to build and maintain relationships with students, staff, and parents. Of importance, when participants built personal relationships of compassion and care with their students, they believed they could respond in corrective ways without abandoning compassion and care.

Internal Consistency

Along with concerns about policies and relationships, participants expressed concerns and struggles with internal consistency. Aaron, an elementary principal, represented the sample well.

There are days when it's harder and sometimes you do things and say things that you don't intend to do and say.

Additionally, George, a K-12 principal, elaborated on his concerns about how his disciplinary decisions will be perceived by others.

. . . if I didn't stick to my guns, I would be questioned even further. That was a hard place to be because it's just ripe with insecurities around whether I'm able to even do my job or whether I'm the right person for it. Everybody's moral codes and values come into play into it.

Later in the interview, George elaborated further.

I feel like because we don't have a routine set of discipline that we get out of practice. We constantly revisit each situation individually. . . . Part of me feels like that's absolutely the right way to go. That's because every situation is unique, and context does matter. Then there's part of me that's like, "Well, what if this was an everyday occurrence or an every week occurrence at a school and I was in that type of role?" I feel like that would be a little more algorithmic and I would just know what to do next. This is what we do and here's how we handle these situations. It's three strikes you're out or any type of framework that I've come up with. I just wonder where's the happy place?

Across the sample, the ways in which participants thought about internal consistency with discipline decision-making proved to be highly contextual. Additionally, the participants

reflected deeply as they grappled with inconsistencies and how others might perceive their discipline decisions.

Safety

Many principals expressed concerns about safety. Safety surfaced as both a concern and a pressure. Peter, an elementary principal, represented the sample well.

I think our highest priority [as principals] is safety.

Joe, a high school principal, elaborated on his concerns about safety non-negotiables.

Part of our schools being safe places [is] that we're not going to hit people, we're not going to hit each other, we're never going to resort to violence, and we're not going to have drugs and alcohol at school. That's not acceptable.

Across the sample, participants' accounts illuminated safety as a priority. Safety concerns included preventing students from hurting other students or staff members, diffusing dangerous situations, and providing a safe place for students to learn.

Pressures

Moreover, participants' accounts surfaced three major pressures when making student discipline decisions. These pressures included keeping everyone safe, performing in a public arena, and navigating through decision-making with increasing complexities. Importantly, all participants stressed that these pressures were generally persistent. That is, no matter what they did, in any given instance, it was not going to resolve the larger pressure. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss each enduring pressure.

Keeping Everyone Safe

The study unveiled participants felt an extreme amount of pressure to keep students and staff safe. Importantly, several principals discussed safety as a non-negotiable in the building.

There seemed to be a threshold that drew a line in terms of safety. Beth, an elementary principal, represented the sample well.

We cry over kids because it breaks our heart when a kid is being so unsuccessful, not regulated at all, and can't stay at school. We have to keep the other kids safe, and so we oftentimes will have to get to a point where we realize we don't have a choice but to send the child home because what about the other 25?

Additionally, George, a K-12 principal, discussed the pressures of violence and unsafe behaviors putting others at risk.

When we talk about some behaviors that we rarely ever see, which are things that would be just a severe overreach of violence or unsafe behaviors that have really put so many other people at risk, those seem to be quite nonnegotiable.

Similarly, Renee, an assistant high school principal, shared pressure to keep drugs from being sold on campus.

And it always comes back to safety for us. Same with drugs, it's a safety issue. If we can't ensure that you're not going to sell drugs here, then we'll wait until we feel better about that. We try to get there as quickly as possible.

Later in the interview, Renee discussed pressure to keep the school safe from threats and violence.

If we allow kids to just enter back in and they're not emotionally ready, and then they're saying stuff or threatening people or fronting or whatever, that's creating a safety issue in that then we have some tension that we maybe would have just dissolved if we'd taken a day.

Similarly, Matt, a middle school principal, discussed the pressure to keep students and staff safe from physical violence.

I had a girl who literally went into another classroom seeking this other young lady out and attacked her. I emergency expelled right then and there. Again, it's the safety of all of our kids. It's the safety of that student that was attacked and our staff member that was having to try to break that up. And then just having those discussions with the parent and the counselor. I think it was in the best interest of all those involved. The nice part about emergency expulsion is you can convert it. The parent came back in and was very supportive of us.

There's a nexus at schools when it comes to safety and discipline decision-making. On one hand, students have a right to an education. It's important that they get a good education. Then on the other hand, there are the following questions: Can the student be safe? Can the people around them be safe? Can the other students in school be safe?

Performing in a Public Arena

In addition to the pressure to keep everyone safe, participants in this study articulated pressures associated with performing in a public arena. Jake, a middle school assistant principal described the pressure of public scrutiny around discipline decisions.

Oftentimes you are second guessed by the teachers and by parents. And even though you know you did the right thing, it's really tough to hear that criticism. I think the hardest thing about that is, like I said, I don't think you second guess yourself, but you know that you made the right call.

Similarly, Joe, a high school principal discussed the pressures of discipline decision-making due to the degree of impact decisions have on various stakeholders in the organization.

Our old superintendent here, when I heard him speak with kids before in emergency expulsion situations or things like that, he was always really clear that discipline happens for three different groups. It happens for the victim, it happens for the individual that's being disciplined, but it happens for the group too, and others are watching and judging. Moreover, Vince, a high school principal described the pressure of stakeholders expecting quick action and how that conflicts with beliefs on the amount of time and effort it takes to change student behavior.

I think that in the world today, whether it's behaviors or grades or anything, people expect a result much sooner and people don't learn or change as fast as we think they do. That just doesn't happen, it takes time. I think that it's a little bit tougher because you have that added scrutiny. It's not like you were doing something horrible, it's not like the tough love was abusive or anything, but you could maybe talk a little more directly with a kid without the fear of how's mom going to take this?

Because principals make student discipline decisions in public arenas, the pressures of the job are intensified. Participants reflected on decisions and the challenges of navigating though how their specific decisions were perceived by actors in the organization. Several participants' stories described tensions with doing what is right versus doing what stakeholders expected them to do.

Added Complexities of the Principalship

Additionally, this study shed light on the pressures of discipline decision-making with the added complexities of the principalship. Complexities such as the effects of the pandemic, increases in mental health needs, higher percentages of students who have experienced trauma, rises in violent behaviors, a lack of resources, publicly displayed performance accountability data, and equity mandates increased pressures on principals across the study, especially when

making discipline decisions. For example, Andy, a high school principal discussed pressures of making good discipline decisions in an era of post-COVID impacts.

I'm more worried about mental health than anything right now, and I know that sounds a little cliché coming out of a pandemic, but I don't think we know the impact of what's gone on in the last year yet.

Beth, an elementary principal, described the pressures of making the right decisions around student discipline when students exhibit violent behaviors.

Anyway, in this particular case, it was a total disaster because the mom beat the sheriff here. He [the student] was in the middle. We were just trying to keep our hands off of him, but he had totally destroyed a classroom. He was just totally bonkers. We had him out in the hall, and when he saw his mom come, he looked up, he saw her coming down the hallway and he said, "Mommy," and we think it's going to be a good thing and that she's going to be able to calm him down. He literally leaped out before we had him, ran down the hallway, got to her, and we're still thinking it's going to be okay, and he started beating her up. It was horrible. He started hitting her in the face with his fist and kicking her, and we are like, "Oh my God." We've never seen anything like it. It was a disaster. The sheriff showed up when he [the student] was taking another swing. It happened so fast, and it was just mind-blowing. He went to hit her, probably for the fifth time, because we were all at that point trying to pull him off of her.

Matt, a middle school principal elaborated on the pressure to ensure a positive learning environment while simultaneously providing students with the support they need when resources are limited or non-existent.

And I think we struggle with those resources to provide those kids that we know have behavioral issues. . . . They're [our staff] trying to teach 20 or 30 kids in a classroom, and it's very frustrating for them. . . . There's been instances where kids may cause a disruption or multiple times caused disruptions, and then you struggle with what do you do with them? You hit that 10-day piece, or whatever it is, you struggle. How do we provide the necessary services for those kids?

Karlie, a middle school principal, discussed pressures around equity mandates and performance accountability measures.

It's hard when a student says, "You're discriminating against me because I'm gay." It's also hard when you have a variety of students from different racial ethnic backgrounds to not be accused of favoritism or bias. We do a discipline proportionality report every year for the acts of civil rights, and we're always setting goals around those reports A student was caught using drugs at school and a whole bunch of things that you can't have as much leniency with. And they [staff member] made the comment that this person [student] was part of a group in the school that was like 1% of the kids in the school belong to this ethnic group. And they were like, "Great, now my district proportionality report next year is going to say that this is the only kid I'm going to probably expel for this drug thing. And now it [looks] like we're targeting this group." . . . There is this weird pressure sometimes [when] the statistics [stare you] in your face.

Similarly, Joe, a high school principal, discussed pressures of equity mandates and public scrutiny.

When I was at [district name], I felt there was a huge microscope, mainly racially, between Native Americans and White students and families that are constantly judging

what happened and making sure it was per policy and equitable. Not even equitable, but equal to what had happened to other students even multiple years prior to.

Across the sample, participants' accounts unveiled the added complexities of the principalship and pressures to make the right discipline decisions despite compounding and competing factors.

Tensions

The third overarching theme derived from this study is participants experienced tensions when making decisions around student discipline. Specifically, tensions with organizational contexts; core values and beliefs; and laws, policies, and procedures surfaced. Like the pressures they described, these tensions were largely persistent. In the paragraphs below, I will address each of the enduring tensions.

Organizational Contexts

Participants recognized that organizational contexts may impact the degree of tension they encounter as a result of their decision-making. Joe, a high school principal, represented the sample well. He discussed the degree student discipline decisions can be at odds with the actors in an organization.

There were still people with that old school mentality out there that think you should be gone for 45 days for drugs and alcohol. How could that only be three days or two and a half in many senses? But there are others, like, why should they be kicked out at all?

That's really not going to change it. Then you see you've got to balance in what's for the good of the order.

Joe elaborated on the challenges of decision-making when teachers feel like disruptive behavior is having a negative impact on the culture and climate of the school.

There's the fact that big-time defiance, and we rarely get into that, but that gets tough when you get into the dynamic where teachers are talking, I feel the kid is being judged by everybody, and there's an extra microscope on him and how disruptive he is, how he disrupts others, or how he's maybe pulling others along with him . . . When people start feeling like it's really having a negative effect on the climate and culture of the school, that gets to be a tough decision-making process. How are we going to navigate that because it's our job to educate the students still and get them to understand the value of education? Even if they're showing no value in it and they're just disrupting the climate and maybe they're starting to pull others along with them. How to handle those? That gets really tough [when] trying to figure out what's going to make things better.

Joe expanded on tensions with parents.

If it's the point where other kids are going home and telling their parents about how disruptive that student is, you could start to get some outside parent commentary going. Why are we allowing this? . . . For a lot of parents that are still old enough, [back in] the day, that kid just would have been gone.

Additionally, Lance, a middle school principal, discussed organizational tensions when teachers feel threatened and unsafe.

And I had a relationship with this young man, and I did not view him as a threat or a person that was going to go too far out of the lines. [He] just [had] some attention-seeking behavior that middle school kids had. So, I operated from that perspective. The special ed teacher [reported] the student had a knife in his backpack. And so, there were some consequences for that, not nearly as stiff as the teacher should have thought. And

the teacher viewed it as a threat to her because she was having an increasingly tension-filled relationship. So, she was approaching it as, "This could be a physical threat to me."

Similarly, Andrea, a middle school principal discussed how tensions arise when there is disagreement with the severity and duration of the consequence.

I have a healthy culture, and I have the mental health of my staff and other students to think about. . . . What he [the student] did was harassing behavior, [and] it was certainly hurtful and harmful. And you've got to give both staff and students who witness it a chance to process, recover, and perhaps see that there's some level of consequence. . . . I get teachers who want to tell me, "Bad behavior is going to become contagious if you don't drop the hammer." . . . I don't agree with that. I don't think I'm going to end up with a whole school full of kids behaving like this other student because this kid did what he did. What I think has to happen is sometimes the staff and students who witnessed that situation need a break just to process what they saw because what they saw wasn't right, and they need to make sense of it and where do we go from here?

Finally, Heidi, an elementary assistant principal, described tensions and challenges with competing aspirations when trying to get teachers to buy into a new system.

When I first came to this job, the first thing is, if a kid doesn't listen to me, you go to the office. And so, we've really tried to build a culture around SEL and restorative practices. And so there hasn't been a guideline that you follow the steps, you have to do this first and this first and this first and this first. It's more about having conversations and really talking to teachers, "Did you try this?" And really getting them to understand that when they send a kid to my office, they have just lost their power and that we want to retain

their power until it gets to the point that they truly cannot handle the discipline and that it needs to go to that higher level.

For many participants in this study, there was an element of negotiating community norms and finding the middle ground. Many stakeholders in the participants' organizations vocalized strong opinions on whether a discipline decision was too hard or too soft. Moreover, many participants were faced with creating new systems to manage behaviors and convincing teachers to work in the systems.

Core Values and Beliefs

Tensions with core values and beliefs is an additional enduring category that surfaced across all participants. Jack, a high school principal, discussed tensions when what is best for the individual student is at odds with what is best for the collective.

What's best for the individual and what's best for the collective? That's the hard part because there's not a perfect answer, and there's not a recipe for that. There are times that we have to be on the side of how do we help this individual student, and then simultaneously we also have to keep in mind, how is this impacting the other 1,250 students that are involved in this or impacted by this decision?

Similarly, Madison, an elementary principal discussed how her core values and beliefs about student discipline can lead to tensions with the core values and beliefs of stakeholders.

I think that it's a long process, and that's something that frustrates people sometimes because they want that immediate punishment or that immediate consequence for something. I'm fine with that, but the consequence has to fit the crime. It also can't be something that you hold against the kid forever and ever because we all make mistakes every single day. . . . I'm also a big believer in kind of wiping the slate clean, unless it's a

super big issue. . . . I don't like punishments to carry over from one day to the next. I don't think that they're meaningful, and for most kids, they're not impactful because they don't even remember what they did wrong by the time that they've had the next day of punishment. . . . I have to hold kids accountable absolutely, but the accountability is more impactful when you have a relationship.

Across the study, participants' accounts illustrated how their core values and beliefs impacted their discipline decision-making. They discussed how specific decisions clashed with their personal core values and beliefs or with the core values and beliefs of stakeholders in the organization.

Laws, Policies, and Procedures

Lastly, several participants across the study experienced tension with laws, policies, and procedures when making decisions around student discipline. George, a K-12 principal elaborated on tensions with manifestation determination policy and procedures.

The most challenging are the ones it's unclear if it's related to the disability or not . . . addressing the discipline I guess at a level that holds students accountable for their actions when the nature of their disability has had a certain level of impact. That's a really hard one to judge for me. And then the inverse is holding a student highly accountable, but being unclear about how impactful if there was a disability. There's just room for doubt on both of those scenarios.

Mackenzie, an elementary principal, described tensions with contract and the teacher's union.

Last year, I received my first grievance around discipline because one of the vocal teachers was unhappy with the way that I was handling a situation. The brief synopsis of the situation was that we had a new student who moved in, a fifth grader who also

happened to not be white, which is highly unusual out in our small, rural school district. This student came in and was displaying behaviors that I would say are probably culturally acceptable for him and his family and the community he moved away from. He was being targeted by the teacher as being disrespectful, defiant, disruptive. Trying to push back on that teacher and saying, "No, that's not acceptable," they caught me in some very tricky language that's in our teacher contract. In this example, the teacher sent a student out of the room, even though it's not an acceptable practice in my building, but in the teacher contract, it says something to the effect that if a teacher sends a student to the office, they shall not return unless the teacher has a meeting with the administrator, principal or principal designee, and an agreed-upon plan is put into place. How our association interpreted that is that I personally have to walk the kid back to class, talk to the teacher, ask their permission for the student to return and that that teacher can deny that request up to one full school day, which is interesting because I feel like that is in conflicting language with the new suspension laws about exclusionary disciplinary practices. It's like, that is the point in case of that.

Across the study, participants shared stories of how laws, policies, and procedures caused conflict either internally or with stakeholders within the organization.

What Makes a Good Discipline Decision?

In addition to unveiling the concerns, pressures, and tensions when making decisions around student discipline, participants' accounts revealed how principals determine what makes a discipline decision good. Results indicated good decisions produce results, keep relationships intact, get resolved at the lowest level, and address the root cause. In the following paragraphs, I will elaborate on each enduring category.

Good Decisions Produce Results

Participants indicated that good decisions result in observable student growth, improvements in behavior, or a discontinuation of misbehavior. For example, Ashley, a K-12 principal, discussed confidence in decisions that resulted in observable growth in the student.

If I had to rate it, I don't feel confident at the end of the situation until I can see progress and growth for that student. If I see the relationship being built between a student and a teacher, then I feel confident that that's working.

Similarly, Emily, an elementary assistant principal, described how good decisions are decisions that change student behavior.

When it works, it changes the students' behavior and families are on board. I realize, yep, we're on the right track. When it doesn't, that's when you're like, okay, let's go back to the drawing board. I think confidence comes when the plan that you and the parents have worked on together changes the student's behavior. The lack of confidence comes when it doesn't work, and you have to figure out, okay, let's go back to the drawing board. Let's call parents back in again. Let's start from scratch.

Building on Emily's accounts, Todd, a high school assistant principal, shared good decisions are those decisions that change student behavior.

I would like to think that I'm always operating, and again, it might be to a fault in the eyes of some of my staff, I try to keep the students' best interest in mind. So, number one, I've got to keep everybody safe. So that's always on my mind. But on the other hand, what's going to work with this particular student, and what's really going to make this student potentially change their behavior?

Lastly, Karlie, a middle school principal, described good decisions as being decisions that resulted in a cease of the misbehavior.

I think when there would be no repeat offending, I would feel pretty good about it. And I guess the times that I have not felt great about it, it's been on the side of being too lenient. And I decided the first time that happened, if I have regret at night about the choices I made, one, there will always be another opportunity to address this behavior again if this is actually an issue that is going to keep coming up. And if I have to feel bad, I'm going to feel worse if I excluded a child from their education in a way that was rash or quick to judgment than I am if I gave him another chance or was softer when I could've been harder.

Across the study, many participants indicated that a good discipline decision produced observable results and quantifiable improvement.

Good Decisions Keep Relationships Intact

In addition to impacting student behavior, several participants described a good discipline decision as one that keeps relationships intact. This enduring category encompassed relationships with students, parents, teachers, and superiors. Intact was described as receiving good feedback, experiencing no pushback or contention, ending with people feeling heard and cared about, stakeholders being on the same page, and everyone agreeing on the next steps. In the following paragraph, I will provide examples that illustrate this theme.

Cory, an elementary principal described good decisions as decisions that resulted in positive feedback from parents and teachers.

I feel like I make good decisions when it comes to student discipline just from doing it successfully and the feedback that I get from others that they're happy with the way that

went, they feel like they were supported, they feel like it was a learning experience for the student, and the parents are appreciative and they're understanding. If I constantly had contentious parents about what happened, I would probably second-guess myself. Or [if I] constantly had teachers contentious about the way I did things, but I never have or do. I feel like I'm doing it the right way.

Additionally, Madison, an elementary principal, described good decisions as being decisions in which people feel heard and cared about.

When I talk to students and families [and] they feel heard and cared for, I think that's the biggest thing. At the end of something bad, when I'm talking to the family and they feel like they've been heard, that I care about the needs of their student, and like the next time something happens, that they're going to be heard and cared for again, [then I made a good decision]. . . . I talked to a parent last week about her son on Friday and about how I'm really worried about his future, like really, really worried about him. She wrote me an email and she said that she knows that and that she's thankful for that, and that she knows that I want what's best for her kid and that's why I'm willing to have a hard conversation with her.

Moreover, Drew, a middle school principal, described a good decision as one that results in everyone on the same page and agreeing on the next steps.

I feel like I've made the right decision when all parties understand. I don't want to say I agree with it, but I understand the harm that's happened and the steps that need to follow to make that repair - best for everybody. Sometimes, as a leader that's out of my control. Sometimes as a leader, when you think about influence and how to influence people in their thinking, it's more in my control than maybe I might think. But at the end of the day,

I can't fully ever control someone's thinking. So, I guess I feel like I've made the right choice or the right decision when other people are all on the same page about what happened, the harm that happened, and then what we need to do next to repair it.

Similarly, Stephanie, an elementary assistant principal, discussed good decisions are made with a team approach.

Sometimes it's really draining because I really do want to help them improve. I don't want it to be about just a one and done kind of thing. I want to help them understand why things didn't work out and why they landed with me. But I also want them to see me, like I said earlier, as a helper, and as somebody who's going to help them navigate their emotions and their social situations, and you know, they're learning, they're little, so help them figure it out. . . . Probably the main thing that gives me confidence is knowing that we have a team of people here that are all on the same page about kids, that's huge.

Stephanie elaborated on how teamwork boosts her confidence in discipline decision-making while building trust and keeping relationships intact.

Because we all use the Zones of Regulation, and we are all very consistent building wide with how we help kids identify emotions and handle things. And building-wide everybody is for a very proactive approach. And I think that gives me confidence to make the decisions that the staff will support [as far as] what I do with kids. And we'll follow up with parents [and] their teachers as [we] need to. And then, also, just that my principal, psychologist, and counselor are there. If I'm really uncertain, [I'll] run things by them and vice versa, you know. [I'll] say, "You know if you were in this situation, what would you do?" And then I trust that they're making the decisions based on our common beliefs about behavior.

Relationships were a common thread across all participants. Furthermore, participants valued the importance of maintaining positive relationships with all stakeholders associated with an organization and viewed good discipline decisions as those decisions that kept relationships intact.

Good Decisions Get Resolved at the Lowest Level

Findings showed participants defined good decisions as those decisions in which behavioral infractions get resolved closest to where the misbehavior occurred. This enduring category consists of the following notions. First, discipline should be handled by the teacher in the classroom, so it does not get passed onto the assistant principal or principal. Second, discipline should be handled by the assistant principal if there is one in the building, so it does not get handed off to the principal. Finally, discipline should be handled by the principal and within the building, so it does not get forwarded to the district office. Heidi, an elementary assistant principal, described challenges when teachers give up their power yet expect the administrator to carry out the decisions that they want that they define as good.

So, there are three different levels and with each of those levels comes a consequence.

And there is a lot of flexibility, although the problem we have is we can be flexible, but then we get feedback from teachers, "You're not following the matrix. They've been out of my class five different times and you're not doing anything except for talking with them." And I'm like, "Well, that's actually not true." And so again, that's part of educating the teachers on restorative practices and how they play a part in this. And so, when they come to me, it's really not your decision anymore. It's mine. So, we get some pushback from teachers because they have the matrix, the parents have the matrix, and then we're

held accountable if we are following it. So yes, it is helpful. It is also one of those barriers that we face when thinking about the best decision for a student.

Similarly, Eric, an elementary principal, discussed that good discipline decisions are best made by the teacher in the classroom closest to where the behavioral infraction occurred.

So, that's kind of my philosophy from the higher-level thinking. Now, to break that down a little bit. As much as possible, I let teachers, and I encourage teachers to handle all of that discipline stuff, like that's the starting point. If something happens, and I'm the first to address it in the principal's office, the teacher loses their authority and their power. And I don't like to say that teachers hold power over kids. That's not what I mean. But teachers can't then support that kid and the kid can't view them as a resource to improve if they're not the ones involved in it. So, yes, there's severe situations where kids come directly to us obviously.

Additionally, Ivy, a middle school principal, described good decisions as those decisions that are made in the four walls of the school without overflowing to the district office.

One of the things that our former superintendent and Dave [current superintendent] told me is I have very little that spills out of my building up to the district office. For a superintendent, they don't want surprises. They don't want your mistakes and fumbles up in their office. They'll deal with them if they have to, but to me, it's no different than my teachers that should be doing restorative practices with a student that continues to sharpen their pencil or shuffle papers. Rather than say "Get out." That does nothing but put them onto my lap. That's like no, I'm not going to take your monkey. You need to keep your power in your classroom and you solve that. So, I see that it parallels. I try to

solve and be thorough with everything I do in my building so that nobody else has to clean it up.

Building on Ivy's thinking, Nick, a middle school assistant principal, discussed the notion that good decisions are those decisions that do not get passed up chain of command.

Typically, in a situation where I'm unsure of what to do, I walk next door to my head principal, "Here's the situation, here's what's going on, here's what I feel like I should do. But my gut is telling me this." Then we'll walk and talk through it together. Because the way I look at it, whether it's the kid or the parent unhappy with my decision, they're going to go to him next anyways. . . . He doesn't want to overrule me, either. He wants me to be able to work through it myself. . . . But I think if you're going to regret something, then you need to have somebody else listen and have another set of ears, another set of eyes, go through what you've done, and help you with that decision. . . . Definitely do your homework. . . . I can't imagine being in a building where you're completely by yourself and have nobody else. I would hope at least you'd have somebody downtown that you can call and get a hold of to help you out. We're not perfect, we make mistakes too. So, it's nice to have somebody else look and guide you through or help you in the same process or say what they would do.

Adding to Nick and Ivy's accounts, Adam, a high school assistant principal, elaborated on the importance of handling situations independently to prevent issues from getting passed up the chain of command.

If I'm the assistant principal, then they go to the principal. If I'm the principal, then they go to the superintendent. So, you just avoid all of that. And of course, not every decision goes the way that you want it to go. There are some that might still get up to the higher

levels of appealing those decisions. But I would venture to say that I've cut back the percentage of people that were unhappy with my decision-making processes. I've cut that in great numbers just because I have become more of a collaborative partner with the families. And [I] also involve the student in the conversation, too. They can also come up with some great alternatives to being suspended.

Similarly, Betty described good decisions as those that keep superiors in the loop and that are made with team input if they are potentially controversial.

Sometimes it's pretty cut and dry. So, when it's a fight and the kid throws a punch, I watch the video, it's that easy. It's when it starts getting a little gray or hazy [that it gets tough]. Like bullying is a really tough one because you really have to be able to back that up. There are times [when] I've called [my superintendent] and said, "This is what I'm thinking. I just need to know, am I going in the right direction?" I'll usually call [him] and ask. Like when I had a first grader with a knife. I'll call, "Okay, this is what I'm thinking. They're six. They really didn't use it for anything." Those [situations] that I'm not quite sure about, that could be controversial, [are the ones that] I'll usually talk to [my superintendent] and feel him out on it. I definitely don't like those gray ones where it's harder. . . . Again, the ones of confidence are the ones that I can say without a doubt, "This is what happened." I have no question about who did it and what happened. The ones that I lose confidence in are the ones that are just not as clear cut. And I can only tell the parents I'm almost positive this is what happened, or I'm 90% sure, or based on all the information that I've gathered, this is what I have to say that happened. But that's why I like to talk to as many people as I can and get as much information as I can. So that way, I can be as confident with my decision as possible.

Whereas Melissa, a middle school assistant principal expressed confidence in decision-making that provides students with tools they need to be successful while simultaneously getting them back to class.

I feel like for the most part, we're not quick to give negative consequences for students. So, in that, I can feel more secure in what we are doing because I think we are trained to handle it at a low level, get the student back to class, and give them tools and resources that they can access when things start to get crazy. If they need a break, if they need an escape, whatever it might be. So that makes it easier. Whereas if you're dealing with big consequences, then you have more reason to doubt whether you're doing the right thing.

Across the study, findings revealed that principals place a high priority on handling student discipline closest to the origin of the misbehavior. This was two-fold. First, participants expected teachers to prevent and intervene with minor misbehaviors at the classroom level. Principals faced challenges and pushback from teachers on this expectation. Second, principals navigated decision-making in a manner that would keep situations from getting passed up the chain of command.

Good Decisions Address the Root Cause

The final enduring category is good discipline decisions are those that address the root cause of the behavior. For example, Eric, an elementary principal illustrated the importance of matching services to the root cause of the misbehavior and represents the sample well.

In that example, as a building, we did a lot of what we could do. And we ended up getting parents to get into some outside services. And in the end, that's what's going to help that child. And there's a lot of layers to that child that explain a lot of those behaviors that we can try to support, but we really can't get to the depth that that child needed. So, in the

end, we got them [the parents] to buy in, finally, after many years of trying to get some services. But to me, that's the best-case scenario. Obviously, the flipside is we had a lot of repeated behaviors we had to address, and each time we addressed them, we tried to take a different approach to support the child again. But again, that's an example of if we just simply attacked the behavior and said, "Oh, you missed recess, here's your consequence, here's your consequence," and we never go deeper, we wouldn't have gotten to the point to get them those services and to get parents bought in to it. We got there because we tried to do all these things to support him as a student and a child rather than just simply hammering down consequences. And I tell teachers, every behavior is sending a message. We just need to know what message is being sent. And then we can address it. If the message is I haven't eaten in two days, it doesn't matter what the output is. If we address that, we're not going to get the output. But if we address the output and never the food, we're going to just get that over and over. It doesn't matter how many times we send them to the office.

Similarly, Matt, a middle school principal described good decisions as those that pinpoint the root cause of the misbehavior and focus on addressing the root cause.

So, you're always thinking about the student when you're making decisions and how that can affect them. . . . Do they need school supplies? Do they need clothes? My mind is always on the student. . . . I think the research shows that those kids with adverse experiences at school are the ones that aren't being successful. So how do we continue to help them? . . . What does the data tell us? If a kid is getting into a fight, your data tells you whether it's common or uncommon or just something out of the ordinary. You got a

kid that all of a sudden blows up in class, but we've never ever had that problem in classes, it's like, whoa, what happened? Is there something at home? What happened? Building on Matt's thinking, Aaron, an elementary principal, described how good decisions get to the root cause and can function as a means of preventing future misbehaviors or escalations.

In my head, whenever I look into it, I'm looking at, okay, what is the behavior the student is engaging in? Why do we not want that in class? What were the steps taken by the adults involved? Not just the teacher, but any adult, and what was the response by the student? Because I'm coming from the positive pre-supposition that all kids want to do well, all kids want to achieve, all kids want to succeed, and all kids are going to do the best that they can with the skills that they have. A student engages in X behavior and displays Y response when teacher provides intervention [or] whatever. Really behavior is X, intervention is Y and then outcome output response is Z. I sit there and I think, well, if that's the best that the kid's got, then we got to look at are we giving them enough tools in their tool bag to handle whatever's coming up in their day? Are we giving the teachers enough tools in their tool bags to respond to student behaviors? And what was the reason that that behavior existed in the first place? If we can be preventative to the point where we no longer see that behavior, then that's a success. Which is why it goes back to my earlier statement of it really starts when students walk into the building or start interacting with adults. It all comes to context.

Adding to Aaron's story, Renee, a high school assistant principal, provided an example to support Aaron's rationale. She relayed a success story about a time when her decision-making unveiled the root cause of the behavior to be a struggle with math. She was able to provide targeted resources to help the student be successful.

It was always the same thing, and we would end up once a week in my office. It wasn't until this had been going on for quite some time that he finally just broke down crying and shared this obviously traumatic story with me about what was going on in his life. It just took him that long to get to a point where he really was willing to say, "Here's why I don't care about math." Then that allowed me to push him to some other resources that we already had in place.

Whereas Andy, a high school principal, shared challenges with making good decisions that get to the root cause when resources are non-existent or limited.

We are a catch-all. Whether it be social service, mental health, medical, it's all wrapped in a school setting these days. . . . The kids I worry about are the ones that are using [drugs]. About seven years ago, we had a drug and alcohol intervention specialist here, and her clientele, the kids that would come see her for help, were primarily female. The support she gave them [was] to help them get clean. . . . They were being abused a lot as they were in the midst of somebody's drug house where parents didn't care whether or not they use[d], and then [they were] having to use sex [to have] a place to stay. We've lost that position, and I know that OSPI was working on a menu of interventions that should be happening in schools, and there's so many counselors and that kind of stuff. We have yet to get back to that place where we have a full-time drug and alcohol counselor. And there's just no beds around here in [our city] or treatment. [When] kids get their drug and alcohol tests and they say, "Well, you need to do two months of outpatient treatment," that doesn't really change their environment. I feel like for so many of them it's just a hoop. And to break that cycle, when you've already been on meth and stuff by the time you're 13 years old, we've got big issues. But vaping seems to have gone away, for the

most part. That was a hot thing for so long. But just the accessibility of marijuana right now is [a big issue].

Similarly, Joe, a high school principal illustrated how decisions that are not good, or that don't address the root cause, can be detrimental for not only the student, but other students and staff too.

Maybe I don't remember the exact deal, but there had been a lot of back and forth going on, and we knew the kid [had a] tough home life. The student had been pretty progressive with some bullying and harassment-type stuff and trying to work through it. I think she ended up attacking and going after a girl in the bathroom and striking her a few times. Maybe [I] should have taken a tougher line a little earlier on with that and she wouldn't have made that aggressive of assault on a girl later on. . . . I didn't really foresee it going down that route and turning it into such a violent episode. . . . or maybe with a harder line or more intervention with forcing some mental health counseling to get to the root of the anger or something like that. Just being willing to get way more serious when it seems like there's ongoing conflict between two students and put things in writing matters. We have a, we call it our local, but basically a no-contact order that's pretty strict that we use maybe only done one this year, maybe once or twice a year but having both students and parents sign and say, there'll be no verbal or physical contact but they'll also be no verbal or digital discussion to anybody else about the student.

Building on Andy and Joe's accounts, Todd, a high school assistant principal, also discussed potential challenges with making good decisions that target the root cause of the behavior. In doing so, he elaborated on tensions that may arise when considering the best interest of the student versus the best interest of the collective. Specifically, how getting to the root cause of a

misbehavior may be at odds with safety or what is best for those who may have been impacted by the behavioral violation.

I have a benefit because my two adult children have both come through [name of high school]. So, for eight of my 14 years here, I'm taking consideration of what is necessary to keep MY kids safe. So again, kind of putting that parent piece in place as well as my administrative piece. So, keeping the building safe, doing what's right for the students and student who maybe is impacted or is maybe just one of those people that's in the building. And then, at the same time, taking into consideration just kind of the overall best interest of the student who's in my office, too. So, the other term I'm getting familiar with and really like is "root cause." So, I like to think I've always been pretty good at trying to get down to the root cause of what the real problem is. I think that's what I think kids appreciate when I talk to them too. It's not just a "You're disruptive in class, that's an hour of detention," and away we go. I stop, look at their grades, look at their attendance, talk to them, get their side of the story, and try to kind of understand, okay, so why did this happen? So, the why or the root cause, I think is important. So, in my mind, that's where my confidence comes from. And that's what I try to push off on other staff too, is you got to take the time to talk to the students and find out what it is that's really going on. And that's the amazing thing. Like I said earlier, I have relationships with the kids that I have to discipline on a somewhat regular basis. But now they come to me even when they're not in trouble and you know, they're asking for my assistance or asking me to help them go to whatever resources available that is above and beyond my ability level is. So, I think where I feel most confident is my ability to just work with the students and

parents as well. It's kind of getting to the root cause of things and then trying to get the right resources in place to help fix that problem.

Across all participants, emphasis was placed on getting to the root cause to prevent misbehavior from reoccurring. There was a recognition that excluding students would not be effective in shaping behaviors as exclusion does not necessarily take the root cause of the behavior into account. Matching interventions and supports to student needs was a priority across the sample.

Summary

In conclusion, this study revealed important findings about the ways in which principals think about decisions concerning student discipline. Importantly, accounts provided evidence of a disconnect between aspiration and practice. Principals knew what should not be done in terms of student discipline and why it should not be done. Additionally, principals could articulate what should be done to promote equitable discipline outcomes, but they struggled with knowing how to do what they knew should be done within their organizational contexts.

Across the sample, participants' accounts shed light on three enduring challenges they experienced when making decisions around student discipline. The three enduring categories unveiled include concerns, pressures, and tensions. First, participants were concerned about policy, relationships, internal consistency, and safety. Next, participants felt pressure to keep everyone safe, perform in a public arena, and negotiate decision-making with increasing complexities of the principalship. Lastly, participants experienced tension with organizational contexts; core values and beliefs; and laws, policies, and procedures.

Finally, participants' accounts unveiled the ways in which principals define good discipline decisions. These four enduring categories shed light on the thinking principals engage in when making decisions around student discipline. First, participants determined that discipline

decisions were good if they improved or extinguished student behavior. Second, participants considered decisions that were made at the level closest to the origin of the misbehavior to be good decisions. Third, participants described good discipline decisions as those decisions that kept relationships intact. Lastly, participants defined good discipline decisions as those decisions that targeted the root cause of the misbehavior as a means to diminish or prevent reoccurring misbehaviors.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

School discipline decision-making has been a long-standing topic of debate. Proponents of stricter discipline laws argue student behavior is becoming increasingly violent and disruptive, thus harsher punishments are needed to restore safety and order (Wall, 2023). Conversely, critics of harsher punishments argue exclusionary discipline is ineffective and leads to harmful effects (e.g., LiCalsi et al., 2021; Rushton et al., 2002).

To address the growing fears of student violence, several U.S. lawmakers have pushed for tougher discipline policies (Wall, 2023). In response, the Biden administration released guidance cautioning school leaders about unfair discipline practices (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Despite efforts to reform school discipline, concerns on both sides of the argument continue to persist.

While overall suspension rates have declined in recent years (Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2021), in urban and high poverty schools the rates of disciplinary actions remain high (Kamenetz, 2018). This is problematic because research has shown suspension exacerbates misbehavior, harms academic performance, and leads to both juvenile and adult incarceration (e.g., LiCalsi et al., 2021; Rumberger & Losen, 2016; Ruston et al., 2002). Additionally, LiCalsi et al, (2021) found suspended students are more likely to show a heightened risk of depression and civic engagement. Moreover, economic analyses indicate that suspensions cost taxpayers tens of millions of dollars each year due to lifelong government expenditures and losses in tax revenue (Rumberger & Losen, 2016). Black students are impacted the most. Alarming, Black students are two times more likely than White students to receive out-of-school suspensions among all student subpopulations and across all school contexts (Nowicki, 2018).

Discouragingly, new research by Darling-Hammond and Welsh found efforts to resolve these disparities continue to fall short. Darling-Hammond et al. (2023) recently published a study that found disciplinary infractions escalates during the school year. Moreover, it escalates more severely for Black students, and racial disparities in discipline referrals escalate most in schools that have a high degree of racial disparity early in the year. Darling-Hammond et al's. (2023) findings provide insights regarding when and where to intervene to reduce discipline and discipline disparities.

Additionally, a study conducted by Welsh (2023) concluded administrators' disciplinary philosophies vary, relationships and interactions among school leaders and teachers are a major component of the organizational dynamics underlying how perceived misbehavior is handled in schools, and school-level decisions about the generation and adjudication of office discipline referrals are the product of interactional patterns and relationships among adults in schools that partly shape discretion and accountability in disciplinary decisions. As stated by Welsh (2023, p. 237), "The findings unearth two key tensions—disciplinary philosophical tensions and discretion and accountability for office discipline referrals tensions—among district leaders, school administrators, and teachers navigating referrals and further disciplinary consequences." The present study surfaced similar tensions.

To date, few studies make direct correlations between principal decision-making attitudes and behaviors, values and beliefs, and more equitable outcomes for diverse student populations. In the present study, principals are viewed as key agents in decision-making. Given the high importance and interwoven complexities of school leaders' decision-making within schools and the charge to eliminate discipline inequities, this study sought to understand how principals describe their concerns, pressures, and tensions when making discipline decisions. Additionally,

this study sought to understand how principals describe what makes a student discipline decision good.

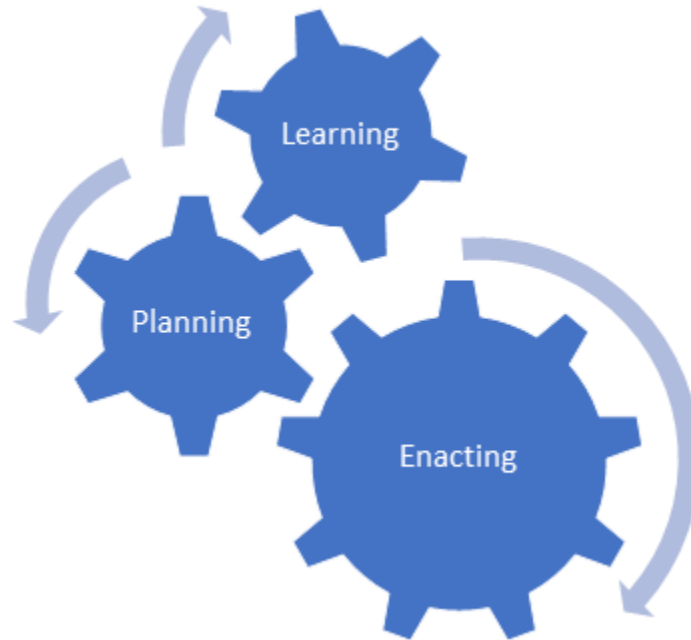
Discussion

Study results suggest a disconnect between principal aspirations and practice when administering student discipline. Principals could articulate what should *not* be done, why it should *not* be done, and what the right things to do are. However, they struggled knowing *how* to do the right things. Chapter four surfaced the concerns, pressures, and tensions principals face when making discipline decisions. Chapter four also explored the characteristics of a good decision. Principals were clear, good decisions, decisions where they felt like ‘they got it right’, shared several characteristics. Good decisions are those decisions that produce results, keep relationships intact, get resolved at the lowest level, and address root causes.

Moreover, principals did not leave things to chance. They actively worked to respond to issues they faced, trying to make more good decisions than bad. Chapter five expands on the ideas in chapter four by adding additional nuance and context for principals’ discipline decision-making choices. Initial data analysis revealed principals engaged in a common decision-making cycle in their attempts to resolve the tensions inherent in decisions about student discipline. This decision-making cycle of tensions can best be described as including phases of learning, planning, and enacting. Building on the findings of chapter four, chapter five explores this cycle of tension resolution and its application to daily practice.

Figure 3

Discipline Decision-Making Cycle of Tensions



Important to note, principals experienced tensions throughout the discipline decision-making cycle. These tensions were not distinct to one phase; there is some overlap.

Unquestionably, these phases are iterative, mutually impacting, and tightly linked together. The table below shows commonly occurring tensions at each phase of the discipline decision-making cycle. In the subsequent paragraphs, I will elaborate on learning, planning, and enacting as well as the corresponding tensions principals experienced.

Table 3*Tensions: Discipline Decision-Making Cycle*

Tensions	Balancing	
Learning Tensions	Daily practices	Aspirational practices
	Status quo	Change
Planning Tensions	Individual needs of students	Organizational capacity to meet students' needs
	Management	Leadership
Enacting Tensions	Punitive responses to behavioral infractions	Relationship-based, supportive responses to behavioral infractions
	Needs of the community	Needs of individual students
	Laws, policies, and procedures	Core values and beliefs
	Prescriptive responses to behavioral infractions	Individualized responses to behavioral infractions
	Principal managed responses to student misbehavior	Teacher managed responses to student misbehavior

Learning

During the learning phase of the discipline decision-making cycle, principals acquired knowledge about aspirational discipline practices. Learning encompassed discovering, understanding, and sensemaking not only of laws, policies, and procedures, but also of supportive alternatives to exclusionary discipline such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS), restorative practices, and social emotional learning. Additionally, for many participants, learning included a trial by fire approach as they implemented organizational

change in schoolwide discipline practices. Differing philosophical views concerning student discipline amongst the actors in the organization also led to increased tensions during the learning phase. In sum, across the sample, learning tensions arose because discipline decision-making required balancing new discipline ideas and beliefs with older and more traditional ideas and beliefs within organizational contexts. The overarching learning tensions principals grappled with included acknowledging the differences between the status quo and change; daily practice and aspirational practice; and individual needs and organizational capacity.

Status Quo and Change

Participants in this study experienced tensions between maintaining the status quo and introducing change. Change requires flexibility and fidelity. Additionally, it requires a sacrifice of order and stability. In a study conducted by Welsh (2023), the author noted that efforts to change sparked philosophical tensions with diverging perspectives on punitive and nonpunitive discipline; behavior management and behavior expectations; prescriptive and individualized responses to misconduct; and whether or not discipline should be teacher-managed versus principal-administered. Certainly, the notion that there are philosophical distinctions about the purpose of school discipline is unremarkable. However, diverging philosophies about how student behavioral infractions should be addressed increased relational tensions between principals and teachers as some teachers pushed back to maintain the status quo. As has already been discussed in chapter four as an example of the pressures of policy and procedure, MacKenzie described her experience with a grievance around her discipline decision-making and a strategy she uses to prevent future grievances. Here her words speak to how change causes tensions.

. . . last year, I received my first grievance around discipline because one of the vocal teachers was unhappy with the way that I was handling a situation. . . . He [the student] was being targeted by the teacher as being disrespectful, defiant, disruptive. . . . In this example, the teacher sent a student out of the room, even though it's not an acceptable practice in my building. In the teacher contract, it says something to the effect that if a teacher sends a student to the office, they shall not return unless the teacher has a meeting with the administrator, principal or principal designee, and an agreed-upon plan is put into place. . . . How our association interpreted that is that I personally have to walk the kid back to class, talk to the teacher, ask their permission for the student to return, and that that teacher can deny that request up to one full school day, which is interesting because I feel like that is in conflicting language with the new suspension laws about exclusionary disciplinary practices. . . . I know that I am acting in a very fragile state right now because of that grievance last year. I second-guess, I reflect, I persevere on my decisions when I do have to intervene, and I overkill on some aspects. When I escort the kid back, I follow up with an email. Then I follow up with [another] email to make sure that they got my [email]. Doing these over-the-top things . . . just because I know I don't want there to be any questioning or fault because I didn't follow the contract to a T. That's been a learning experience in itself.

In addition, expanding on his struggle with navigating teachers' perceptions as he described in chapter four, Adam elaborated on his challenges, specific to teachers feeling supported by administration, and how he balanced that with his role.

I used to be of the mind that, yeah, we've got to punish them. We've got to teach them a lesson. They've got to learn. And I came in like that to [Spirit High School]. Like, okay,

yeah, let's throw them out . . . And I think teachers like that, and not all teachers, but the majority of the teachers, 80-85% of the teachers say, "Yeah, so and so is supportive." And as soon as you don't go the way that they[teachers] want you to go with the decision on discipline, then they tell you, and I quote, "I don't feel supported." That's code for, "You're not throwing the kid out, which is what I want." And I don't deny that there are situations when that needs to be the case. Like if we have a threat to somebody's integrity, physical integrity, then we have to act. Because our main duty and responsibility is to provide a safe and comfortable learning environment for all of our students.

In sum, it is important for school leaders to be aware of and prepared for conflicting philosophies about student discipline as they prepare to enact changes in schoolwide discipline systems. Principals must be prepared to navigate through potential grievances around student discipline and teacher dissatisfaction with their job performance, namely discipline decision-making. Yet, none of the principals in this study reported that they had received any training or substantive assistance in managing this tension. Findings from this study suggest that principal learning should include acknowledgement of these tensions and offer considerable practical support aimed at mitigating potential opposition and grievances.

Daily Practices and Aspirational Practices

Tensions also arose between aspirational and daily practices. Aspirational practices included the principals' vision for what schoolwide discipline systems could be. For example, many principals in this study aspired to implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS), Restorative Practices, or Social Emotional Learning in alignment with the new state and national discipline policy and laws. They imagined relationship-based responses to student

misbehavior tailored to meet individualized student needs, producing measurable improvements in student behavior. Daily practices, on the other hand, were the sum total of the habits practiced. These included what some principals described as "punitive" or "quick-triggered" responses to student misbehavior. Others described it as the "old way" of handling behavioral infractions. However, implementing aspirational visions required changing daily practices and disrupting the status quo. These cultural shifts led to tensions and resulted in low commitment, confusion over roles, interpersonal conflicts, and pushback. Matt, a middle school principal, discussed the importance of getting staff buy-in to navigate around these tensions.

I think that's the hardest part for me. I guess my vision of discipline here is it should be around restorative practices, teaching expectations, and PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support). But then, you know, comes the not so fun side - the suspensions and the consequences. We include our teachers in those decisions, because ultimately, you have to have the buy-in from them. And that's where I think I've struggled a little bit over the last couple of years is they want to see that consequence piece. But I want to see the restorative practice, the teaching, the changing of the behaviors. So, it's working together to get where we want to be, at least at this school.

Other principals elaborated on the importance of providing sufficient time for professional learning about relationship-based approaches such as PBIS or restorative practices or cultural biases. Additionally, some principals emphasized the necessity to provide targeted coaching for individual teachers who were overtly or covertly resisting changing their classroom behavior management practices. Clearly, principals must be provided with support in the form of ongoing training or professional networking to successfully navigate through tensions when shifting school discipline practices. Sadly, currently, principals in this study reported that most of their

learning related to balancing traditional practices with aspirational, although legislatively required, practices rested on their own shoulders. This work suggests that resolving these tensions needs to be surfaced as important collective learning and elevated within district and professional association discussion and work.

Individual Needs and Organizational Capacity

Moreover, participants experienced tensions with the increasing needs of students and the school's capacity required to meet those needs. COVID-19 school closures added to the complexity of the principalship as principals saw profound impacts post-COVID on the social emotional and well-being of students. Challenges included, but were not limited to, increases in poverty, trauma, behavioral, and mental health needs. Participants across the sample responded by striving to provide targeted supports for the individual needs of students. However, many principals reported a lack of sufficient resources including time, staffing, professional development, and community partnerships. Building on his accounts highlighted in chapter four regarding his struggle to meet the needs of students with limited resources, Aaron, an elementary principal, elaborated on this notion of feeling helpless.

Where I feel my hands get tied with the interactions [is] when you get multiple entities involved, for instance, when special education students engage in repeated behaviors to which we don't have an answer. That's more at the middle school. I'm like, "I just don't know what to do." Either we don't have the resources to help the student out or they're doing such extreme behaviors that we can't keep them here, and therefore, they're out there at home or in that setting, and I feel so helpless at that point.

Important to note, rural school leaders emphasized disparities in resources between schools across the state. Many principals exhausted all the tools in their toolbox, and at times, shifted

into survival mode, or reverted to the status quo. This led to internal conflict for these principals, and many of them described this inability to provide students with care and support students' need to address the root cause of misbehavior as something that keeps them "awake at night".

Some principals discussed creative ways they increased systems of support for students. For example, Kelly, a middle school principal described supports in her building.

We have a lot of safety nets for kids. We have a Threat Assessment Team. . . . It consists of a psychologist, our school resource officer, admin, teachers, parents, and student. . . . We have a really neat program set up with interns from [colleges]. These mental health professional interns from [colleges] do their internships here. We have one gal that oversees all of them, and they're assigned to our buildings for quite some time. They also have group counseling and individual counseling . . . we have a Social Emotional Learning team, and we have a district [approach]. . . . As far as the kids with the little problems, they're staffed. Kids that are on the radar are taken to our PLC teams grade level teams. They try to figure out interventions for those kids and what's going on and so. We're just starting to really dig into that this year. It's just like an academic intervention only they're social emotional interventions. We also have Second Steps. We've incorporated that into our curriculum too. . . . One of the things that I've done is we look at our class rosters and we will say is there a kid there that you aren't connected with or that you don't know about or who's hanging out there? And we talk about those kids, and we'll do things like, okay, we're going to take this kid and somebody's going to talk to this kid like just two minutes a day and start getting relationships and then in trying to get to know the kids more and so then we come back and talk a little. Did that work? It's all about connecting with kids. And we have a team, they do nothing but look

at all the data on the discipline and to see whether it's going down or up or referrals up or down and we have dropped dramatically the past probably four years because we have been doing this stuff, and connecting with kids and, you know, it's not about punishment and it's not about us. It's about connecting with the kids and the kids know that you love them. If you care for them, they're not going to act out so much. . . . So we have a lot of support.

Stephanie's insights in chapter four highlighted the notion that good decisions are made with a team approach, here, she described the various behavioral and emotional supports her team collectively provides for their students.

So, we do have a thing in place called [the Den]. This is a room where we can take kids who get angry really quickly and can't calm down. Even though they're using those strategies, they know they can't calm down in a classroom. So, we have a quiet space, and it's just kind of calming lighting and everything. And we take them for a walk, and then take them in there and just spend some time calming. And they can have their choice. They can either just sit there, or they can watch the calming apps. . . . we have a team of people here that are all on the same page about kids. That's huge. Because we all use the Zones of Regulation, and we are all very consistent building-wide with how we help kids identify emotions and handle things. And building-wide everybody is for a very proactive approach.

Moreover, MacKenzie, an elementary principal, described positions she created to increase the systems of support in her building.

I now have created [positions] this year with my high poverty lap funds. One, I fund [Roger's] position. . . . If we were in a typical school day, he would be providing SEL

instruction for the upper grades. . . . Then the other portion of his day, it's funded under SEL for high-poverty lap, but it's a pseudo-Dean of Student's position. He helps with a lot of low-level behavior things. Then I created a second position where I have hired a classified staff member who also is finishing up her bachelor's in functional behavioral analysis. She's planning on eventually becoming a BCBA. She is a behavior interventionist. She's that nitty-gritty even before the issue gets to [Roger]. She's there as a support person.

While some principals described multiple ways they are creating caring and supporting systems to meet the increasing needs of students, resources remain limited and inequitable across buildings. This may be leading to the persistent discipline inequities that we are seeing. Policymakers must address the insufficient capacity of schools to meet the expanding needs of students if equity in education is to be achieved. A system change is needed at the policy level. Principals cannot do this important work alone with no additional supports.

Although many of the principals in this study reported learning their way into new, more effective practices, the absence of sufficient resources required that they learned in isolation and "trial by error" rather than in more informed and communal ways. Not only is the inefficient and likely unsustainable, learning in these ways offers no avenues for these new practices to be institutionalized in meaningful ways or shared beyond the boundaries of a single school. Therefore, although valuable, the impact of these hard learned lessons is easily lost and rarely replicated, lessening its influence and significance. Yet, the principals in this study persisted using their learning to make plans with the intent of making good decisions about discipline.

Planning

The planning phase of the discipline decision-making cycle incorporated planning and organizing systems of support. Generally, principals defined their planning work as future focused, identifying changes that needed to happen so that discipline decisions at both the classroom and building level were responsive to the needs of students and state and district policy and law.

Planning was important because it provided teachers and paraprofessionals with a sense of purpose and direction, outlining the kinds of tasks they would be performing, and explaining how their activities were related to the overall goals of the school. Once principals developed workable plans and the methods for attaining them, they designed systems designed to successfully implement the plans. Selina, an elementary principal, described the challenges of being a new principal in a new building, feeling underprepared. Her planning efforts focused on building a common understanding of how student misbehavior should be managed.

Someone will say, "This is what we do," and then you ask other people [and] they're like, "We haven't done that for years," which might be that some people are doing it, and some people aren't. And so just gathering people around to make sure we all have this common understanding about what our expectations are. What are our conversations about students? What should it look like? How do we communicate about these things? How do we address these things? I think we're on the iceberg tip of these conversations with the staff right now. . . . It is a growth point. . . . It's a little overwhelming at times.

Planning for schoolwide discipline practice changes proved to be challenging. Change is hard. People want order and stability. People want kids to act appropriately so learning can be the focus of the classroom and school. However, for change and adaptation to occur, order and

stability may be sacrificed. Therefore, changing schoolwide discipline systems required principals to plan *how* to significantly shift mindsets about responding to student misbehavior. Additionally, it required principals to grapple with *when* to implement change. It was a difficult balance to negotiate as they planned for tensions associated with change.

Across the sample, principals described "selling the message" that "this is good for kids, good for you as the teacher, and good for families and parents" as a "hard task" that was "really big." Overarching tensions that surfaced during the planning phase of the discipline decision-making cycle included tensions between management and leadership actions as well as managing opposition to new, relationship-based responses to behavioral infractions. In the following paragraphs, I will elaborate on the two.

Management and Leadership

One overarching tension that surfaced for principals in the planning phase of the discipline decision-making cycle was balancing management and leadership actions. Traditionally, management duties focused on creating and enforcing policies, rules, and procedures; keeping the building safe and running efficiently; and managing student discipline in more removed ways. Leadership aspects of the principalship, on the other hand, focused on shifting attitudes, values, and beliefs regarding how to respond to student misbehavior. Additionally, in the leadership realm, principals looked to the future and gravitated towards relationship-based and supportive ways of responding to behavioral infractions. Sandy, a middle school principal, navigated this tension by dividing up management and leadership duties in her building.

Well, I have an assistant principal. . . . I do divide our labor up a little bit. . . . I tend to oversee more of the things that are instructional leadership-focused, and he is more of a

manager who's responding to whatever happens between kids and teachers and so on during the course of a day. But restorative practices, PBIS work, that is proactive work. So, he and I very much collaborate on our proactive systems and how those are going to function to try to prevent problems before they arise. [Assistant Principal] will usually take the lead on [responding to misbehavior] stuff. . . . he told a teacher to blankity blank blank, and he'll respond to that kind of stuff.

Still, there were principals that described themselves as a “one-person show” not having the ability to divide up management and leadership duties. Thus, planning proved to be highly contextual and dependent upon multiple factors including personnel, resources, and existing building culture. For example, Karlie, a middle school principal navigated the push and pull between management and leadership by prioritizing communication with teachers.

As a teacher, I'd hear from other teachers a lot that the admin didn't support them, and that the admin just gave the kids candy when they came down [to the principal's office]. . . . And so, I think that what I learned from that is the communication begins with teachers. It's not that I'm trying to push it back on you, but a kid and I can have a great conversation alone in an office. There's no magic with that. If the teacher were alone in the office talking to the kids, they would have a great conversation too, for the most part. And it doesn't change the bad behavior that's occurring with 30 kids.

Karlie expanded on the importance of communication.

So, I feel like I've learned more about trying to communicate with teachers like, here's the steps that we're taking and why, and also why we need you to be, you're the one that has to live in this relationship and this classroom atmosphere with the student. I guess I would think too sometimes like, gosh, he went and talked to so-and-so, I didn't cure him

of this behavior. Why not? So, I think it's communicating with [the teachers] too, about exactly what happened and then trying to empower them from the get-go in terms of how to handle behavior and what . . . I feel like really communicating with teachers, what is a teacher discretionary or teacher managed behavior, when does that become cumulative enough to involve other people? And what is so extreme?

Likewise, Heidi elementary assistant principal, elaborated on how she balanced managing schoolwide discipline systems while leading a shift to more relationship-based responses to misbehavior.

. . . the problem we have is we can be flexible but then we get feedback from teachers, "You're not following the matrix. They've been out of my class five different times and you're not doing anything except for talking with them." And I'm like, "Well, that's actually not true." And so again, that's part of educating the teachers on restorative practices and how they play a part in this. And so, when they come to me, it's really not your decision anymore. It's mine. So, we get some pushback from teachers because they have the matrix, the parents have the matrix, and we're held accountable for following it. So yes, it [discipline matrix] is helpful. It is also one of those barriers that we face when thinking about what the best decision for a student is.

Additionally, there was a common notion of “teachers giving up their power” but wanting principals to do “exactly what they wanted them to do” across the sample. Principals negotiated this by using it as an opportunity for professional learning. Later in her interview, Heidi represented this well.

We had many conversations with teachers about sending a child down because he's just being rude and disrespectful and refusing to do work. They come to me, and at that point

I gather all the information I can from the teacher and from the student. And then I have to make a decision. If this is a teacher that I know maybe doesn't have strong skills for classroom management, then this is not just a kid issue. This is also a teacher issue. So, then I go in and look at what are the structures that you're putting in place? What are the expectations for this child? . . . We talk about do they know why this child is misbehaving? So, what in the classroom could maybe help that issue. And then I'll tell them straight up, when they come to me, it's no longer your decision.

Heidi described how she structures and leads the conversation, suggesting that she was aware that a single encounter was not adequate to fully address these issues. Professional learning was also required.

We talk about it sounds like that this relationship has been broken and how are we going to do this? So, I'll have a restorative circle with the teacher and the child because the child's not following expectations, but there's something missing or not validating in that child. And there's been so many different reasons, things that are happening outside of school. And they come in and they're just mad and angry. And then the teacher won't get off their back. And so really just kind of having that conversation about, this is what this kid is going through and maybe you could cut them some slack. If this kid in this moment cannot focus, what is something that they could do in your classroom to help them be focused? Do you have a corner that they could just go to until they can collect themselves and come back? Is there a person they could check in with? So, we try to help not only the teacher but the student but have the teacher in on that decision-making process so that they have more awareness.

This illustrates the tension between old and new ways of student discipline. Principals struggle with this tension, finding themselves walking a fine line between management and leadership actions. Principals that don't fight it, fight teachers. Yet, even in schools where principals are actively trying to lead with a new approach, the work is still hard. In many cases, changes in practice still tinker around the edges. There is a privileging of the traditional structures of schooling. However, there is some evidence it is starting to shift at varying degrees. In this study, principals seemed to be grappling with this shift, but in many schools, teachers are still reticent to change.

Additionally, the findings of this study imply that principals cannot choose between management and leadership actions. Principals in this study navigated balancing managing and leading by building common understandings; focusing on communication and relationships; and by using tensions as opportunities to provide individual coaching or professional learning like Heidi described. Therefore, planning for change, and the inevitable bumps in the road principals encounter, is an important part of the cycle discipline decision-making cycle. Undeniably, real reform cannot occur absent planful management and leadership activity.

Punitive and Relationship-based, Supportive, or Restorative Practices

At the root of much of the resistance to change was a tension between traditional punitive practices and relationship-based, supportive, or restorative practices. Traditionally, punitive responses to misbehavior focused on coercing individuals to conform to existing norms and rules and punishing those who refused or were not able to do the accepted thing. Additionally, punitive practices reinforced hierarchical relationships because punishment was handed down from someone who held a position of power (e.g., judge, principal, teacher) to someone at fault for wrongdoing.

Relationship-based, supportive, or restorative approaches to misbehavior focus on changing the school in ways that met both the individual *and* community needs. Therefore, restorative practices are posited to construct egalitarian relationships and use democratic methods to repair harm, resolve conflict, and promote healing. Matt, a middle school principal, described restorative justice and PBIS and spoke to what they are designed to do.

I think it went from that consequence piece to how do we look at the behavior and help with interventions to make that student better? The consequences do not solve the problem. There's got to be a consequence for your behavior-I don't disagree with that. Sometimes I struggle with how much of a consequence. And I've got to be a little bit better at that. . . . How are we going to change that behavior? It does us no good to just kick a kid out, put them three to five days behind, and expect them to come back in here with a changed perspective. Fear does not work with our kids, especially our tier two and our tier three. When I was growing up, you could fear me into being a good kid. That's not why I was a good kid, but part of it. [But] you know, fear doesn't work. I think providing interventions, providing opportunities for that kid to talk to someone to solve problems is really what it's about. And I think that's where PBIS, restorative practices, all those things [are important].

Selina, an elementary principal, elaborated on the push and pull between punitive and relationship-based responses to misbehavior and why it is hard to navigate implementing restorative practices with tension from older practices.

I think the difficult part of this transition is that there wasn't a lot of structure in place at the old building. Nobody knew how to refer a student to the office. They didn't know how to document discipline, which seems like a really small thing. . . . I love talking

about community and restorative practices, but the flip side is like, what have you done with this student around this behavior to support them, to communicate with families? Like, what have you tried? And so, when I went into Skyward and I was looking at discipline, nobody was putting anything in. But then we were having all these side conversations, like, why aren't we doing something about X, Y, Z? Well, we don't know about them.

Selina elaborated on the importance of documentation.

So, the flip side of like having that warm, fuzzy, community-building, restorative stuff is like, you have to document everything that we're doing. Because what I do is frequently, like on a weekly basis, I pull the discipline data and look at where discipline's happening. Playground, number one, always. But then you can also see other pockets of students in grade levels [or] classrooms. Like, are there other places around the building that need support that I'm not aware of because they're not like high level things? But if I have one teacher writing 10 to 15 referrals a day, that teacher might need some help. Right? But if that teacher's not putting anything in, and there are all these little, tiny, low-level things, but I don't know about them, the families don't know about them, then what happens is when those little things just start building and building and building and building, and then you're just mad and you just write up everybody. And it's a major thing, and it's a big explosion.

Selina knew that working within the system matters.

So, when we're talking about systems, just little things like that, where that is kind of a district thing, where you are supposed to write up your discipline and here's your discipline matrixes. This staff right now, we're going back to building up and creating

and reviewing, what is a major? What is a minor? What does the teacher deal with? What does admin deal with? What are some interventions? . . . That's pretty important.

One of the problems of practice is just clarity around it, building expectations for students and staff. It's huge. And coming in . . . I was the associate, so I learned those things, and a lot of these things were in place, and then I was a principal, and it was a nice, soft start.

And so, when I came here, I wasn't quite as ready as I thought I should have been. Right?

There are just things that you would expect that would be . . . like, that you make assumptions about because of your past experiences.

Clearly, principals struggle with navigating tensions between punitive and relationship-based responses to student misconduct. Further complicating this navigation is the fact that these approaches represent diverging, deeply held philosophical beliefs about student discipline held by teachers, administrators, and parents. Unfortunately, none of the principals in this study reported that they had received any training or substantive support in managing this tension. Yet, the principals in this study continued to persist in their planning and pursuit to make good student discipline decisions.

If lasting shifts are to be made in how principals address student misbehavior, principal learning should offer ample practical assistance aimed at shifting attitudes, values, beliefs, and mindsets despite conflicting policies, existing cultures, or diverging philosophies on student discipline. Additionally, at the school board and district level, district leaders must be clear about discipline and equity goals and support planning efforts designed to reach them. Finally, adequate resources must be provided to support principal work. For example, both Selina and Matt spoke about the importance of ongoing professional learning for teachers. Principals, especially those in small districts, cannot be the only source for new knowledge and teaching

skills. Therefore, support for additional professional learning is required if principals are to fully implement these practices.

Enacting

After principals formulated plans and organized activities, they embarked on the enacting phase of the discipline decision-making cycle of tensions. Enacting included leading teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents toward changed practice. Enacting, for the principals in this study, began with relatively typical kinds of leadership actions. First, the new direction or vision for school discipline was broadly shared. Importantly, influencing the behavior of others proved to be challenging for the principals in this study as it involved the complex elements of leadership, motivation, communication, and organizational dynamics.

During the enacting phase, principals grappled between wanting to do their best and wanting to do what was needed to lead, develop, and serve students better. Thus, performance tensions were raised between individual and collective identities. Adding to the difficulty, principals reported not having enough knowledge or resources to enact their aspirational visions. Context matters, and there was no lockstep, cookie cutter approach to follow. Therefore, context became a filter for the coordination of systems.

Moreover, an important aspect of context was the school's existing school culture. While the status quo may be outdated, it exists for a reason. Typically, building culture is deeply ingrained, and establishing a new culture and a new status quo presents tensions and challenges for principals. Therefore, enacting becomes a discipline microcosm amidst constant change.

As was the case in other parts of this cycle, in the enacting phase, principals reported tensions. These tensions included balancing the needs of the community and the needs of the individual student; navigating laws, policies, and procedures which, in many cases, were in

opposition to existing core values and beliefs; responding to behavioral infractions in a prescriptive manner or alternatively, an individualized manner that addressed the root cause of the misbehavior; and negotiating principal managed student discipline and teacher-managed student discipline. In the following paragraphs, I will elaborate on these four important tensions.

Needs of the Community and Needs of the Individual Student

Tensions concerning what is best for the individual student and what is best for the collective school community surfaced upon analysis of the results. For example, principals experienced tensions when deciding to exclude a student for the purpose of keeping the collective community safe. Conversely, some principals struggled with deciding not to exclude a student in response to a behavioral infraction; thereby compromising the safety of the collective. Moreover, other principals grappled with teacher criticisms that their discipline decision-making was “too soft” and expressed frustration with a lack of consequences for student misconduct. On the one hand, principals viewed their primary role as maintaining a safe school. On the other hand, many stressed the importance of students being in class to learn. Principals who aligned their decisions with what they believed was best for the individual student oftentimes navigated tensions with teachers who feared for their safety. Todd, a high school assistant principal described the importance of communicating with the building principal and district level staff when concerns of safety may arise.

So, the one that almost got me fired - I tried to do what I thought was the right thing to do, based on the knowledge that I had at the time of the policies and the student I was dealing with. But that process stepped on a lot of toes because they [the school board] didn't think I was doing everything that I needed to do to maintain safety at the school and in the classroom. So, if I could have done it differently, I would have put the kid on

emergency expulsion, and that would have cleaned it all up. But instead of doing that, I just made a personal decision that the "weapon" quote unquote, that the student brought number one, it was broken, number two, it was a pellet gun, number three, it was in underneath the seat in the vehicle of a car, and [it] was never brandished at anybody, so I'm thinking about all those things. I'm thinking about the fact that the kid is a special education student, and kind of what ways can I take this nonthreat and still hold them [the student] accountable, but not basically getting expelled for 45 days out of school kind of thing. So again, if I had to do it over again, I would have put them [the student] on emergency expulsion, and that would have given me time to kind of go through the whole process and talk to more people, before I made the final decision and maybe add some support on whatever the final decision might have been. But again, I've come a long way since that situation happened. And I think I do a better job of CYA, as you say, and you know, making sure I've got people in the know with what I'm doing and what I'm planning to do before I do it, and then have to get my hand slapped afterwards.

Todd went on to explain how he communicates his thinking in these kinds of situations and when making these kinds of decisions.

. . . you just got to make sure that you're communicating. So, communication is huge. You just have to know [our principal] likes it when I keep her in the loop on the big stuff. So, making sure she's aware, and she's not getting surprises. And then likewise, with our secondary director to district office - running stuff by them, too. So, they're aware. And if they want to, you know, put an extra step in there, "[Todd], you need to do this too," rather than jump to what I think might be the next best thing. But yeah, the communication piece is big, and just making sure everybody's on the same page.

Additionally, teacher and community expectations of principals conflicted with the principals' self-defined roles. According to principals, teachers were looking for administrators to be consistent and supportive. While principals wanted to be perceived as supportive by teachers, this was sometimes at odds with the needs of the individual student. Eric, an elementary principal, described how he navigated through this tension with transparency as a means to build trust and increase perceptions of being supported.

. . . So, at any surface level, what's the root of the behavior? . . . But there comes a point where we've got to make a decision. Is it always going to be right? No. Is it always going to be perfect? No. Is it going to be wrong? Sometimes. With the information we have, let's make the best decision. And then we'll adjust. And I'll be the first to talk. And I have talked to staff like, "Ooh, that was a really bad thing on my part. What can we do differently? Or what do we need to change?" . . . I think my transparency with people is something they receive well and that helps them trust me in those decision-making times when somebody's got to make it. And I think they trust that I make the decisions for the best reasons and right reasons. And I've told staff too, this has come up a lot. And I'll tell parents and staff this all the time as I'm not making this decision because it's in the best interest of you. I'm making it because it's in the best interest of the kids. . . . that's what I'll get pushback on. It's fascinating. But when I phrase it, and I'm pretty point blank about that, very little pushback, because who can argue that right?

Similarly, Melissa, a middle school assistant principal, whom we were introduced to in chapter four, navigated this tension well. Her accounts described how she successfully balanced helping and supporting students and keeping things safe and productive in the classroom.

. . . we have students who needed different supports, and we were trying, but not at the same level that now I think we try to find other ways to help and support students while trying to keep things safe and productive in the classroom. . . . [I ask questions like:] How do we support students who struggle with behaviors that are going to get them in trouble at school? How do we be creative, devote resources, devote staff, find ways to create relationships with those kids and their families and build a support system to help them? . . . Before we look at sending them home.

These accounts provide insight into the significant tensions principals experience in the enacting phase when making discipline decisions in which the needs of the individual are at odds with the needs of the collective community. Yet, principals are unlikely to be able to resolve this tension alone. Not only is it important that principals be aware that they are not alone in needing to balance the interests of individuals and those of the community, it is important that they be provided with the knowledge and skills to do so. Therefore, principals would benefit from ongoing professional development and networking focused on growing their capacity to navigate through this enduring tension. In addition to leadership development, district leadership must provide clear expectations and ample support to facilitate the development of equitable discipline practices, systems, and structures that can be realistically sustained and do not fall on individual principals to manage.

Laws, Policies, Procedures and Core Values and Beliefs

Moreover, tensions between laws, policies, and procedures and core values and beliefs were unveiled in the enacting phase. Similar to Kennedy et al. (2017) and Larsen and Hunter (2014), this study also found that the organizational contexts in which principals work may impact discipline decision-making, thereby causing tension. Many participants reported the

existence of guidelines that provided an easy and widely accepted range of possible consequences prescribed by policy or the code of conduct existing in a discipline matrix, athletic code, or school handbook, which aligned with observations by Larsen & Hunter (2014). In addition, similar to findings presented by Kennedy et al., (2017), administrators experienced tensions when they compromised and assigned punishment they did not believe in.

Principals in this study described their “hands being tied” due to policies and procedures. For example, certain discipline policies, such as athletic or dress code policies prescribed consequences that conflicted with the values and beliefs of some of the participants. These decisions kept the principals “awake at night” and led to internal tension. It is important to note that two principals in this study navigated through this tension by taking action to change dress code or athletic policies they deemed to be outdated, biased, or unfair. Illustrating one example of leadership, Jake, a middle school assistant principal described a time when he compromised assigned punishment with advocating for changes in policy.

I can think of one this year in particular, where a student yelled sexual absurdities very graphic in nature up and down the hallway. He had done this a couple times. Our decision at the time was we needed a couple of days to do in-house, but also, he wasn't allowed to participate in the baseball event. . . . according to our Student Handbook in the athletic code, when you're suspended, you can't participate in those events. He is a difficult student with a lot of social adaptive complications. And so, I think that added insult to injury that he couldn't be in the game. So, do I regret it? Um, yeah. I guess that's something I struggle with. I guess I would have probably let them play in the baseball game. . . . I think he understood the severity of what happened. He didn't do it again. But maybe that was a lot. . . . By the end of the year, he mentioned that [the punishment]

ruined his year. At the time, it seemed like the right call. In reflection, maybe we could have done something different. . . . If they've learned their lesson, then there's no need to keep adding punishments, right? . . . So, I think there needs to be a revision in the athletic handbook.

Jake expanded on how attitudes, values, and beliefs can be at odds with laws, policies, and procedures.

That's one of the things I learned. I guess the other thing is that teachers and coaches feel very strongly that what is written you need to adhere to, and I don't agree with that as an administrator. But obviously, that is something that the coaches and teachers feel very strongly about. So, you kind of learn that I couldn't just make that decision without consulting the handbook. I mean, I guess I could have, but it wouldn't have been good leadership. But in order to make a change like that, you really do have to wait for an opportunity to do something like a revision to the athletic code or revision to the student handbook. And so that's really the best way to do that. And so, you just learn that teachers and coaches don't discipline as much as principals, but they certainly think that what's written in the handbook has to be adhered to.

Similarly, Trisha, middle school principal described how she successfully navigated through clashes between core values and beliefs and new discipline laws, policies, and procedures.

I love having the staff in the room with different beliefs and really having some of those deep conversations to help move them to that next level, whether it be alignment, whether it be grading, whether it be even discipline. There's so much learning . . . [Teachers] want it to be always negative, negative, negative. Even helping staff understand the belief system behind discipline and how it's a learning experience, and how restorative justice

can play in the role, that's my favorite part - changing belief systems. . . . There's always going to be some work involved of what happened and why we got to the place where you kick them out to begin with." Sometimes, it's the teacher looking within themselves, that there's a trigger, that they're the trigger because they've done something to the child. Sometimes, that's hard for staff. . . . Is it the student that needs to replace this behavior, and then how can we do that? Or is it the teacher that needs to change their behavior, and how can I successfully talk them through that? The number one thing that [angers] a teacher is when I tell [him or her] that it's their fault, for lack of a better term. . . . Sometimes, it's just knowing this kid and what triggers this kid, and just saying something. [For example,] . . . when you get to that older grade level like the junior high school, teachers get [angry] and they are angry at this [student]. When you send [the student] back in, and they're still angry, it just creates friction and they're back in your office again. It's really getting those two together and teaching the kid about respect. Even if you don't agree with what the adult did or said, you have to be respectful in your conversation. Then, usually, the teachers know that but it's really working on that relationship to where they can continue in class together without getting kicked out the next day for the same thing.

Other participants described laws, policies, and procedures as being black and white and contrasted that with the understanding that when dealing with school discipline not everything is black and white. For example, when it came to matters of safety, many participants described tensions when it came time to decide whether to exclude or not exclude or whether to involve the sheriff or not to. William, a high school principal, emphasized the importance of discretionary discipline decision-making and described how involving law enforcement can give principal

decision-making power away. He discussed potential lasting, detrimental impacts of involving law enforcement because of stringent procedures and protocols that law enforcement personnel are required to follow.

Way back at the beginning of my time as an admin, I immediately called the sheriff on a harassment issue. And it's one of the rare occasions where I didn't think the sheriff had the best interest of the student in mind. Looking back, it should have been handled in the building between the families, maybe even mediation. It could have had a building consequence. But I felt with the nature of it, we had to use the sheriff. And in the end, I don't think the sheriff handled it right at all. But their processes, knowing what I know now, are very different from ours. They have to deal with [things] certain ways, where we probably have more freedom at the school level than they would in their line of work. And it just was unfortunate, it could lead to long term issues for the student.

William wrestled with knowing how to balance this tension.

. . . Just knowing that there's consequences to actions that we take, and it can seem cut and dry at times, but there are real consequences for students and for schools. There are times that certain calls have to be made. But it's just knowing the whole situation. Having to go from disciplinarian to advocate would have probably been a better role for me in that situation. As the situation got worse for the student, I think I probably could have stopped it along the way of, "Okay, we're going way too far." But I really had a hands-off approach when the law enforcement was involved. But looking back now, I wouldn't feel bad about advocating for students in, "OK stop. We are way, way overblowing this. We're going to have a pause and go from there."

Additionally, principals grappled with placing violent students back into an environment where they could potentially harm others. Trisha, a middle school principal, discussed matters of safety and struggling with the belief that the student needed a different system.

There was a year that we had a lot of gang activity going on and in a couple of situations, I did feel my hands were tied. . . . At the end of the year, [policy says] I have to bring them back, even though I don't feel like I can protect the staff. That's really when I feel [my hands are tied]. . . . That's the only one where I really felt it was out of my hands when I had to bring a kid back where I felt that it was not safe. . . . I felt really, really frustrated because I felt like he needed to do a different system. It was a huge danger to staff and students. I never knew when it was going to happen, and I couldn't control that safety aspect of him.

Others struggled with not having the resources needed to best address the needs of the student. Many participants cited special education law and manifestation determinations as sources of tension. Principals struggled with being too hard or too soft on students on an IEP. Tensions around whether a behavior exhibited was a manifestation of the student's disability were ubiquitous. Additionally, principals were aware that any decision they made was public, adding to their sense of concern. Therefore, as discipline practices change, principals must be prepared to grapple with these tensions in a political arena under watchful eyes and public scrutiny.

Furthermore, toolbox exhaustion was prevalent. Principals simply ran out of ways to reckon with binding policies, student needs, and restorative values and beliefs. Thus, many principals reverted to old ways of discipline as a means of survival, which led to further internal tensions. As the principals in this study shared, they did not want to use discipline practices they

thought were outdated, they just did not have any alternatives. They were aware that doing so perpetuated inequities but also lacked the tools to act differently. Therefore, ongoing training and networking are necessary if we are to close persistent discipline equity gaps.

Prescriptive Discipline and Individualized Discipline

Several principals expressed tensions about responding to behavior infractions in a prescriptive manner and responding in an individualized, supportive manner during the enacting phase. On the one hand, principals sought to address the root cause of misbehavior so appropriate support could be provided. On the other hand, time and resources were described as limited, so it was not always feasible for principals to individualize responses to misbehavior for every student. In addition, as was noted in the tensions illustrated above, principals described pushback from teachers if the prescriptive matrix was not followed. They also reported teachers claiming they were not supported if a “pound of flesh” was not given. Conversely, automaticity with a progressive, prescriptive matrix caused internal conflict within some participants as they struggled with prescribing discipline that did not address the root cause or that interfered with their internal consistency. This is important because in order for equity in school discipline to be achieved, district leadership must be clearer about expectations and policymakers need to understand that supportive responses to misbehavior require resources and systems of support for principals.

Travis, a high school principal discussed the importance of individualizing responses to student misconduct by targeting the root cause of the misbehavior.

. . . you're dealing with a kid who maybe they're caught drinking at school, or they're caught smoking pot at school or at lunch or something like that, the natural reaction is to want to suspend that student and make them pay the price for using at school, or even

worse, supplying for another student at school and taking part in these very unsafe behaviors. . . . Multiple times we've had this situation where we've learned a lot more about what's going on with that student, dealing with some types of depression or anxiety or substance abuse issues, getting them into treatment, getting them the help that they're crying out for. They just don't know they're crying out for that help. Keeping [the student] involved and attached to the school during that whole process, and then getting them to the end, which is the graduation and having them come back and saying things like, "Oh gosh, if you guys would've just given up on me, I wouldn't even be here today."

Travis described how his individualized, focused discipline decision-making led to a sense of accomplishment.

. . . you see them moving on and being successful in life because you took the time to get them to listen and get them what they needed. I think that happens a lot. It's not always just with the substance abuse issue, but it happens with a lot of different situations. In our school, in particular, our demographic has changed quite a bit. . . . We have a lot of temporary housing and at least our socioeconomic demographic has changed quite a bit. We have families and kids who are going through crises and are reacting in different ways and sometimes kids are acting out because sometimes they feel it's the only thing that they can control because the rest of their life is out of control. Trying to just take that time and be the ones who don't give up on the kid, be the ones who are going to be there to support them and then seeing them be successful, those are the ones where you go, "Yes, we got that right. We did right by that kid. We got them what they needed."

Where Travis found ways to balance prescriptive and individual decisions Ed, a middle school principal, encountered ambiguity and a lack of clarity concerning discipline laws.

I don't have a menu of, oh, if you do X, then you're going to have Z. I know that sometimes there's mixed messages, I think from the state. . . . One part of their philosophy was they want you to treat people like you were taking the individual student into account like their needs, their family, their background, all that, take all that into account. Yet then they'd say, here's our discipline matrix that you could follow.

In sum, a significant tension for principals was toggling between prescriptive and individualized responses to misbehavior. According to study participants, the lack of clarity in the state discipline laws lead to ambiguity in daily and aspirational practices. While the state emphasizes the importance of individualizing consequences for misbehavior based on the root cause, the inclusion of a prescriptive matrix may be at odds with that philosophy. Yet, several accounts by principals in this study described decisions in which individualizing consequences based on student needs were administered and resulted in the best-case scenario. In those cases, principals felt that they had district-level support for those actions. In cases where principals were less certain about how their decisions might be received, they struggled. Therefore, if equitable discipline practices are to be achieved across buildings, districts and the state, district and state leadership must provide clear expectations and guidance to reduce ambiguity. Since implementing restorative practices is fairly new, it is not surprising these tensions exist. However, it is important that district and state leadership find ways to resolve these concerns, not doing so only continues to perpetuate inequity.

Principal Managed and Teacher Managed Decision-Making

Finally, principals in this study reported needing to negotiate between principal and teacher managed student discipline. Principals reported tensions around the definitions of minor versus major behaviors, inconsistencies between staff members' responses to misbehavior, and

further escalations of defiant behavior that resulted from how teachers responded to student misbehaviors. Many principals stressed the idea of power and reported explaining to teachers they lose authority if they send students to the office. Adding to the tension, principals reported teachers did not feel supported if and when they sent a student out of their class and the student returned the same or the next day without extended exclusion.

In some instances, unions became involved if teachers felt student misbehavior was not handled appropriately. As concluded by Welsh (2023), there are nuanced power dynamics in the negotiated back and forth process underlying the generation and adjudication of Office Discipline Referrals (Welsh, 2023). For example, Cole, an elementary principal explained he successfully navigated the principal/teacher tension by emphasizing the notion of teachers retaining power by handling student misbehaviors in the classroom.

. . . kids need to be in class and in school. I was always a teacher that just handled almost all of my discipline because I always felt that if the power rested with me, then I could handle the situation. Kids knew that [I] was going to handle it in the classroom, that I was able to, and I took a vested interest in the students and had great relationships that they would respond to me.

Cole reflected on how his own experiences as a teacher informed his choices as a principal.

I've recognized I've probably tried to handle it myself for teachers often and recognize now [that I need to say], "Hey, some of these things you got to have ownership on, you got to be the one that handles it." I've talked to peer educators like, and I know power can be a not very PC word right now, "You got to have the power because if you don't, then they're just going to walk all over you all day long." They know that [the principal] does because he'll follow through on it, so what are you then going to do? How are you going

to try and take some of this ownership on? How are you going to talk with kids? How are you building positive relationships on the front end? How are you working to handle some of these little things so that they know, "Okay, the teacher's going to handle it."? [I'm] trying to push a little bit more of that on teachers as well versus that it'll always be me because if I'm always the one dealing with it, they won't ever be able to.

Cole stressed his efforts to help teachers learn the skills necessary so that discipline is addressed first in the classroom.

I try to talk to them a lot about some of these certain things like, "Okay, let's look back at how this led up to it. It sounds like you did this and then this and then Johnny exploded. Man, why is that?" Just taking an inquisitive stance and just asking a lot of questions. That's always in a coaching model. I try to take an inquisitive stance and help people come to the solution themselves because if I just tell them, then they just look back and go, ["What does the union contract say?"]

Similarly, Kurt, a high school assistant principal described how the enactment of crucial conversations and coaching helped him navigate through this role tension.

. . . It's just the changing world and education of how the teachers work with their kids and how do they differentiate to really make sure that they're working with each individual kid. When you ask about a kid that has an F and this one that was in there struggling because they're not working, and the teacher says, "Well, I offered to help them, but they said no." Well, that's great that you offered, but we've got to find more than just that. We've got to dig deeper and do more to support them, so let's look at what other options are. Yes, and there's that shift, over the last couple of years now, of exclusion and having them out of the classroom. That's been a big shift for the staff that

we've really tried to work on. Sending them to the office is okay, that's an intervention and we can do it, but I'm sure as heck not going to house them in the office for the rest of the day. We're going to get them back in class. Maybe, what could we have done rather than send them down? Is it pulling them out in the hallway and having a quick discussion? Is it that you give them a five-minute break to go get a drink of water and use the bathroom and come back? Sometimes we have buddy rooms in schools, you could send this kid to a buddy room. Sometimes you could do something, but you always make that call home. If those things are not followed, don't send a kid to me, because I'm going to give the kid a pencil and I'm going to send him back to you, and you've lost all your control, and they don't think I'm tough or hold accountable because I gave them a pencil. They're going to be like, "Well, she just gave me a pencil." You know what I mean? It's having those tough conversations with staff about when to send a kid to me and when not to, [that's hard].

These accounts illustrate the role tensions principals face in their daily practices. Many principals stressed the importance of teachers handling minor misbehaviors, such as non-compliance or disruption, in the classroom instead of sending them down to the office. Furthermore, some teachers reportedly criticized principals for sending students right back to the classroom with “just a talking to” or some sort of action the teacher felt was “too soft” for the infraction. Changing deeply ingrained values and beliefs about how to respond to student misconduct is multifaceted and complex work. Principals cannot do this work in isolation. If equitable discipline practices are to be achieved, clear direction from district leadership is a necessity.

In sum, during the enactment phase, when making decisions about how to respond to student misbehavior, principals faced multiple tensions. Overarching tensions that surfaced in the

enactment phase included opposition between the needs of the community and the needs of the individual student; conflict between core values and beliefs and laws, policies, and procedures; struggle between prescriptive discipline and individualized discipline; and a push and pull between teacher managed responses to student misbehavior and principal managed responses to student misbehavior. Principals navigated through these tensions in a variety of ways.

As was discussed above, many principals emphasized the importance of communication and transparency. Principals also exercised leadership and took steps to change systems, policies, and procedures. Additionally, many adopted a coaching stance and tackled the challenging task of changing mindsets and beliefs. Importantly, the responses to the tensions required them to return to additional learning and planning to enact new strategies or different approaches. This illustrates how the Discipline Decision-Making Cycle is intertwined into daily discipline decision-making practices. In the following section, I will discuss three important implications drawn from this study's findings including leadership development, organizational alignment, and policy alignment.

Implications

The findings in this study provide insight on how understanding tensions principals face when making student discipline decisions can lead to changes in daily practices. Knowing about tensions that arise around student discipline matters and sets the stage for the work. It enables principals to be prepared for the tensions ahead as they strive to achieve discipline equity. However, for daily practices to change, leadership development, organizational alignment, and policy alignment need to change.

Leadership Development

Prior research has shown that as a result of increasing demands and complexity of the job of school principal, modifications to leadership preparatory programs are necessary to prepare individuals for the principalship (e.g., DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Golann & Jones, 2021; Gullo & Beachum, 2020; Tamadoni et al., 2021). This study confirms this prior research as principals in this study could articulate what should be done to promote equitable discipline outcomes, but they struggled with *how* to do the right things within their organizational contexts. Expanding on prior research, this study's results suggested a need to include not only a need for modifications to leadership preparatory programs, but also a need for leadership development support in the form of ongoing training or professional networking. Principals in this study reported a continuous balancing of tensions during the learning, planning, and enacting phases of the Discipline Decision-Making Cycle, which is shown in Table 3 above. However, none of the study participants reported that they had received any training or substantive assistance in managing tensions when shifting from traditional to aspirational discipline practices.

This work suggests that leadership development in resolving these tensions needs to be surfaced as important collective learning and elevated within district and professional association discussion and work. Leadership development should include acknowledgement of these tensions and offer considerable practical support aimed at successfully navigating through opposition. Principals are unlikely to be able to resolve these tensions alone. Not only is it important that principals be aware that they are not alone in needing to balance tensions, it is important that they be supported with leadership development that provides them with the knowledge and skills to do so. Therefore, principals would benefit from ongoing leadership development and networking focused on growing their capacity to navigate through these enduring discipline decision-making tensions. Principals, especially those in small, rural districts,

cannot be the only source for new knowledge and teaching skills. Therefore, support for additional leadership development is required if principals are to fully implement equitable discipline practices.

Organizational Alignment

Prior research has shown there may be local factors that prevent full implementation of external discipline mandates or discipline reform (e.g., Anderson & McKenzie, 2022). Confirming this prior finding, for many participants in this study, there was an element of negotiating community norms and finding the middle ground. Stakeholders within organizations had diverging core values and beliefs regarding student discipline. Moreover, many participants were faced with creating new systems to manage behaviors and convincing teachers to work in the systems. These factors proved to be barriers to equitable discipline practices.

Expanding upon prior research, this study suggests contextual factors such as district and state leadership; school and district systems; and the capacity to implement equitable discipline systems prevented full implementation of discipline mandates and reform. First, district and state leadership matters. If equitable discipline practices are to be achieved across schools, district and state leadership must provide clear expectations and guidance to reduce ambiguity in discipline mandates. Additionally, at the school board and district level, district leaders must be clear about discipline and equity goals and support principals' planning efforts designed to reach them. Moreover, systems matter. District leadership must provide ample support to facilitate the development of equitable discipline practices, systems, and structures that can be realistically sustained and do not fall on individual principals to manage. Finally, capacity matters. State and district leadership must support schools' capacity and resource availability in meeting the increasing needs of students. These expanding needs include behavioral, social, and emotional

needs. Principals cannot do this work in isolation. If equitable discipline practices are to be achieved, clear direction from state and district leadership; abundant support to create and sustain equitable systems, and extensive support to build capacity are needed.

Policy Alignment

Prior research has shown that successful policy implementation requires resources and capacity, and if a policy's demands outweigh the ability or will of local actors, implementation fidelity may suffer (e.g., Cohen et al., 2007; Hill & Hupe, 2003; Matland, 1995; McLaughlin, 1987). This study confirmed these findings as principals identified limited resource availability to achieve aspirational discipline practices. While some principals described multiple ways they are creating caring and supporting systems to meet the increasing needs of students, resources remain limited and inequitable across buildings. This may be leading to persistent discipline inequities across schools and districts. Furthermore, toolbox exhaustion was prevalent. Principals had limited resources to meet the students' increasing needs, creating a barrier to achieving aspirational, equitable discipline practices.

In order to increase equitable outcomes for all students, policies must evolve. Policymakers must address the insufficient capacity of schools to meet the expanding needs of students if equity in education is to be achieved. Policies need to ensure principals receive high quality leadership development on an ongoing basis and schools are provided with ample resources to implement support systems. Principals cannot do this important work alone with no additional supports.

Conclusion

As Tobin (2013) stated, "The demands of increased accountability, the variety of social issues that confront communities today, the lack of funding to meet the increasing number of

mandates imposed on schools, and the expanding demands that society is asking schools to address certainly makes the job of tomorrow's school principals formidable" (p. 4). Prior studies have placed principals at the center of school disciplinary decisions (DeMatthews et al. 2017; Kinsler, 2013). The findings in this study provide insight concerning how to support school leaders in their efforts to close the discipline equity gap.

First, study results illuminated a disconnect between principals' aspirations and daily practice. Concerning discipline decision-making, principals could articulate what they should *not* be doing and *why*. Additionally, participants could describe what they *should* be doing, but struggled knowing *how* to do the right things. Furthermore, the accounts illustrated participants did not know if the *right* things proved to be right for everyone or what it would look like to do the *right* thing for all students. This was especially true when applying discipline logic in multiple contexts.

Next, this study highlighted concerns, pressures, and tensions principals experience when making student discipline decisions. Participants' concerns included ensuring safety, adhering to laws, policies, and procedures, maintaining positive and healthy relationships, and upholding internal consistency as decisions get made. Principals' pressures consisted of keeping everyone safe, performing in a public arena under scrutiny, and incorporating the added complexities of the principalship. The tensions principals faced encompassed tensions related to navigating organizational contexts, balancing core values and beliefs, and following laws, policies, and procedures.

Importantly, results shed light on how principals describe what makes a discipline decision good. From participants' accounts, four major descriptors of good discipline decisions

emerged. Principals in this study suggested that good discipline decisions produce results, keep relationships intact, get resolved at the lowest level, and address root causes.

Finally, results unveiled principals generally attempted to resolve the issues they faced by employing a discipline decision-making cycle consisting of three phases including learning, planning, and enacting. Principals experienced tensions throughout the cycle, and these tensions were not distinct to one phase. Importantly, phases proved to be iterative, mutually impacting, and tightly linked together. During the learning phase, principals balanced tensions between aspirational practices and daily practices; status quo and change; and individual needs of students and organizational capacity to meet students' needs. In the planning phase, principals navigated management and leadership while balancing tensions between punitive responses to behavioral infractions and relationship-based, supportive responses to behavioral infractions. Throughout the enacting phase, principals balanced tensions with laws, policies, and procedures and core values and beliefs; needs of the community and needs of individual students; prescriptive responses to behavioral infractions and individualized responses to behavioral infractions; and principal managed responses to student misbehavior and teacher managed responses to student misbehavior. These results suggest reform is needed in the areas of leadership development, organizational alignment, and policy alignment if equitable discipline outcomes are to be achieved.

REFERENCES

- Adom, D., Yeboah, A., & Ankrah, A. (2016). Constructivism philosophical paradigm: Implication for research, teaching, and learning. *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Studies*, 4(10), 1–9.
- Albiladi, W., Lasater, K., & Bengtson, E. (2020). Data use among principals and teachers: Divergent paths or common ground? Implications for the leadership preparation programs. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development*, 5, 63–76. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jsard.v5i2.2240>
- Allman, K. L., & Slate, J. (2011). School discipline in public education: A brief review of current practices. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 6(2). <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/School-Discipline-in-Public-Education%3A-A-Brief-of-Allman-Slate/e2d963da52f1a9142ab754a6fff7ae7e439a665>
- American Academy of Pediatrics. (2013). Out-of-school suspension and expulsion. *Council on School Health*, 131(3), e1000–e1007. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2012-3932>
- American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. *American Psychologist*, 63(9), 852–862. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.63.9.852>
- Anderson, K. P. (2018). Inequitable compliance: Implementation failure of a statewide student discipline reform. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 93(2), 244–263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2018.1435052>
- Anderson, K. P., & McKenzie, S. (2022). Local implementation of state-level discipline policy: Administrator perspectives and contextual factors associated with compliance. *AERA Open*, 8(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584221075341>

- Anderson, K. P., Ritter, G. W., & Zamarro, G. (2019). Understanding a vicious cycle: The relationship between student discipline and student academic outcomes. *Educational Researcher*, 48(5), 251–262. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X19848720>
- Anisef, P., & Kilbride, K. (2004). *The needs of newcomer youth and emerging best practices to meet those needs*. The Joint Centre of Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS). http://atwork.settlement.org/downloads/Newcomer_Youth_Best_Practices.pdf
- Anyon, Y., Lechuga, C., Ortega, D., Downing, B., Greer, E., & Simmons, J. (2018). An exploration of the relationships between student racial background and the school sub-contexts of office discipline referrals: A critical race theory analysis. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 21(3), 390–406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2017.1328594>
- Arar, K., Haj, I., Abramovitz, R., & Oplatka, I. (2016). Ethical leadership in education and its relation to ethical decision-making: The case of Arab school leaders in Israel. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 54(6), 647–660. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-11-2015-0101>
- Arar, K., & Saiti, A. (2022). Ethical leadership, ethical dilemmas and decision-making among school administrators. *Equity in Education & Society*, 1(1), 126–141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/27526461211070828>
- Bacher-Hicks, A., Billings, S., & Deming, D. (2019). *The School to Prison Pipeline: Long-Run Impacts of School Suspensions on Adult Crime* (w26257). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w26257>
- Balfanz, R., Byrnes, V., & Fox, J. H. (2015). Sent home and put off track. *Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion*, 17-30.
- Ball, S. (1987). *The micropolitics of the school. Towards a theory of school organization*. Routledge.

- Barrett, N., McEachin, A., Mills, J. N., & Valant, J. (2017). *Disparities in student discipline by race and family income*. Education Research Alliance for New Orleans.
<https://educationresearchalliancena.org/files/publications/010418-Barrett-McEachin-Mills-Valant-Disparities-in-Student-Discipline-by-Race-and-Family-Income.pdf>
- Beck, A. N., & Muschkin, C. G. (2012). The enduring impact of race: Understanding disparities in student disciplinary infractions and achievement. *Sociological Perspectives*, 55(4), 637–662. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2012.55.4.637>
- Begley, P. T. (2000). Values and leadership: Theory development, new research, and an agenda for the future. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 46(3), 233–249.
<https://doi.org/10.11575/ajer.v46i3.54816>
- Belansky, E. S., Cutforth, N., Delong, E., Ross, C., Scarbro, S., Gilbert, L., Beatty, B., & Marshall, J. A. (2009). Early impact of the federally mandated local wellness policy on physical activity in rural, low-income elementary schools in Colorado. *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 30(1), S141–S160. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jphp.2008.50>
- Berg, B. (2009). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (7th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
- Berg, B. L., & Lune, H. (2012). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (8th ed.). Pearson.
- Berman, P., & McLaughlin, M. W. (1975). *Federal programs supporting educational change: The findings in review*. Rand Corp. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED108330>
- Bingham, A., & Witkowsky, P. (2022). Qualitative analysis: Deductive and inductive approaches. In C. Vanover, P. Mihás, & J. Saldaña (Eds.), *Analyzing and Interpreting Qualitative Data: After the Interview* (pp. 133–146). SAGE Publications.

- Blad, E. (2021, June 4). Biden team to revisit how schools should ensure racial equity in discipline. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/biden-team-to-revisit-how-schools-should-ensure-racial-equity-in-discipline/2021/06>
- Boland, R. J. (2008). Decision-making and sensemaking. In F. Burstein & C. W. Holsapple (Eds.), *Handbook on Decision Support Systems* (pp. 55–63). Springer Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-48713-5>
- Bradbury, A. (2019). Datafied at four: The role of data in the ‘schoolification’ of early childhood education in England. *Learning, Media, and Technology*, *44*(1), 7–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2018.1511577>
- Bradbury, A., & Roberts-Holmes, G. (2018). How data impacts on early years educators. *Early Years Educator*, *19*(10), 38–44. <https://doi.org/10.12968/eyed.2018.19.10.38>
- Bradshaw, C. P., Waasdorp, T. E., & Leaf, P. J. (2012). Effects of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports on child behavior problems. *Pediatrics*, *130*(5), e1136–e1145. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2012-0243>
- Brooks, K., Schiraldi, V., & Zeidenberg, J. (2000). *School house hype: Two years later*. Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice. <http://www.cjcj.org/uploads/cjcj/documents/schoolhouse.pdf>
- Broussard, J., Williams-Diamond, T., Broussard, M., Fossey, R., & Slater, R. (2013). Corporal punishment in southern schools: Good news, bad news, and news that’s pretty ugly. *Teachers College Record Online*. <http://www.tcrecord.org/ContentIdp17221>
- Buchanan, R., & McPherson, A. (2019). Teachers and learners in a time of big data. *Journal of Philosophy in Schools*, *6*(1). <https://doi.org/10.21913/jps.v6i1.1566>

- Burkholder, G. J., Cox, K. A., Crawford, L. M., & Hitchcock, J. H. (Eds.). (2019). *Research design and methods: An applied guide for the scholar-practitioner*. SAGE Publications.
<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/research-design-and-methods/book262895>
- Camacho, K. A., & Krezmien, M. P. (2020). A statewide analysis of school discipline policies and suspension practices. *Preventing School Failure, 64*(1), 55–66.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2019.1678010>
- Cambron-McCabe, N., & McCarthy, M. M. (2005). Educating school leaders for social justice. *Educational Policy, 19*(1), 201–222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904804271609>
- Cardichon, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *Advancing educational equity for underserved youth: How new state accountability systems can support school inclusion and student success*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/advancing-educational-equity>.
- Cardichon, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2020). Protecting students' civil rights: The federal role in school discipline. *Voices in Urban Education, 49*(2). <https://doi.org/10.33682/a3vc-nfcx>
- Cardona, M., & Rodriguez, R. (2023). *Guiding principles for creating safe, inclusive, supportive, and fair school climates*. U.S. Department of Education.
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf>
- Cashman, S., Adeky, S., Allen, A., Corburn, J., Israel, B., Montañó, J., Rafelito, A., Rhodes, S., Wallerstein, N., & Eng, E. (2008). The power and the promise: Working with communities to analyze data, interpret findings, and get to outcomes. *American Journal of Public Health, 98*, 1407–1417. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2007.113571>

- Catano, N., & Stronge, J. H. (2007). What do we expect of school principals? Congruence between principal evaluation and performance standards. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *10*(4), 379–399. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603120701381782>
- Chamberlain, K. (2014). *Chamberlain, K. (2015). Reflexivity: Fostering research quality, ethicality, criticality, and creativity.* In M. Murray (Eds.), *Critical health psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 165-181). Palgrave MacMillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-28267-5_10
- Chin, M., Quinn, D., Dhaliwal, T., & Lovison, V. (2020). Bias in the air: A nationwide exploration of teachers' implicit racial attitudes, aggregate bias, and student outcomes. *Educational Researcher*, *49*(8). <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20937240>
- Cholewa, B., Hull, M., Babcock, C., & Smith, A. (2017). Predictors and academic outcomes associated with in-school suspension. *School Psychology Quarterly*, *33*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000213>
- Chu, E. M., & Ready, D. D. (2018). Exclusion and urban public high schools: Short- and long-term consequences of school suspensions. *American Journal of Education*, *124*(4), 479–509. <https://doi.org/10.1086/698454>
- Churchman, C. W. (1967). Guest editorial: Wicked problems. *Management Science*, 141–142.
- Coburn, C. E. (2001). Collective sensemaking about reading: How teachers mediate reading policy in their professional communities. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *23*(2), 145–170. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737023002145>
- Coburn, C. E. (2005). The role of nonsystem actors in the relationship between policy and practice: The case of reading instruction in California. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *27*(1), 23–52. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737027001023>

- Coburn, C. E., Honig, M. I., & Stein, M. K. (2009). What's the evidence on districts' use of evidence? In L. Bransford, D. Gomez, & N. Vye (Eds.), *Research and practice: Towards a reconciliation* (p. 38). Harvard Educational Press.
- Coburn, C. E., & Turner, E. O. (2011). Research on data use: A framework and analysis. *Measurement: Interdisciplinary Research and Perspectives*, 9(4), 173–206.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15366367.2011.626729>
- Cohen, D. K., & Ball, D. L. (1990). Policy and practice: An overview. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 12(3), 233–239. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737012003233>
- Cohen, D. K., Moffit, S., & Goldin, S. (2007). Policy and practice. In S. H. Fuhrman, D. K. Cohen, & F. Mosher (Eds.), *The state of education policy research* (pp. 63–85). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). Routledge.
- Connolly, M., Eddy-Spicer, D. H., James, C., & Kruse, S. D. (2018). *The Sage handbook of school organization*. SAGE Publications.
- Cook, C. R., Frye, M., Slemrod, T., Lyon, A. R., Renshaw, T. L., & Zhang, Y. (2015). An integrated approach to universal prevention: Independent and combined effects of PBIS and SEL on youths' mental health. *Educational Psychology*, 30(2), 166–183.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000102>
- Cook-Harvey, C. M., Darling-Hammond, L., Lam, L., Mercer, C., & Roc, M. (2016). *Equity and ESSA: Leveraging educational opportunity through the Every Student Succeeds Act* (p. 36). Learning Policy Institute.

https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Equity_ESSA_REPORT.pdf

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed., pp. xv, 379). SAGE Publications.

<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452230153>

Coyne, R. (2005). Wicked problems revisited. *Design studies*, 26(1), 5-17.

Crawford, L. M. (2020). Qualitative research designs. In G. J. Burkholder, K. A. Cox, & J. H. Hitchcock (Eds.), *Research design and methods: An applied guide for the scholar practitioner* (pp. 81–98). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (pp. xv, 403). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Croft, A., Coggshall, J. G., Dolan, M., & Powers, E. (2010). *Job-embedded professional development: What it is, who is responsible, and how to get it done well* [Issue Brief].

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED520830>

Cuban, L. (1988). *Managerial imperative and the practice of leadership in schools, the*. State University of New York Press.

- Curran, F. C. (2016). Estimating the effect of state zero tolerance laws on exclusionary discipline, racial discipline gaps, and student behavior. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 38, 647–668. <https://doi.org/doi:10.3102/0162373716652728>
- Curran, F. C. (2017). Racial disproportionalities in discipline: The role of zero tolerance policies. *Critical Examinations of School Violence and Disturbance in K-12 Education*, 1251–1266. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-1933-1.ch057>
- Curran, F. C. (2020). A matter of measurement: How different ways of measuring racial gaps in school discipline can yield drastically different conclusions about racial disparities in discipline. *Educational Researcher*, 49(5), 382–387. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20923348>
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2004). Standards, accountability, and school reform. *Teachers College Record*, 106(6), 1047–1085. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9620.2004.00372.x>
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2022). Reimagining American education: Possible futures: The policy changes we need to get there. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 103(8), 54–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00317217221100012>
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Asher, C. (1991). *Creating accountability in big city school systems*. Urban Diversity (Series 102). Office of Educational Research and Improvement. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED334339.pdf>
- Darling-Hammond, L., Wilhoit, G., & Pittenger, L. (2014). Accountability for college and career readiness: Developing a new paradigm. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 22, 86. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v22n86.2014>

- Darling-Hammond, S., Ruiz, M., Eberhardt, J. L., & Okonofua, J. A. (2023). The dynamic nature of student discipline and discipline disparities. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *120*(17). <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2120417120>
- Datnow, A., Park, V., & Kennedy-Lewis, B. (2012). High school teachers' use of data to inform instruction. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, *17*(4), 247–265. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2012.718944>
- Davis, S., Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., & Meyerson, D. (2005). *School leadership study: Developing successful principals (Review of Research)*. Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.
- de Brey, C., Musu, L., McFarland, J., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Diliberti, M., Zhang, A., Branstetter, C., & Wang, X. (2019). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups 2018* (NCES 2019-038). National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/>
- DeMatthews, D. E., Carey, R. L., Olivarez, A., & Moussavi Saeedi, K. (2017). Guilty as charged? Principals' perspectives on disciplinary practices and the racial discipline gap. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *53*(4), 519-555.
- DeMatthews, D. E., & Serafini, A. (2019). Do good principals do bad things? Examining bounds of ethical behavior in the context of high-stakes accountability. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *20*(3), 335–354. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2019.1668023>
- Dempster, N., Carter, L., Freakley, M., & Parry, L. (2004). Contextual influences on school leaders in Australia: Some data from a recent study of principals' ethical decision-making. *School Leadership & Management*, *24*(2), 163–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1363243041000695804>

- Denzin, N. K. (1989). *Interpretive biography* (p. 95). SAGE Publications.
- Denzin, N. K. (2017). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. Transaction publishers.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. SAGE Publications.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2002). *The qualitative inquiry reader*. SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412986267>
- Devos, B., Nielsen, K. M., Azar, A. M., & Whitaker, M. (2018). *Final Report of the Federal Commission on School Safety. Presented to the President of the United States*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/school-safety/school-safety-report.pdf>
- Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think, a restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. D.C. Heath and Co.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Logic: The theory of inquiry*. Henry Holt and Company.
- Dogan, E., & Demirbolat, A. O. (2021). Data-driven decision-making in schools scale: A study of validity and reliability. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 13(1), 507–523.
- Dong, B., & Krohn, M. D. (2020). Sent home versus being arrested: The relative influence of school and police intervention on drug use. *Justice Quarterly*, 37(6), 985–1011. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2018.1561924>
- Erdağ, C., & Karadağ, E. (2017). School accountability models: A holistic review. *Turkish Journal of Business Ethics*, 10(2), 13. <http://dx.doi.org/10.12711/tjbe.2017.10.2.0004>

- Evans, A. E. (2007). School leaders and their sensemaking about race and demographic change. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(2), 159–188.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X06294575>
- Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Pub. L. No. 114–95 (2015).
<https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn>
- Fabelo, T., Thompson, M. D., Plotkin, M., Carmichael, D., Marchbanks, M. P., & Booth, E. A. (2011). *Breaking schools' rules: A statewide study of how school discipline relates to students' success and juvenile justice involvement*. Council of State Governments Justice Center. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/breaking-schools-rules-statewide-study-how-school-discipline-0>
- Falabella, A. (2020). The ethics of competition: Accountability policy enactment in Chilean schools' everyday life. *Journal of Education Policy*, 35(1), 23–45.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2019.1635272>
- Findlay, N. M. (2015). Discretion in student discipline: Insight into elementary principals' decision-making. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 51(3), 472–507.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X14523617>
- Flick, U. (2011). *Introducing research methodology: A beginner's guide to doing a research project*. SAGE Publications.
- Frankenberg, E., & Siegel-Hawley, G. (2008). *Are teachers prepared for racially changing schools? Teachers describe their preparation, resources, and practices for racially diverse schools*. The Civil Rights Project.
- Fraser, N. (2008). *Scales of justice: Reimagining political space in a globalizing world*. Columbia University Press.

- French Jr., J. R. P., & Raven, B. (1959). The bases of social power. In *Studies in social power* (pp. 150–167). Univer. Michigan.
- Frey, W. H. (2018). *William H. Frey analysis of U.S. Census population projections released March 13, 2018 and revised September 6, 2018*. Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings.
- Frey, W. H. (2020, July 1). The nation is diversifying even faster than predicted, according to new census data. *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/new-census-data-shows-the-nation-is-diversifying-even-faster-than-predicted/>
- Frey, W. H. (2022, August 1). White and youth population losses contributed most to the nation's growth slowdown, new census data reveals. *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/white-and-youth-population-losses-contributed-most-to-the-nations-growth-slowdown-new-census-data-reveals/>
- Frick, W. C. (2008). Principals' value-informed decision-making, intrapersonal moral discord, and pathways to resolution: The complexities of moral leadership praxis. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 47(1), 50–74. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230910928089>
- Frick, W. C. (2011). Practicing a Professional Ethic: Leading for Students' Best Interests. *American Journal of Education*, 117(4), 527–562. <https://doi.org/10.1086/660757>
- Frick, W. C., Faircloth, S. C., & Little, K. S. (2012). Responding to the collective and individual “best interests of students”: Revisiting the tension between administrative practice and ethical imperatives in special education leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 49(2), 207–242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X12463230>
- Frick, W. C., Faircloth, S. C., & Little, K. S. (2013). Responding to the collective and individual "best interests of students": Revisiting the tension between administrative practice and

- ethical imperatives in special education leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 49(2), 207–242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X12463230>
- Fullan, M. (1996). Leadership for change. In K. Leithwood, J. Chapman, D. Corson, P. Hallinger, & A. Hart (Eds.), *International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration: Part 1–2* (pp. 701–722). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-1573-2_21
- Fullan, M. (1999). *Change forces: The sequel*. Psychology Press.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *Whole school reform: Problems and promises*. University of Toronto.
- Fullan, M., & Stiegelmeier, M. G. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. Psychology Press.
- Fullan, M., Rincón-Gallardo, S., & Hargreaves, A. (2015). Professional capital as accountability. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 23(15), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v23.1998>
- Furman, G. C. (2004). The ethic of community. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 42(2), 215–235. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230410525612>
- Gagnon, J. C., Kennedy-Lewis, B. L., & Gurel, S. (2014). *Corporal punishment in Florida schools: Trends in reactive, punitive, and ineffective approaches to youth behavior*. Southern Poverty Law Center.
- Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2003). *Educational research: An introduction* (7th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
- Giroux, H. A. (1992). Literacy, pedagogy, and the politics of difference. *College Literature*, 19(1), 1–11.

- Girvan, E. J., Gion, C., McIntosh, K., & Smolkowski, K. (2017). The relative contribution of subjective office referrals to racial disproportionality in school discipline. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 32(3), 392–404. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000178>
- Girvan, E. J., McIntosh, K., & Santiago-Rosario, M. R. (2021). Associations between community-level racial biases, office discipline referrals, and out-of-school suspensions. *School Psychology Review*, 50(2–3), 288–302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2020.1838232>
- Gjelten, T. (2015). *A nation of nations: A great American immigration story*. Simon & Schuster.
- Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Glesne, C. (2016). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. In *Pearson* (5th ed.). Pearson.
- Goddard, J., & Hart, A. C. (2007). School leadership and equity: Canadian elements. *School Leadership & Management*, 27(1), 7–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430601092263>
- Golann, J. W., & Jones, A. (2021). How principals balance control and care in urban school discipline. *Urban Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420859211046824>
- Gottfredson, G. D., & Gottfredson, D. C. (2001). What schools do to prevent problem behavior and promote safe environments. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, 12(4), 313–344. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532768XJEPC1204_02
- Gray, A. M., Sirinides, P. M., Fink, R., Flack, A., DuBois, T., Morrison, K., & Hill, K. (2017). *Discipline in context: Suspension, climate, and PBIS in the school district of Philadelphia*. [Research Report]. Consortium for Policy Research in Education. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED586779.pdf>

- Green, S., Grant, A. M., & Rynsaardt, J. (2020). Evidence-based life coaching for senior high school students. In *Coaching Researched* (pp. 257–268). John Wiley & Sons.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119656913.ch13>
- Greenfield, W. D. (2004). Moral leadership in schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 42(2), 174–196. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230410525595>
- Gregory, A., Bell, J., & Pollock, M. (2014). *How educators can eradicate disparities in school discipline: A briefing paper on school-based interventions* (Discipline Disparities Series: Interventions) [Report]. Discipline Disparities A Research-to-Practice Collaborative at Indiana University. <https://search.issuelab.org/resource/how-educators-can-eradicate-disparities-in-school-discipline-a-briefing-paper-on-school-based-interventions.html>
- Gregory, A., Cornell, D., & Fan, X. (2011). The relationship of school structure and support to suspension rates for Black and White high school students. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48, 904–934. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831211398531>
- Gregory, A., Osher, D., Bear, G. G., Jagers, R. J., & Sprague, J. R. (2021). Good intentions are not enough: Centering equity in school discipline reform. *School Psychology Review*, 50(2–3), 206–220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2020.1861911>
- Gregory, A., Skiba, R. J., & Noguera, P. A. (2010). The achievement gap and the discipline gap: Two sides of the same coin? *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 59–68.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X09357621>
- Gregory, A., & Weinstein, R. S. (2008). The discipline gap and African Americans: Defiance or cooperation in the high school classroom. *Journal of School Psychology*, 46(4), 455–475.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2007.09.001>

- Griffin, C. B., Metzger, I. W., Halliday-Boykins, C. A., & Salazar, C. A. (2020). Racial fairness, school engagement, and discipline outcomes in African American high school students: The important role of gender. *School Psychology Review, 49*(3), 222–238.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2020.1726810>
- Grissom, J. A., Rodriguez, L. A., & Kern, E. C. (2017). Teacher and principal diversity and the representation of students of color in gifted programs: Evidence from national data. *Elementary School Journal, 117*(3), 396–422.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? *Field Methods, 18*(1), 59–82.
- Gullo, G. L., & Beachum, F. D. (2020). Principals navigating discipline decisions for social justice: An informed grounded theory study. *Heliyon, 6*(12), e05736.
- Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (1998). Exploring the principal's contribution to school effectiveness: 1980-1995. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 9*(2), 157–191.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0924345980090203>
- Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (2010). Collaborative leadership and school improvement: Understanding the impact on school capacity and student learning. *School Leadership & Management, 30*(2), 95–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632431003663214>
- Harry, B., & Lipsky, M. (2014). Qualitative research on special education teacher preparation. In P. T. Sindelar, E. D. McCray, M. T. Brownell, & B. Lignugaris-Kraft (Eds.), *Handbook of research on special education teacher preparation* (1st ed., pp. 473–488). Routledge.
- Hartzell, G. N., & Petrie, T. A. (1992). The principal and discipline: Working with school structures, teachers, and students. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational*

- Strategies, Issues, and Ideas*, 65(6), 376–380.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.1992.10114252>
- Hattie, J. A. C. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Routledge & CRC Press. <https://www.routledge.com/Visible-Learning-A-Synthesis-of-Over-800-Meta-Analyses-Relating-to-Achievement/Hattie/p/book/9780415476188>
- Head, B. W. (2008). Wicked problems in public policy. *Public Policy*.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/43502862>
- Head, B. W., & Alford, J. (2015). Wicked problems: Implications for public policy and management. *Administration & Society*, 47(6), 711–739.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399713481601>
- Heavyside, S. (1998). *Violence and discipline problems in U.S. public schools: 1996-97*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.
- Heilbrun, A., Cornell, D., & Lovegrove, P. (2015). Principal attitudes regarding zero tolerance and racial disparities in school suspensions. *Psychology in the Schools*, 52(5), 489–499.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21838>
- Hein, G. E. (1991). *Constructivist learning theory*. CECA (International Committee of Museum Educators Conference).
<http://www.exploratorium.edu/IFI/resources/constructivistlearning.html>
- Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2011). *Qualitative research methods*. SAGE Publications.
<https://www.perlego.com/book/3013435/qualitative-research-methods-pdf>
- Hill, M., & Hupe, P. (2003). The multi-layer problem in implementation research. *Public Management Review*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1471903032000178545>

- Honebein, P. C. (1996). Seven goals for the design of constructivist learning environments. *Constructivist Learning Environments: Case Studies in Instructional Design*, 11–24.
- Huang, F. L. (2020). Prior problem behaviors do not account for the racial suspension gap. *Educational Researcher*, 49(7), 493–502. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20932474>
- Huang, F. L., & Cornell, D. (2018). The relationship of school climate with out-of-school suspensions. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 94, 378–389. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2018.08.013>
- Hwang, N. (2018). Suspensions and achievement: Varying links by type, frequency, and subgroup. *Educational Researcher*, 47(6), 363–374. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X18779579>
- Irwin, V., De La Rosa, J., Wang, K., & Zhang, J. (2022). *Report on the condition of education*. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2022144>
- Johnson, B. L., & Kruse, S. D. (2009). *Decision-making for educational leaders: Underexamined dimensions and issues*. State University of New York Press.
- Johnson, S. M. (1996). *Leading to change: The challenge of the new superintendency*. Jossey-Bass.
- Jones, E. P., Margolius, M., Rollock, M., Yan, C. T., Cole, M. L., & Zaff, J. F. (2018). *Disciplined and disconnected: How students experience exclusionary discipline in Minnesota and the promise of non-exclusionary alternatives*. Center for Promise: America's Promise Alliance. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED586336.pdf>
- Joppe, M. (2000). *The research process*. Scientific Research. <http://www.ryerson.ca/~mjoppe/rp.htm>

- Kafka, J. (2011). The history of “zero tolerance” in American public schooling: Palgrave studies in urban education. In *Palgrave Macmillan* (2011th ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kamenetz, A. (2018, December 17). *Suspensions are down in U.S. schools but large racial gaps remain*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/17/677508707/suspensions-are-down-in-u-s-schools-but-large-racial-gaps-remain>
- Kang-Brown, J., Trone, J., Fratello, J., & Daftary-Kapur, T. (2013). *Generation later: What we’ve learned about zero tolerance in schools*. U.S. Department of Justice. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/generation-later-what-weve-learned-about-zero-tolerance-schools>
- Kennedy, B. L., Murphy, A. S., & Jordan, A. (2017). Title I middle school administrators’ beliefs and choices about using corporal punishment and exclusionary discipline. *American Journal of Education*, 123(2), 243–280. <https://doi.org/10.1086/689929>
- Kim, C. Y., Losen, D. J., & Hewitt, D. T. (2010). *The school-to-prison pipeline: Structuring legal reform*. NYU press.
- Kinsler, J. (2011). Understanding the black–white school discipline gap. *Economics of Education Review*, 30(6), 1370-1383.
- Klein, H. K., & Myers, M. D. (1999). A set of principles for conducting and evaluating interpretive field studies in information systems. *MIS Quarterly*, 23(1), 67. <https://doi.org/10.2307/249410>
- Klinger, D. A., Maggi, S., & D’Angiulli, A. (2011). School accountability and assessment: Should we put the roof up first? *The Educational Forum*, 75(2), 114–128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2011.552671>

- Knapp, M., & Feldman, S. (2012). Managing the intersection of internal and external accountability: Challenge for urban school leadership in the United States. *Journal of Educational Administration, 50*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231211249862>
- Kostyo, S., Cardichon, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2018). *Making ESSA's equity promise real: State strategies to close the opportunity gap: A follow-up report to advancing equity for underserved youth*. Learning Policy Institute.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED606522.pdf>
- Koyama, J. (2013). Principals as bricoleurs: Making sense and making do in an era of accountability. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 50*, 279–304.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X13492796>
- Kranich, N. (2001). Imagining fairness: Equality and equity of access in search of democracy. libraries and democracy.
- Kuhfeld, M., Soland, J., Tarasawa, B., Johnson, A., Ruzek, E., & Liu, J. (2020). Projecting the potential impact of COVID-19 school closures on academic achievement. *Educational Researcher, 49*(8), 549–565. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20965918>
- Lacoe, J., & Steinberg, M. P. (2019). Do suspensions affect student outcomes? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 41*(1), 34–62.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373718794897>
- Langlois, L., & Lapointe, C. (2010). Can ethics be learned? Results from a three-year action-research project. *Journal of Educational Administration, 48*(2), 147–163.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231011027824>

- Larsen, D. E., & Hunter, J. E. (2014). Separating wheat from chaff: How secondary school principals' core values and beliefs influence decision-making related to mandates. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 9(2), 71–90.
- Lasater, K., Bengtson, E., & Albiladi, W. S. (2021). Data use for equity? How data practices incite deficit thinking in schools. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 69. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2020.100845>
- Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning: A review of research for the Learning from Leadership project*. The Wallace Foundation.
- Levin, J. A., & Datnow, A. (2012). The principal role in data-driven decision-making: Using case-study data to develop multi-mediator models of educational reform. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 23(2), 179–201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2011.599394>
- LiCalsi, C., Osher, D., & Bailey, P. (2021). *An empirical examination of the effects of suspension and suspension severity on behavioral and academic outcomes*. American Institute for Research. <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/NYC-Suspension-Effects-Behavioral-Academic-Outcomes-August-2021.pdf>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.
- Losen, D. J. (2014). *Closing the School Discipline Gap: Equitable Remedies for Excessive Exclusion*. Teachers College Press.
- Losen, D. J. (2015). *The school to prison pipeline: What research says about contributing actors and the remedies*. The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the Civil Rights Project at UCLA. <https://cebcpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Losen.pdf>

- Losen, D. J., Goyal, S., Alam, M., & Salazar, R. (2022). *Unmasking school discipline disparities in California*. The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the Civil Rights Project.
- Losen, D. J., & Martinez, P. (2020). *Lost opportunities: How disparate school discipline continues to drive differences in the opportunity to learn*. Learning Policy Institute.
<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/crdc-school-discipline-report>
- Lowery, C. (2018). Moral literacy and school leadership: Perceptions of principals in southeast Ohio on the ethics of decision-making. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 58(1), 112–127. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-06-2018-0120>
- Lunenburg, F. C. (2010). The decision-making process. *National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision Journal*, 27(4), 12.
- Madrigal, D., & McClain, B. (2012). *Strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative research*. Ux Matters. <https://www.uxmatters.com/mt/archives/2012/09/strengths-and-weaknesses-of-quantitative-and-qualitative-research.php>
- Mandinach, E. B. (2012). A perfect time for data use: Using data-driven decision-making to inform practice. *Educational Psychologist*, 47(2), 71–85.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2012.667064>
- Mandinach, E. B., & Gummer, E. S. (2016). What does it mean for teachers to be data literate: Laying out the skills, knowledge, and dispositions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 60, 366–376. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.07.011>
- Mandinach, E. B., & Schildkamp, K. (2021). Misconceptions about data-based decision-making in education: An exploration of the literature. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 69, 100842. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2020.100842>

- Marcotte, D. E., & Hemelt, S. W. (2008). Unscheduled school closings and student performance. *Education Finance and Policy*, 3(3), 316–338. <https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp.2008.3.3.316>
- Marks, H. M., & Printy, S. M. (2003). Principal leadership and school performance: An integration of transformational and instructional leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(3), 370–397. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X03253412>
- Marsh, J. A., Pane, J. F., & Hamilton, L. S. (2006). *Making sense of data-driven decision-making in education: Evidence from recent RAND research*. RAND Corporation. <https://www.rand.org/>
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (2016). *Designing qualitative research* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Matland, R. E. (1995). Synthesizing the implementation literature: The ambiguity-conflict model of policy implementation. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 5(2), 145–174.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). Designing a qualitative study. In J. A. Maxwell (Ed.), *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (pp. 214–253). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/43220402>
- Mazmanian, D., & Sabatier, P. (1983). *Implementation and public policy*. Scott Foresman.
- McCartan, K., & Robson, C. (2016). *Real world research* (4th ed.). Wiley.
- McIntosh, K., Predy, L. K., Upreti, G., Hume, A. E., Turri, M. G., & Mathews, S. (2014). Perceptions of contextual features related to implementation and sustainability of school-

- wide positive behavior support. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 16(1), 31–43.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300712470723>
- McLaughlin, M. W. (1987). Learning from experience: Lessons from policy implementation. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 9(2), 171–178.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed., pp. xiv, 338). SAGE Publications.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook. In *SAGE Publications* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/qualitative-data-analysis/book246128>
- Mittleman, J. (2018). A downward spiral? Childhood suspension and the path to juvenile arrest. *Sociology of Education*, 91(3), 183–204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040718784603>
- Morgan, H. (2022). Resisting the movement to ban critical race theory from schools. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas*, 95(1), 35–41.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2021.2025023>
- Morgan-D'Atrio, C., Northup, J., LaFleur, L., & Spera, S. (1996). Toward prescriptive alternatives to suspensions: A preliminary evaluation. *Behavioral Disorders*, 21(2), 190–200.
- Morton, M. K., Jim Soland, Karyn Lewis, and Emily. (2022, March 3). The pandemic has had devastating impacts on learning. What will it take to help students catch up? *Brookings*.

- <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2022/03/03/the-pandemic-has-had-devastating-impacts-on-learning-what-will-it-take-to-help-students-catch-up/>
- Mukuria, G. (2002). Disciplinary challenges: How do principals address this dilemma? *Urban Education, 37*(3), 432–452. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00485902037003007>
- Nasreen, A. (2019). The world of a school principal: A qualitative study of secondary school principals' selection, capability, and current practices in the province of Punjab. *Bulletin of Education Research, 2*, 161–179.
- National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (n.d.). *Discipline*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/environment/discipline>
- Noble, H., & Heale, R. (2019). Triangulation in research, with examples. *Evidence Based Nursing, 22*(3), 67–68. <https://doi.org/10.1136/ebnurs-2019-103145>
- O'Day, J. (2002). Complexity, accountability, and school improvement. *Harvard Educational Review, 72*(3), 293–329. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.72.3.021q742t8182h238>
- Okonofua, J. A., & Eberhardt, J. L. (2015). Two strikes: Race and the disciplining of young students. *Psychological Science, 26*(5), 617–624.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797615570365>
- Osher, D., Bear, G. G., Sprague, J. R., & Doyle, W. (2010). How can we improve school discipline? *Educational Researcher, 39*(1), 48–58.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X09357618>
- Owens, J., & McLanahan, S. S. (2020). Unpacking the drivers of racial disparities in school suspension and expulsion. *Social Forces, 98*(4), 1548–1577.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soz095>

- Patton, M. (2005). Qualitative research. In B. Everitt & D. Howell (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Statistics in Behavioral Science*. John Wiley & Sons.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/0470013192.bsa514>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Sage.
- Pearman, F. A., Curran, F. C., Fisher, B., & Gardella, J. (2019). Are achievement gaps related to discipline gaps? Evidence from national data. *AERA Open*, 5(4).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858419875440>
- Pennsylvania School Boards Association. (2020). *School district mandates: Their impact on public education* [PSBA Special Report]. <https://www.psba.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Mandate-report-2020-WEB.pdf>
- Pfleger, R., & Wiley, K. (2012). *Colorado disciplinary practices 2008-2010: Disciplinary actions, student behavior, race, and gender*. National Education Policy Center.
<http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/colorado-disciplinary-practices>
- Poliner Shapiro, J., & Stefkovich, J. A. (2016). *Ethical leadership and decision-making in education: Applying theoretical perspectives to complex dilemmas*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Pollock, K., Wang, F., & Hauseman, D. C. (2015). Complexity and volume: An inquiry into factors that drive principals' work. *Societies*, 5(2), Article 2.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/soc5020537>
- Raffaele Mendez, L. M. (2003). Predictors of suspension and negative school outcomes: A longitudinal investigation. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2003(99), 17–33.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.52>

- Rahmatollahi, M., & Mohamadi Zenouzagh, Z. (2021). Designing and validating an evaluation inventory for assessing teachers' professional accountability. *Language Testing in Asia*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-021-00128-3>
- Raichle, D. R. (1977). School discipline and corporal punishment: An American retrospect. *Interchange*, 8(1), 71–83. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01188018>
- Reeves, J. R. (2006). Secondary teacher attitudes toward including English language learners in mainstream classrooms. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 99(3), 131–143. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JOER.99.3.131-143>
- Richards, T. J., & Richards, L. (1994). Using computers in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 445–462). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Riddle, T., & Sinclair, S. (2019). Racial disparities in school-based disciplinary actions are associated with county-level rates of racial bias. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 116(17), 8255–8260.
- Riordan, G. (2006). Reducing student 'suspension rates' and engaging students in learning: Principal and teacher approaches that work. *Improving Schools*, 9(3), 239–250. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480206069026>
- Ritchie, J., & Spencer, L. (1994). Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In A. Bryman & R. Burgess (Eds.), *Analyzing qualitative data* (pp. 305–329). Routledge.
- Rittel, H. W. J., & Webber, M. M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4(2), 155–169.

- Robinson, V. M. J., Lloyd, C. A., & Rowe, K. J. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(5), 635–674. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X08321509>
- Robson, C., & McCartan, K. (2016). Real world research: A resource for users of social research methods in applied settings.
- Rodriguez, L. A., & Welsh, R. O. (2022). The dimensions of school discipline: Toward a comprehensive framework for measuring discipline patterns and outcomes in schools. *AERA Open*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584221083669>
- Rosen, L. (1997). *School discipline: Best practices for administrators*. Corwin Press.
- Rosenbaum, J. E. (2020). Educational and criminal justice outcomes 12 years after school suspension. *Youth & Society*, 52(4), 515–547. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X17752208>
- Rumberger, R. W., & Losen, D. J. (2016). *The high cost of harsh discipline and its disparate impact*. The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the Civil Rights Project.
- Rushton, J. L., Forcier, M., & Schectman, R. M. (2002). Epidemiology of depressive symptoms in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 41(2), 199–205. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00004583-200202000-00014>
- Saldaña, J. (2009). Popular film as an instructional strategy in qualitative research methods courses. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 15(1), 247–261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800408318323>
- Saldaña, J., & Omasta, M. (2022). *Qualitative research: Analyzing life* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/qualitative-research/book268682>

- Sallee, M., & Flood, J. (2012). Using qualitative research to bridge research, policy, and practice. *Theory Into Practice, 51*, 137–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2012.662873>
- Sarason, S. B. (1971). *The culture of the school and the problem of change*. Allyn and Bacon. https://archive.org/details/cultureofschoolp000sara_q0r6
- Schement, J. R. (2001). Imagining fairness: Equality and equity of access in search of democracy. By Jorge Reina Schement. In N. C. Kranich (Ed.), *Libraries and democracy: The cornerstones of liberty*. (pp. 15–27). American Library Association.
- Schildkamp, K., Karbautzki, L., & Vanhoof, J. (2014). Exploring data use practices around Europe: Identifying enablers and barriers. *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 42*, 15–24. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2013.10.007>
- Schildkamp, K., & Kuiper, W. (2010). Data-informed curriculum reform: Which data, what purposes, and promoting and hindering factors. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*(3), 482–496. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.06.007>
- Shaked, H., & Schechter, C. (2019). Exploring systems thinking in school principals' decision-making. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 22*(5), 573–596. Shapiro, J.P., & Stefkovich, J.A. (2016). *Ethical leadership and decision-making in education: Applying theoretical perspectives to complex dilemmas* (4th ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Shen, J., Cooley, V. E., Ma, X., Reeves, P. L., Burt, W. L., Rainey, J. M., & Yuan, W. (2012). Data-informed decision-making on high-impact strategies: Developing and validating an instrument for principals. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 80*(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.2010.550338>

- Shores, K., Kim, H. E., & Still, M. (2020). Categorical inequality in black and white: Linking disproportionality across multiple educational outcomes. *American Educational Research Journal*, 57(5), 2089–2131. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831219900128>
- Silverman, D. (2010). *Doing qualitative research*. SAGE Publications.
- Simon, J. R. (1969). Reactions toward the source of stimulation. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 81(1), 174–176. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0027448>
- Skelton, S. M., & Kigamwa, J. (2012). *Education equity: What's it all about?* [Equi-learn Webinar].
https://greatlakesequity.org/sites/default/files/2012_11_26_equity_webinar_final.pdf
- Skiba, R. J., Chung, C.-G., Trachok, M., Baker, T. L., Sheya, A., & Hughes, R. L. (2014). Parsing disciplinary disproportionality: Contributions of infraction, student, and school characteristics to out-of-school suspension and expulsion. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51(4), 640–670. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831214541670>
- Skiba, R. J., Horner, R. H., Chung, C.-G., Rausch, M. K., May, S. L., & Tobin, T. (2011). Race is not neutral: A national investigation of African American and Latino disproportionality in school discipline. *School Psychology Review*, 40(1), 85–107.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02796015.2011.12087730>
- Skiba, R. J., & Losen, D. J. (2015). From reaction to prevention: Turning the page on school discipline. *American Educator*, Winter, 1–44.
- Skiba, R. J., Michael, R. S., Nardo, A. C., & Peterson, R. L. (2002). The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. *The Urban Review*, 26.

- Skiba, R. J., Peterson, R. L., & Williams, T. (1997). Office referrals and suspension: Disciplinary intervention in middle schools. *Education and Treatment of Children, 6*(2), 107–118.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603120304821>
- Skiba, R., & Rausch, M. K. (2006). School disciplinary systems: Alternatives to suspension and expulsion. In *Children's needs III: Development, prevention, and intervention* (pp. 87–102). National Association of School Psychologists.
- Smith, B. N., & Hains, B. J. (2012). Examining administrators' disciplinary philosophies: A conceptual model. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 48*(3), 548–576.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X12441363>
- Smolkowski, K., Girvan, E. J., McIntosh, K., Nese, R. N. T., & Horner, R. H. (2016). Vulnerable decision points for disproportionate office discipline referrals: Comparisons of discipline for African American and White elementary school students. *Behavioral Disorders, 41*(4), pp. 178-195. <https://files.eric.edu.gov/fulltext/EJ1113080.pdf>
- Snyder, J., & Bristol, T. (2015). Professional accountability for improving life, college, and career readiness. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 23*, 16–16.
<https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v23.2002>
- Sorensen, L. C., Bushway, S. D., & Gifford, E. J. (2022). Getting Tough? The effects of discretionary principal discipline on student outcomes. *Education Finance and Policy, 17*(2), 255–284. https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_a_00341
- Spillane, J. P. (2012). Data in practice: Conceptualizing the data-based decision-making phenomena. *American Journal of Education, 118*(2), 113–141.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/663283>

- Spillane, J. P., Diamond, J. B., Burch, P., Hallett, T., Jita, L., & Zoltners, J. (2002). Managing in the middle: School leaders and the enactment of accountability policy. *Educational Policy, 16*(5), 731–762. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089590402237311>
- Staats, C. (2015). Understanding implicit bias. *American Educator*.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1086492.pdf>
- Starratt, R. J. (1994). *Building an ethical school: A practical response to the moral crisis in schools*. Falmer Press.
- Steinberg, M. P., & Lacoé, J. (2018). Reforming school discipline: School-level policy implementation and the consequences for suspended students and their peers. *American Journal of Education, 125*(1), 29–77. <https://doi.org/10.1086/699811>
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. SAGE Publications.
- Stringer, E. T. (2014). *Action research: A handbook for practitioners* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
<https://www.scirp.org/reference/ReferencesPapers.aspx?ReferenceID=2623102>
- Sullivan, A. L., Van Norman, E. R., & Klingbeil, D. A. (2014). Exclusionary discipline of students with disabilities: Student and school characteristics predicting suspension. *Remedial and Special Education, 35*(4), 199–210.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932513519825>
- Tamadoni, A., Hosseingholizadeh, R., & Bellibaş, M. Ş. (2021). A systematic review of key contextual challenges facing school principals: Research-informed coping solutions. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211061439>

- Thompson, R. A. (2011). Emotion and emotion regulation: Two sides of the developing coin. *Emotion Review*, 3(1), 53–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073910380969>
- Tobin, J. (2014). Management and leadership issues for school building leaders. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 9(1). <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1024110>
- Tobin, K., & Murphy, J. (2013). Addressing the challenges of child and family homelessness. *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*, 4(1). <https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/childrenatrisk/vol4/iss1/9>
- Tomaszewski, L. E., Zarestky, J., & Gonzalez, E. (2020). Planning qualitative research: Design and decision-making for new researchers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1609406920967174. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920967174>
- U.S. Department of Commerce, & Department of Education. (2021, June 8). *Federal Register* 86(108). [Notice 30449]. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-06-08/pdf/2021-11990.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights; U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division (2014, January 18; 2018, July 30). *Dear colleague letter on the nondiscriminatory administration of school discipline*. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201401-title-vi.html>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights; U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division (2018, December 21). Dear Colleague Letter [OCR-000113]. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201812.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2018, April; 2019, May). *School Climate and Safety: Data highlights on school climate and safety in our nation's public schools*

[2015-2016 Civil Rights Data Collection].

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/school-climate-and-safety.pdf>

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2021). *An overview of exclusionary discipline practices in public schools for the 2017-18 school year*. [Civil Rights Data Collection]. <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/assets/downloads/crdc-exclusionary-school-discipline.pdf>

U.S. Education Department, Office for Civil Rights (2021, June). *2017-18 State and National Estimations* [Civil Rights Data Collection]. <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/estimations/2017-2018>

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2022). *Safeguarding students' civil rights, promoting educational excellence*. [Report to the President and Secretary of Education under section 203(b)(1) of the Department of Education Organization Act, FY 2021]. <http://www.ed.gov/ocr>

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs (2023, July 24). *Dear Colleague Letter: General Supervision Responsibilities*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/dear-colleague-letter-general-supervision-responsibilities-july-24-2023/>

U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2013). *Individuals with disabilities act: Standards needed to improve identification of racial and ethnic overrepresentation in special education*. [Report to the Chairman, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, U.S. Senate]. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-13-137.pdf>

Valdebenito, S., Eisner, M., Farrington, D. P., Ttofi, M. M., & Sutherland, A. (2019). What can we do to reduce disciplinary school exclusion? A systematic review and meta-analysis.

- Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 15(3), 253–287. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-018-09351-0>
- van der Kleij, F. M., & Eggen, T. J. H. M. (2013). Interpretation of the score reports from the computer program LOVS by teachers, internal support teachers and principals. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 39(3), 144–152. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2013.04.002>
- Van Meter, D. S., & Van Horn, C. E. (1975). The policy implementation process: A conceptual framework. *Administration & Society*, 6(4).
- Vanhoof, J., De Maeyer, S., & Van Petegem, P. (2011). Variation in the conduct and the quality of self-evaluations: A multi-level path analysis. *Educational Studies*, 37(3), 277–287. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1080/03055698.2010.506326>
- Vanlommel, K., & Schildkamp, K. (2019). How do teachers make sense of data in the context of high-stakes decision-making? *American Educational Research Journal*, 56(3), 792–821. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831218803891>
- Vanlommel, K., Van Gasse, R., Vanhoof, J., & Van Petegem, P. (2017). Teachers' decision-making: Data based or intuition driven? *International Journal of Educational Research*, 83, 75–83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2017.02.013>
- Vasquez Heilig, J., Ward, D. R., Weisman, E., & Cole, H. (2014). Community-based school finance and accountability: A new era for local control in education policy? *Urban Education*, 49(8), 871–894. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085914558171>
- Vavrus, F., & Cole, K. (2002). I didn't do nothin': The discursive construction of school suspension. *The Urban Review*, 34(2), 87–111. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015375215801>

- Wall, P. (2023, March 28). *Lawmakers across U.S. push for harsher school discipline as safety fears rise*. Chalkbeat. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2023/3/28/23658974/school-discipline-violence-safety-state-law-suspensions-restorative-justice>
- Wang, Y. (2019). Is data-driven decision-making at odds with moral decision-making? A critical review of school leaders' decision-making in the era of school accountability. *Values and Ethics in Educational Administration*, 14(2), 9.
- Wang, Y. (2021). When artificial intelligence meets educational leaders' data-informed decision-making: A cautionary tale. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 69. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2020.100872>
- Weick, K. E. (1984). Small wins: Redefining the scale of social problems. *American Psychologist*, 39, 40–49. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.39.1.40>
- Weick, K. E. (1995a). *Sensemaking in organizations*. SAGE Publications.
- Weick, K. E. (1995b). What theory is not, theorizing is. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40(3), 385. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393789>
- Weick, K. E. (2005). Organizing and failures of imagination. *International Public Management Journal*, 8(3), 425–438. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10967490500439883>
- Weick, K. E., Sutclie, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science*, 16(4).
- Welch, K., & Payne, A. A. (2010). Racial threat and punitive school discipline. *Social Problems*, 57(1), 25–48. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2010.57.1.25>
- Welsh, R. O. (2023). Navigating tensions in school discipline: Examining school leaders, teachers, and the conversion of referrals into suspensions. *American Journal of Education*, 129(2), 237–264. <https://doi.org/10.1086/723064>

- Welsh, R. O., & Little, S. (2018). The school discipline dilemma: A comprehensive review of disparities and alternative approaches. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(5), 752–794. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654318791582>
- Williams, J. A., Lewis, C., Starker Glass, T., Butler, B. R., & Hoon Lim, J. (2023). The discipline gatekeeper: Assistant principals' experiences with managing school discipline in urban middle schools. *Urban Education*, 58(8), 1543-1571. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085920908913>
- Williamson, B. (2017). *Big data in education: The digital future of learning, policy, and practice*. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529714920>
- Williams, V. (2022). *Discipline discussions: The impact and harm of exclusionary discipline* [Discipline Behavior Series, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services Blog]. U.S. Department of Education. <https://sites.ed.gov/osers/2022/12/discipline-discussions-the-impact-and-harm-of-exclusionary-discipline/>
- Wohlstetter, P., & Briggs, K. L. (1994). The principal's role in school-based management. *Principal*, 74(2).
- Wolf, K. C., & Kupchik, A. (2017). School suspensions and adverse experiences in adulthood. *Justice Quarterly*, 34(3), 407–430. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2016.1168475>
- Wriston, B., & Duchesneau, N. (2023, April 6). *How school discipline impacts students' social, emotional, and academic development (SEAD)*. The Education Trust. <https://edtrust.org/resource/how-school-discipline-impacts-students'-emotional-and-academic-development-SEAD/>
- Wu, S.-C., Pink, W., Crain, R., & Moles, O. (1982). Student suspension: A critical reappraisal. *The Urban Review*, 14(4), 245–303. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02171974>

- Yilmaz, K. (2013). Comparison of quantitative and qualitative research traditions: Epistemological, theoretical, and methodological differences. *European Journal of Education, 48*(2), 311–325. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12014>
- Young, M., & Laible, J. (2000). White racism, anti-racism, and school leadership preparation. *Journal of School Leadership, 10*, 374–415. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460001000501>
- Youngs, P., & King, M. B. (2002). Principal leadership for professional development to build school capacity. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 38*(5), 643–670. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X02239642>
- Zamani, N., & Farmer, A. (2009). Corporal punishment in U.S. public schools: Prevalent, abusive, and ineffective. *Teachers College Record*. <http://www.tcrecord.org.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu>. ID Number: 15779
- Zhang, T., Fletcher, P. O., Gino, F., & Bazerman, M. H. (2015). Reducing bounded ethicality: How to help individuals notice and avoid unethical behavior. *Organizational Dynamics*.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Principal Discipline Decision-Making Interview Questions:

Part I.) Introductory Questions:

- What led you to become a school administrator? What did your journey to that job look like?
- What is the best part of your job?

Part II.) Policy/Organizational Framing Questions

- Can you explain your role in discipline actions in this school?
- To what extent do you feel like you have the latitude to make whatever disciplinary decision is best and to what extent are you constrained by policy and procedure?

Part III.) Examples/Thinking on Discipline Decisions

- What are the most common discipline issues you address?
- What does your approach to gathering information look like when you need to make a disciplinary decision?
 - Who are the people you generally talk to?
 - How do you decide if the sources are trustworthy? Are there narratives you give greater weight to?
- Can you walk us through a recent discipline decision you had to make? What were the circumstances and what was the outcome?
 - Who were the people you thought about in this decision, and why?
 - How do parents and parent interaction fit into your decision-making?
 - Is this the sort of decision you make often, or not very often?
- Is there a time when you had to make a disciplinary decision that you think resulted in the “best case scenario”? What happened/what did that look like?
- Is there a particular instance when you needed to make a disciplinary decision that you regret or wish you had done differently? Why?
 - What is the key lesson you took from this?
 - How did you use your learning the next time?
- In general, how confident do you feel that you have made the “right” decision?
 - What gives you confidence (or causes you to lack confidence)?
- When you are making decisions, are you thinking about the student’s future schooling experiences and their future teachers and principals?
 - What about their past experiences and the folks who have come before?

Part IV.) Concluding Questions

- How has your thinking about discipline shifted over time?

Part V.) Luxury/Backup Questions

- Is there a person you look up to who you feel handles discipline decisions well? What is it that you admire about their/her/his approach?
- What might you want to know to decide if the decision is a “horse” or a “zebra”?
- Can you think of an example of a time when you knew a decision would have “downstream” effects- it wouldn’t just be a one off?
 - What did this look like?
 - How was your approach different with this as opposed to “day-to-day” decisions?

APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
College of Education
Research Study Consent Form

Study Title: K12 Principal Decision-making: Strategies and Challenges

Researchers: Sharon Kruse and Jeff Walls

External Funding: This study is not funded by an external funder.

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THIS STUDY

- Your consent is being sought for research. Participation is voluntary.
- **Study Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to understand how school administrators make decisions about discipline for students and what factors shape their decisions.
- **Major Activities of Subject Participation:** Participation in a semi-structured interview and, potentially, a short follow-up interview.
- **Duration of Participation:** The initial interview will likely be approximately 60 minutes, and any follow-up interview will be 15-20 minutes.

What you should know:

You are being asked to take part in a research study carried out by Sharon Kruse and Jeff Walls. This form explains the research study and your part in it if you decide to join the study. Please read the form carefully, taking as much time as you need. Ask the researcher to explain anything you do not understand. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You can decide not to join the study. If you join the study, you can change your mind later or quit at any time. You may refuse any question, test, or procedure. There will be no penalty or loss of services or benefits if you decide to not take part in the study or quit later. This study has been certified as exempt from the need for review by the Washington State University Institutional Review Board

Will my information be kept private?

Your identity, and any information you share will be kept private. In any presentations or publications resulting from this work, you will be given a pseudonym, as will your school and district. All of the interview materials will be securely stored in password protected systems.

Who can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions about this study or the information in this form, please contact one of the researchers, Sharon Kruse, at Sharon.kruse@wsu.edu and Jeff Walls, at jeff.walls@wsu.edu or 509-358-7799. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or if you would like to report a concern or complaint about this study, please contact the Washington State University Institutional Review Board at (509) 335-7646, or e-mail irb@wsu.edu, or regular mail at: Neill 427, PO Box 643143, Pullman, WA 99164-3143.

What are my rights as a research study volunteer?

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to be a part of this study. There will be no penalty to you if you choose not to take part. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records.

What does my signature on this consent form mean?

Your signature on this form means that:

- You understand the information given to you in this form
- You have been able to ask the researcher questions and state any concerns
- The researcher has responded to your questions and concerns
- You believe you understand the research study and the potential benefits and risks that are involved.
- You are giving your voluntary consent to take part in the study.

Statement of Consent

**Yes,
I agree** **No,
I disagree**

_____ _____ The researcher may audio or video record me to aid with data analysis. The researcher will not share these recordings with anyone outside of the immediate study team. These recordings will be automatically transcribed.

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research. You will be provided a copy of this signed document.

Signature of Participant _____
Date

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent _____
Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent