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Exploring Restorative Justice, Suspensions, and Expulsions with  
African American Males

by

Dorothy L. Mosby

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education


School of Education

Exploring Restorative Justice, Suspensions, and Expulsions with  
African American Males

by

Dorothy L. Mosby

This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at Lindenwood University by the School of Education

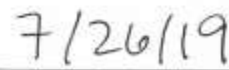
  
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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Dorothy L. Mosby

Signature: Dorothy L. Mosby Date: 7/26/2019

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## **Abstract**

Zero tolerance programs led to unequal consequences for African American males because the programs targeted behaviors African American students were more likely to receive discipline for, which resulted in an increase of disciplinary situations for the students. With the disproportionate suspensions and expulsions of African American male students in public schools, Illinois Senate Bill 100 addressed the discipline issues to reduce the number of long-term suspensions and expulsions. In the 2016–2017 school year, the state of Illinois implemented Senate Bill 100. The bill reconstructed the procedures on how school administrators suspended and expelled students; Restorative Justice was a technique used in schools to help reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions. The purpose of this study was to explore the implementation of Restorative Justice with African American male students. The researcher believed the implementation of Restorative Justice might decrease the number of disruptions within the classrooms and reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions. The researcher also believed that Restorative Justice would allow the teachers to be more accountable for classroom management.

This mixed-methods case study explored the beliefs teachers and students had on Restorative Justice when used in class. This current study suggested that while compelling evidence existed when teachers used Restorative Justice at the beginning of the year, teachers may not have continued the implementation. Results also suggested that teachers should receive professional development before and while implementing Restorative Justice in schools.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Background**

In the 2016–2017 school year, the state of Illinois implemented Senate Bill 100. The bill reconstructed the procedures on how school administrators suspended and expelled students (Stillman, 2016). Administrators could no longer suspend students for certain disciplinary acts considered as minor offenses. Administrators could suspend students only if student actions posed a threat to the school, staff, and/or facility (Blad, 2015). According to Stillman (2016), the SB100 law limited the number of student suspensions, expulsions, and change of placements due to minor infractions. In the past, schools suspended students for noncompliance or minor disruptions in the classroom (Blomberg, 2003). Under the new law, schools developed a plan for reentrance for each student suspended or expelled from school (Wilkie, 2015). The reentry plan also applied to students suspended for possession of drugs or paraphernalia. School administrators implemented alternative methods and/or Restorative Justice to allow students to remain in school to reduce suspensions (Black, 2016).

The researched school for this study followed the then-recently adopted law by implementing Restorative Justice in the school, tracking student data, training staff on Restorative Justice techniques, encouraging staff to use the Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) model, as well as the allocation of added resources for staff. More resources included Restorative Justice coaches, professional development, and ‘peer juries’, where “students face a panel of five or six classmates who have been trained to listen—and interrogate” (Shah, 2012, para. 27).

The researcher explored programs that the researched school implemented to reduce suspensions and expulsions. The Restorative Justice Coaches also worked with PBIS coaches during the study to reduce student discipline in the researched school. The school explored various PBIS programs, which coincided with the Restorative Justice. Additionally, the researcher explored academic supports to reduce the number of referrals in the classroom.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Zero tolerance programs targeted African American males more than any other race and gender, which led to disproportionate African American male suspension rates (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010). Skiba, Eckes, and Brown (2010) argued zero tolerance programs led to unequal consequences for African American males because the programs targeted behaviors African American students were more likely to receive discipline for, which resulted in an increase of disciplinary situations for the students. African American males were often suspended, therefore placing these students behind other students academically. According to a study conducted by Mendez, Knoff, and Ferron (2002),

Black males, in particular were suspended much more frequently than other students were. For example, at the elementary level, 12.15% of Black males experienced at least one suspension (compared to 3.08% of White males and 3.36% of Hispanic males). This trend continued across middle school, where almost half (48.90%) of Black males experienced a suspension (compared to 18.90% of White males and 27.36% of Hispanic males. (pp. 270-271)

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore the implementation of Restorative Justice with African American male students using a mixed-method case study research design. As an educator, the researcher observed the need to implement Restorative Justice in the researched school to possibly decrease classroom disruptions, suspensions, and expulsions. A new law, named SB100, implemented in Illinois addressed the high number of suspensions and expulsions in Illinois schools (Wilkie, 2015). The researcher believed the implementation of Restorative Justice might decrease the number of disruptions within the classrooms and reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions. The researcher also believed Restorative Justice would allow the teachers to be more accountable for classroom management.

Members of the legislature within the state of Illinois signed into law a requirement for school districts to use other methods beyond suspensions and expulsions to discipline students (Wilkie, 2015). Legislature also focused on eliminating zero tolerance policies to reduce the amount of suspensions and expulsions (Wilkie, 2015). While implementing the new law, the researched school wanted to prepare teachers and staff for the transition. A study by Kaveney and Drewery (2011) focused on teacher professional development of Restorative Circles and found teacher professional development created a more positive environment in the classroom. Teachers also perceived the implementation of Restorative Circles improved student performance in the classroom (Kaveney & Drewery, 2011).

The researcher explored the use of Restorative Justice with male students, particularly focused on reducing suspensions and expulsions of African American male

students. The researcher was unable to find earlier studies on Restorative Justice implemented by teachers and administrators with African American male students. The researcher utilized a mixed-method study using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The data collection included collecting pre-and post-assessment surveys for teachers, pre- and post-surveys for students, teacher reflective journaling, and teacher and student interviews. Data analysis included the perceptions of African American and Caucasian males on discipline in the classroom with teachers who participated in the study.

### **Rationale**

Racial issues in America have been a concern since the days of slavery. According to Chapman (2013), “Historically, the legacy of desegregation litigation continues to significantly impact the schooling experiences of all students in U.S. schools” (p. 615). U.S. urban school officials struggled to find solutions to the disproportionality of discipline among African American male students in urban public schools.

African Americans as a whole received harsher punishments (out-of-school suspension and in school suspension) than Caucasian peers for similar acts of disobedience. As a result, African Americans suspension rates were higher than those of their Caucasian counterparts, leading to missed school days and missed opportunities to learn (Lewis, Bonner, Butler, & Joubert, 2010). African American male students’ defiant behavior was viewed as more distracting than that of their Caucasian counterparts. As an administrator and former guidance counselor, the researcher saw African American male students receiving office discipline referrals for defiant behavior that would have been

more appropriately addressed in the classroom. Culturally sensitive teachers were more likely to have success in educating African American males in the classroom. “These teachers understand how their identity may impact their perceptions about their African American male students who are from different racial/ethnic and socio-economic cultures and backgrounds” (Brown-Wright & Tyler, 2010, p. 126). “One out of every four black public schools’ students in Illinois were suspended at least once during the 2009-2010 school year, the highest rate among 47 states examined by the Project” (Stilman, 2016, p. 2).

The researcher explored the use of Restorative Justice with African American male students and was unable to find previous studies on Restorative Justice implemented by teachers/administrators and African American male students.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

**RQ1:** How do teachers perceive male behavior in the classroom?

**RQ2:** How do teachers perceive the use of Restorative Justice in the classroom?

**RQ3:** How do students perceive the use of Restorative Justice in the classroom?

**H1:** There is an increase of teacher knowledge of Restorative Justice as measured on the pre- and post-assessment surveys.

**H2:** There is an increase of student perception of Restorative Justice effectiveness as measured on the pre- and post-surveys.

### **Limitations**

The demographics focused on male behavior in the classroom at an urban Midwest High school. To reduce possible bias, the researcher collected data from all males attending school within the researched site and analyzed the data for a comparison



between African American and Caucasian males. There may be limitations when applying the research to elementary, middle school, or rural settings. A research assistant (RA) collected all data to protect anonymity. One challenge of the study was to ensure all subjects continued to take part during the entire data collection period. The possibility existed of a student moving to another educational plan due to behavior issues, who then no longer took part in the study.

The last challenge included female students who wanted to take part, but for the purpose of this study, only male students served as participants. This limited the study, because it did not allow data collection for all students, which did not give an accurate picture of how Restorative Justice works with all students in the researched school. There were several journals teachers wrote that involved dealing with female students; however, since the research did not involve female students, those data were not added into the results of the research questions or hypotheses.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Conferencing*: According to Pavelka (2013), conferencing involves a wider and larger group of participants focusing on those most affected by the occurrence (e.g., the victim, the offender, family, friends, and key supporters). A trained facilitator guides discussion on how all the affected parties have been harmed by the offense (p. 1).

*Culturally Responsive Instruction*: “Consists of using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and learning styles of culturally different students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them” (Ford & Kea, 2009, p. 8).

*Detention*: Fluke, Olson, and Peterson (2014) described detention as “a consequence in which students are required to remain in a presumably undesirable place

for a specified amount of time outside of school hours. Typically, detentions are served after school” (p. 1).

*Intervention room:* For the purposes of the research, an alternative intervention to allow students to stay in school without receiving a suspension and work with certified teachers while experiencing Restorative Justice.

*Peer Juries:* “In peer court, students face a panel of five or six classmates who have been trained to listen—and interrogate” (Shah, 2012, para. 27).

*Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS):*

An implementation framework that is designed to enhance academic and social behavior outcomes for all students by (a) emphasizing the use of data for informing decisions about the selection, implementation, and progress monitoring of evidence-based behavioral practices; and (b) organizing resources and systems to improve durable implementation fidelity. (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012, p. 1)

*Office Discipline Referral:* “ODRs are written records of schoolwide behavioral issues commonly collected in most schools and are a source of data already available to school personnel” (Flannery, Fenning, Kato, & Bohanon, 2014, p. 2).

*Out-of-School Suspensions:* “OSS is defined as the removal of a student from the school environment for a period not to exceed ten days. Typically, school suspension is intended and perceived as a punishment” (Méndez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002, p. 259).

*Response to Intervention:* “Response to Intervention (RtI) is a commonly utilized method of instructional practice designed to provide interventions early and proactively for students who show a risk of developing academic deficiencies” (Dallas, 2017, p. 105).

*Restorative Justice Peer Mediation:* “With this intervention, students mediate conflicts between two or more disputants. Using peer mediation requires utilizing conflict resolution skills and social competencies to reduce the threat of violence and increase peace in schools” (Pavelka, 2013, p. 15).

*Restorative Justice:* A method used to repair relationships with students and staff after a student’s inappropriate behavior. “A diverse, multi-layered concept. To suggest there exists one universal definition of restorative is, as Johnstone and Van Ness (2007) purported, to present restorative justice as a “more limited and more impoverished movement than it truly is” (p. 9).

*Social Emotional Learning:* “SEL programs try to help adolescents cope with their difficulties more successfully by improving skills and mindsets, and they try to create respectful school environments that young people want to be a part of by changing the school’s climate” (Yeager, 2017, p. 74).

*Zero Tolerance Policy:*

Zero tolerance policies, as a form of getting tough on school discipline, became the mantra of school systems countrywide. Gaining widespread implementations throughout the United States in the 1990s and accelerating with the implementation of No Child Left Behind policies, zero tolerance policies mandated harsh penalties in the form of school suspension, expulsions, alternative schooling, and juvenile justice referral for a variety of problematic student behaviors. (Teasley, 2014, p. 131)

**Summary**

This mixed-methods case study was conducted after the State of Illinois passed SB100, a law which reconstructed the way administrators in Illinois schools suspended and expelled students (Wilke, 2015). To follow the new law, the researched school administration and the researcher believed the implementation of Restorative Justice in the classroom could improve teacher-student relationships and reduce the number of office referrals that resulted in suspensions and expulsions for African American male students. Thirty teachers of freshman and sophomore students were encouraged to take part in the study. Teachers received training on how to implement Restorative Justice techniques in the classroom to reduce office discipline referrals. In the past, office discipline referrals led to suspensions and expulsions within the researched school district and the researcher wanted to explore the relationship between Restorative Justice and student suspensions and expulsions. Teachers completed a weekly journal with a series of questions on the implementation of Restorative Justice techniques in the classroom and described how they each used the Restorative Justice techniques. The research assistant completed monthly interviews with the teachers, as well as monthly classroom observations. Thirty male students took part in the research, as well as teachers who shared perceptions on the use of Restorative Justice techniques monthly.

Chapter Two supplies a review of the literature on Restorative Justice and the history of African American male student's suspension and rates of suspension. Chapter Three describes the qualitative and quantitative data collected and the procedures for data collection. Chapter Four presents analyzed data, collected regarding the research

questions and hypotheses. Chapter Five gives a recommendation on how the researched school and other schools could use the information.

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

### Introduction

Students misbehaving in school is a problem as old as public education in the United States itself. “Inappropriate behaviors of students in school are not a new issue in public education; teachers have reported behavior problems in school since the early beginnings of the public-school system” (Allman & Slate, 2011, p. 2). What has changed dramatically over the years are the methods that teachers and administrators have used to deal with the misbehaving.

Historically, African American male students have had the highest number of discipline offenses in the U.S. school system when compared to other students (Darensbourg et al., 2010). The federal government has kept data on school suspensions since 1968 (Losen, 2013). Monroe (2005) stated, “Nationally, African American students are targeted for disciplinary action in the greatest numbers” (p. 46). The following year, Monroe (2006) wrote, “A small yet compelling body of literature further reveals that teachers are most likely to discipline Black boys even when students of other races participate in identical behaviors” (p. 103). Some discipline research suggested that discipline in the school setting mirrored the criminal justice system in the United States. According to Payne and Welch (2010), schools had a criminal justice approach to educating students and controlling inappropriate behavior at school, and the overrepresentation of African American students among those who received disciplinary actions was alarming. The offenses documented with African American males in the classroom included defiance, disrespect, and aggressive behavior, and the disciplinary infractions were lower for other genders and races. African American boys were more

often given harsher disciplinary consequences (Butler, Joubert, & Lewis, 2009). Skiba's (2000) research revealed, "African Americans receive harsher punishments than their peers, often for subjectively defined offenses. Inequities in school discipline are most pronounced among boys" (p. 19). The literature review tried to find solutions to the issues of discipline for African American boys. Although the researcher found many studies on African American males and discipline rates, limited solutions to the situation were provided.

The research revealed a relationship between African American boys and the achievement gap. "Correlational and longitudinal research has shown that suspended students are more likely to be truant, miss instructional time, and drop out of high school" (Gregory, Cornell, & Fran, 2011, p. 906). Shore Research, Inc. (2012) supported the claim: "While disciplinary practices are used with students across ethnic groups, these practices are particularly problematic for African American students who are disproportionately subjected to corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion" (p. 11). Zero tolerance programs addressed student infractions, but "in fact, zero tolerance policies have been the catalyst for the school-to-prison pipeline, still occurring in many major metropolitan school districts throughout the United States" (Teasley, 2014, p. 131). The policies have also been proven to negate the intended outcome of making schools safer. The policy only limits educational opportunities for students who have violated the policy (Gonzalez, 2012). Strauss (2018) reported the findings of the report issued by the U.S. Government Accountability office. The accountability report stated that even in pre-k, the 2013-2014 data reported African American boys and girls were suspended at a disproportionate rate than White peers. The same study noted "while they constituted

15.5 percent of public-school student, they accounted for 39 percent of students suspended from school” (Strauss, 2018, p. 1).

When faced with a self-defeating mentality, students began to dislike school, and fell even further behind due to a lack of understanding the information and displayed inappropriate behavior as an escape from a stressful situation. Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) reported that “faced with repeated academic struggles, underperforming students may become frustrated and disaffected and have lower self-confidence, all of which may contribute to a higher rate of school disruption” (p. 61). A reoccurring situation continued until students either dropped out or graduated without the skills needed to be successful in college. “Less than half of Black male students graduate from high school on time, although many eventually complete a GED” (Focus on Blacks, 2011, p. 1).

### **Ways to Reduce Discipline with African American Male Students**

Family influence, bringing culture to the classroom, closing the achievement gap, addressing harsh discipline policies, eliminating zero tolerance policies, and putting interventions in place became factors in reducing office discipline referrals. Baker-Smith (2018) said there had been an outcry for implementation of alternative practices in the place of suspensions. African American male students suspended in sixth grade received more office disciplinary referrals or out-of-school suspensions by eighth grade than students not suspended. African American students removed from the classroom because of a discipline referral lost instructional time and often disengaged from the learning environment. Losen, Hewitt, and Toldson (2014) reported when a school had lower suspension rates, students made academic gains. The study also found that schools with



higher suspension rates did not have higher graduation rates than the schools that had lower suspension rates. The schools that had high suspension rates also faced poor test scores (Losen et al., 2014).

Restorative Justice is a support system that was developed into the juvenile justice system, but was later used in the school system to decrease inappropriate behaviors in schools. Restorative Justice has been successful in Denver Public Schools showing a decrease in suspension for all students and a decrease in the disproportionality of African American and Caucasian students on discipline. The data collection was still in the preliminary stages (Baker-Smith, 2018). Hashim, Strunk, and Dhaliwal (2018) stated that other school districts such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Oakland had planned or implemented policies to train staff on using Restorative Justice to reduce the disproportionalities in suspensions. Schools that ensured research-based supports were in place reduced discipline and increased student achievement. Mergler, Vargas, and Caldwell (2014) reported Restorative Justice, PBIS, which is a tiered support system used in schools to provide supports to students and staff, and Social Emotional Learning, which is a support system to address social issues, all worked to reduce discipline and increase student achievement when working with student discipline. Alternatives were not a way to end discipline, but to prevent inappropriate behaviors before exclusionary discipline occurs.

### **Mentoring African American Male Students**

Mentoring programs were created to address the growing needs of the youth, especially the disadvantaged youth, in the community (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Rodriguez-Planas (2014) stated, "Mentors seek to

assess the unmet needs of at-risk youth and the barriers they face and then facilitate access to a service mix that can address both needs and barriers” (p. 2). Mentoring programs were also created to provide positive relationships with adults and youth. Gordan, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, and Boyd (2009) reported the definition of mentoring as a positive relationship with an adult not related to the student. The authors also noted for mentoring to be successful, contacts from the mentor to the student needed to occur often. One research study by DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, and Valentine (2011) concluded that mentoring programs are successful if the plan for the mentor/mentee relationship addressed several areas of the student’s life. Sanchez (2016) stated that “mentoring programs targeting Black male students have also reported other kinds of academic and school benefits” (p. 5). While there have been many benefits placed on Black male students to Black male mentors, the limited availability of Black male mentors in certain areas may necessitate using other races to mentor Black students, if they are culturally competent. “In fact, the research shows that it is more important to consider the racial identity of the youth and the cultural competency of the mentor” (Jarjoura, 2013, p. 4). Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, and Boyd (2009) stated that for a mentoring program to be successful, the program needed mentors to communicate and make the mentoring relationship one with priority. The mentor and mentee must agree on goals for the relationship, and trust must be embedded in the relationship. White (2009) stated that mentoring programs have been used in the public schools with African American male students to increase academic success and decrease inappropriate behaviors and/or isolation and self-esteem issues. Research has stated that positive role models must be selected that are willing to work with the student to help the student

achieve the goal of mentoring. Rodriguez-Planas (2014) stated several pros and cons in regards to mentoring programs. The pros provided can improve social-emotional learning for students. The mentoring programs can also provide a safe place for students during non-school hours. She stated that the cons of the mentoring program are that students could be influenced negatively by other students in the program. Another con for the mentoring program is that mentors might concentrate more on social skills instead of academic skills.

### **Parental Influence**

Parental influence played a significant role in the success of African American male students. “One factor that has been consistently related to elevated levels of academic achievement has [*sic*] been parental involvement” (Harris & Graves, 2010, p. 447). Students who lacked consistent parent involvement were less likely to have academic success. According to Sadberry (2016), parent involvement was a contributing factor to the student’s academic success. School districts, PTAs and the U.S. Department of Education created and implemented programs to increase parental involvement in the schools. Some of the programs included Head Start, Title 1, Even Start, and IDEA (Sadberry, 2016). Ganao, Silvestre, and Glenn (2013) stated when there was parental involvement, there was a more likely chance students would not be suspended. The authors also showed parental expectation had a profound relationship with student success.

When parents set elevated expectations for children, students were most likely to meet those expectations. Ganao et al. (2013) shared that the research had pros and cons for African American children raised in non-traditional homes. The researchers stated

because African American families relied heavily on extended families, the absence of a father may not always have a negative outcome, but contradicting research stated there was a negative outcome on African American male students (Ganao, Silvestre, & Glenn, 2013).

Parental involvement declined due to several factors. Jeynes (2012) stated in the last 40 years, educators and administrators focused on parental involvement because of the continuous reduction in time spent due to jobs, family structure, and society as described by social scientists. Educators understood that students in urban areas faced concerns at a much higher rate than other students living in various parts of the country (Jeynes, 2012). Family influence affects student achievement. Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2013) completed a study to examine the relationship between family influence and African American male student achievement. According to Hines and Holcomb-McCoy, the father's education and the family structure positively influenced the academic achievement of the African American male student more than parenting style. The researchers also found that two-parent homes and the expectations that fathers had on their sons made a difference (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). In a 2007 study, Stewart stated "a growing body of research has shown that students perform better academically when parents are involved with their child's schooling" (p. 20).

### **Culturally Response Instruction**

Several factors contributed to the disproportionality of discipline for African American boys: gaps in learning, misunderstanding of the culture by the teacher, poverty, and stereotyping. In a study conducted by Gardner, Rizzi, and Council (2014) the way that professionals addressed Black males existed because of historical inequities and

racial bias indicators. The authors continued that while the schools acknowledged a discipline disparity among the races in schools, no courageous conversation occurred to address and solve the issue (Gardner, Rizzi, & Council, 2014). In short, strategies put into place to address the achievement gap were not the mindset of the teachers who instructed African American male students. The teachers still kept the same mindset (Gardner et al., 2014). One probable reason was the achievement gap between African American male students and their peers. The researchers found that a relationship between racial bias and student discipline. African American students were more likely sent out of class and miss instructional time. This placed students further behind when the behavior could have been attributed to a disability (Gardner et al., 2014). Schools began to understand the need for culturally responsive instruction in classrooms as well as a culturally competent teacher. According to Ford and Kea (2009), school administrators and other school staff had grown to understand the need for culturally competent teachers. Because of the racial history in the U.S., the focus in schools should be on appreciation and understanding of differences. Most of the teachers in the United States were Caucasian females (Ford & Kea, 2009). Cultural roadblocks and the teacher's own biases should be addressed when the Caucasian teachers are working with African American students. Douglas et al. (2008) reported, "Compounding the problem of some White teachers' cultural misunderstanding or indifference, additional research suggests that the gap between White teachers and Black students is exacerbated by powerful social conditioning that cultivates actual negative attitudes towards Black students" (p. 49). Cultural components, in the curriculum, kept the level of engagement high and reduced discipline issues. According to Green-Gibson and Collett (2014), "If African American

students are to be successful in Chicago public schools and similar schools across the U.S., infusion of African culture in the curriculum is necessary” (p. 35). Teachers needed to ensure the instruction and classroom was culturally responsive. “Culturally responsive teaching begins with acknowledging the considerable intellectual, experiential, and perspectival diversity students bring to the classroom. It builds on the unique contributions of individual students regardless of the overt or seemingly obvious cultural or racial similarities” (Warren, 2013, p. 176). Teachers needed to understand the culture of the students. “Engaging in culturally responsive teaching generally begins with knowledge of culture in a broad sense, teachers’ clear understanding of their own and others’ cultures, and an ability to connect to their students through this understanding” (Larson, Pas, Bradshaw, Rosenberg, & Day-Vines, 2018, p. 154).

The lack of minority teachers was also a significant issue. El-Mekki (2018) found Black and White students needed Black teachers to deal with diversity due to a different worldview and perspective on life. The Black teacher also served as a role model for Black students. Many times, students, both Black and White, went through school without an equal amount of diversity among classroom teachers (El-Mekki, 2018). The downfall of African American teachers in schools is that content knowledge has little value, but social knowledge has value when working with students. One study by Brown (2012) stated even though the recruitment for Black male teachers would be beneficial, leaders are not discussing the possibilities of using Black male teachers as instructional leaders and not just mentors for Black male students (Brown, 2012). School districts should have recruited African American male teachers who provided great instruction, built relationships, and engaged students (Brown, 2012).

Recently, culturally responsive instruction has begun to deal with the issue of teaching all students to excel at learning. *Focus on Blacks* (2011) stated that teachers took into consideration the students' cultural backgrounds, home life, and student experiences. Teachers also focused on the learning gap, the student's attitude, the opportunities students have in school, building relationships with teachers and staff, and the relevance of the lesson so that students can apply it to their own life.

### **Discipline and the Achievement Gap for African American Students**

Schools across America faced achievement gaps between Black and White students. "Myriad studies have documented how instructional, environment, and individual factors contribute to the achievement gap between Blacks and White students" (Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009, p. 277). Educational researchers focused on the achievement gap and how the gap correlated to different races. "The gap in achievement across racial and ethnic groups has been a focus of education research for decades, but the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of Black, Latino, and American Indian students has received less attention" (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010, p. 59). High discipline rates among minority students factored into the achievement gap. "Schools with higher suspension and expulsion rates have lower scores on state standardized test scores, even when controlling for demographic variables such as socioeconomic status" (Hernandez-Melis, Fenning, & Lawrence, 2016, p. 252). The authors concluded, when African Americans received discipline, it was in the form of a suspension and received harsher consequences than Caucasian students. Students missed days of school because of the suspension, thus a loss of instructional time (Lewis et al., 2010).

Educators reported trying many interventions to decrease disciplinary actions and increase instructional time in the classroom. African American and Latino students had a different learning style than students of other cultures. Morgan (2010) noted that students “tend to improve academically with cooperative learning methods of teaching” (p. 116). “School-based discipline disparities are a nationwide problem that leads to opportunity and achievement gaps for Black male students and results in numerous negative consequences, including later school dropout and incarceration” (Cook et al., 2018, p. 148).

Many studies addressed the topic of African American male students’ removal from the classroom because of discipline issues. “Research indicates that punitive sanctions may be having the toxic effect of driving students—particularly minority and poor students—out of school altogether, resulting in a ‘school-to-prison pipeline’” (Fronius, Persson, Guckenbug, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2016, p. 16).

Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, and Jennings (2010) stated teachers reported three main concerns for minority students and the lack of achievement, particularly African American students’ low performance in school: the students’ outlook on school, lack of parental involvement, and lack of community involvement. Gregory et al. (2010) reported “in many schools, large proportions of a group (e.g., Black males) receive at least one suspension, which typically results in missed instructional time and, for some, could exacerbate a cycle of academic failure, disengagement, and escalating rule breaking” (p. 60).

The Illinois Report Card assessed the areas of Mathematics and English. “The goals kids have to meet in Illinois are drawn from the current Common Core standards



for Math and English language arts that emphasize critical thinking and problem-solving, as well as the Next Generation Science Standards for science instruction” (as cited in Rado, 2016, para. 14). The data from the state report cards and national reports had labels with the sub groups of races and socioeconomic status. Carey (2013) conducted research on cultural analysis on the achievement gap with minorities and found, “When the below basic label is disproportionately correlated with labels like Black, Latina/o, ELL, and immigrant, we have a flawed system at best, and a racially and linguistically oppressive one at worst” (p. 461).

Jett, Stinson, and Williams (2015) pointed out research-based strategies successful with African American males. The authors cited four strategies to assist with the academic success of African American males. First, expectations for academic success should be the norm in the classroom as well as building relationships in and out of class. Second, teachers should ensure that classroom instruction has a connection to real life experiences. Third, teachers should proactively infuse culturally appropriate instruction. Last, teachers should not accept the excuse that African American males will not do well in Mathematics. A research review completed by The Education Trust-West (2015) gave recommendations for closing the achievement gap for younger students. The first recommendation was to ensure early interventions were in place for all students - specifically, pre-school for all 4-year-old children. The second recommendation was to ensure that families had an active role in the engagement process. The final recommendation was to supply services to ensure that students and families had access to the same services as other families such as Nurse for Newborns, healthcare, Parents as Teachers, or other programs to support early successful development. Teachers worked

with Black students for placement in AP courses and Honors classes. Educators ensured that the instruction was relevant. Another recommendation was to recruit, hire, and keep effective teachers. Third, provide learning opportunities outside of the classroom. Fourth, instead of using traditional discipline tactics, educators can use Restorative Justice and PBIS models to model appropriate behavior or address inappropriate behavior (Educational Trust-West, 2015). Last, address the needs of the whole child (Educational Trust-West, 2015).

Safety issues also played a role in the academic success of African American male students. Skiba, Shure, and Williams (2011) found feelings of personal safety among African American males were related to academic success. High achieving Black male students reported feeling safe at school, while low achieving Black male students were more likely to carry a weapon to school for self-defense (Skiba, Shure, & Williams, 2011). Students who carried weapons to school were more likely to receive a suspension or expulsion.

The literature also addressed the link between the academic performance of African American male students and the types of student-teacher relationships they experienced. Brittan and Gray (2014) concluded that “early experiences with differential treatment predicted declines in importance of school and academic self-concept from 8th grade to 11th grade” (p. 1). When African American male students perceived teachers as invested in education, students tend to increase academic productivity. Williams (2015) interviewed African American male students, who saw and verbalized the lack of positive attention received from the teacher. When placed into classrooms where teachers gave the needed positive support to African American males, the discipline issues decreased,

and learning occurred. Relationships played a role in educating children in general, but specifically African American male students, who had a negative perception.

### **Discipline Policies**

The implementation of many policies addressed the discipline issues with African American male students. McKenney, Bartholomew, and Gray (2010) explored suspension and expulsion and shared the information in a joint research conference held in 2003. Educational experts found that the school-to-prison pipeline was prevalent with students of color. The school-wide discipline data was comparable to the prison population data when divided into races (McKenney et al., 2010). Even when schools used in-school suspension for African American students, the students' removal from the instructional classroom led to a decrease in learning.

### **SB 100 in Illinois**

In 2014, The Department of Justice and the Office of Civil Rights investigated the disparity of the discipline for African American students and sent letters to all states to inform them of specific recommendations. Stillman (2016) reported a collaborative effort produced a *Dear Colleague* letter to address the issues related to the loss of instructional time by using out-of-school suspension, alternative placement, or expulsion as consequences for discipline infractions. The letter urged states to revise the discipline laws to use interventions when addressing disciplinary issues where applicable (Stillman, 2016). Illinois used the letter as a road map to address disciplinary issues within the state. Illinois enacted a law which placed more focus on students who received added services before students received suspension or expulsion. Blad (2015) reported that Governor Rauner signed a bill focused on reforming school discipline. The bill put

restrictions on suspensions and expulsions, which could only be the last resorts in terms of disciplinary measures unless a safety issue was identified in which case the student needed to be removed immediately. Under the bill, schools were required to ensure the use of every other intervention before placing a student on suspension for longer than three days. Schools had to create and implement a reentry plan for when students returned from suspensions and expulsions. SB 100 also eliminated zero tolerance policies (Blad, 2015). The bill noted that while schools were not required to use any specific interventions, if a student was suspended for longer than three days, evidence of the interventions applied would need documentation. In addition, schools could not use any monetary consequence for students unless the consequence was restitution. Students had access to any missed school assignments while the student was out for suspension (Stillman, 2016). According to McKinney, Bartholomew, and Gray (2010):

Other researchers suggest changing the punitive nature of discipline policies in the schools and finding more proactive responses, such as those consistent with models of positive behavior support, which can teach and acknowledge alternative expected behaviors rather than just react. (McKinney, Bartholomew, & Gray, 2010, p. 28)

### **Zero Tolerance Programs**

Schools created zero tolerance policies in the late 1980s as a part of a law enforcement strategy. “Zero-tolerance is often defined as ‘swift, certain, and severe’ punishments for any form of behavioral misconduct at school, no matter how minor the infraction, although there is not a consensus on behaviors that may constitute zero tolerance discipline” (Strawhun, Fluke, & Peterson, 2017). Zero tolerance policies were

a way to deal with students who had violated a serious school policy or who continued to violate school rules and policies. However, “researchers continue to question the need for zero tolerance policies and now charge that the ‘cure all’ for school disciplinary problems needs replacing” (Teasley, 2014, p. 131). Lustick (2017) reported that zero tolerance did not increase instruction time or decrease disruptive behaviors.

“Quantitatively, zero tolerance policies do not reduce discipline infractions and may instead alienate students from school altogether, leading to repeated disciplinary incidents and a higher likelihood of school dropout” (Lustick, 2017, p. 5). Schools with minority students experienced more expulsions and increased police presence. Tellefsen (2018) stated that zero tolerance policies and increased police presence were more common where predominately minority students attended. In some instances, zero tolerance was the right consequence for certain infractions to ensure the safety of the school, students, and staff. One example described was a weapon brought to school. Zero tolerance was also harmful because the policy blossomed into a gateway for dealing with major offenses as well as minor offenses. Heilbrun, Cornell, and Lovegrove (2015) stated zero tolerance policies opened the door to encompass other infractions otherwise considered less severe and did not include violence or harm to others. Offenses like insubordination and disruption were examples of offenses placed under the zero-tolerance umbrella. Opponents of the zero-tolerance policy argued the disciplinary infractions that students committed were not grounds for a suspension (Heilbrun, Cornell, & Lovegrove, 2015).

Illinois outlawed zero tolerance policy with the SB100 law. Black (2016) outlined the Senate Bill 100 restrictions for suspensions and expulsions about zero tolerance policies. In Illinois, zero tolerance programs became illegal. Students no

longer could receive a suspension over three days without prior intervention (Black, 2016). Some exceptions to the law existed. Students received suspensions for longer than three days if the student had posed a threat to the school environment (Black, 2016). School districts needed to document specific reasons and rationale for the suspension or expulsion (Black, 201). Illinois school districts had to put re-engagement procedures in place for students suspended or expelled.

Gonzalez (2012) provided data that zero tolerance was a political statement, but ineffective with changing behavior. The author continued by saying that more research had shown zero tolerance contributed to the school-to-prison pipeline when using suspensions, expulsions, and alternative placements.

Strawhun, Fluke, and Peterson (2017) concluded that no evidence suggesting zero tolerance policies helped in reducing or ending disciplinary issues in schools. The researchers agreed that there was a need for a consequence for students with disciplinary infractions, but the consequence should be age and developmentally appropriate (Strawhun et al., 2017).

### **Restorative Justice**

In response to laws such as SB 100, as well as disparities in discipline regarding minority students, school districts have been turning to various interventions to deal with behavioral issues. “In order to reduce suspensions and expulsions and more positively address student behavior, many districts and school are implementing research-based approaches like Restorative Justice and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)” (The Education Trust-West, 2015, p. 19).

Restorative Justice is one such intervention that has existed in various forms for decades. “While the idea of Restorative Justice has been articulated in western societies only since the 1970s, the concept draws from a rich source of related knowledge found in such areas as community justice” (Pavelka, 2011, p. 4). At its core, Restorative Justice focused on the repair and restoration of relationships. “Restorative Justice in the school setting diverges from traditional discipline in which punishment is meted out by an authority above and instead focuses on empowering the school community to collectively create safe and just schools” (Reimer, 2011, p. 6). Others defined Restorative Justice techniques as those which encompassed community involvement. Pavelka (2013) defined Restorative Justice in three terms: repairing harm, reducing risk, and empowering community. Pavelka (2013) wrote, “Restorative Justice is a principle-based method of responding to crime and wrongful occurrences. It provides a new approach from which to address such issues as school discipline” (p. 15). Others described Restorative Justice in similar language but placed emphasis on ensuring that the goals were clear. Wachtel (2016) defined Restorative Justice as “a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision making” (p. 1). Wachtel (2016) also outlined the goals for Restorative Justice, which included a way to “reduce crime, violence and bullying, improve human behavior, strengthen civil effective leadership, restore relationships, and repair harm” (p. 1).

Schools started to incorporate Restorative Justice into the social-emotional learning curriculum because individuals found positive relationships reduced discipline in the classroom and at school. Ashley (2015) wrote, “I soon found out that the most effective teachers in working with challenging students had very positive relationships

with them” (p. 14). When schools wanted to implement Restorative Justice, staff and students needed to be aware of the definition and what the program entailed.

Implementation without training did not allow the implementation of the program with fidelity.

Kaveney and Drewery (2011) noted that one high school studied used professional development and release time to ensure the training of teachers in Restorative Justice. Reimer (2011) concluded that most teachers believed Restorative Justice was useful to resolve issues only after the issues became explosive. Teachers did not use it as a preventative way of dealing with issues.

Restorative Justice included four basic types of interventions: conferencing, circles/peer juries, peer mediation, and peer boards. According to Pavelka (2013) conferencing involved a wider and larger group of participants focused on those most affected by the occurrence (e.g., the victim, the offender, family, friends, and key supporters). A trained facilitator guided discussion on how the offense harmed the parties (Pavelka, 2013). Conferencing, or restorative conferencing as described by Drewery (2004), was the conversation between two or more parties to make amends to a damaging situation. The conversation included the teacher, school staff, social worker, coach, peers, community members, parents, and others (Drewery, 2004). The parties discussed the problem and a way to resolve the issue. The victim in the situation was able to voice the damage done by the person who committed the infraction. The conversation concluded with an agreement on how to restore the victim (Drewery, 2004). Shaw (2007) wrote, “Restorative practices were best represented by conferencing strategies, such as informal conferencing strategies, informal mini conferencing among a



small number of people, or classroom circle conferences, or a formal community conference that could involve a large number of people” (p. 130).

Another component of Restorative Justice was Restorative Justice circles. “The basic premise of the classroom sharing circle as a proactive restorative practice is that student behavior, character, and social and emotional competence is improved when they feel connected to an inclusive, supportive, and respectful community” (High, 2017, p. 528).

Classroom circles also included a proactive intervention (Sprague & Nelson, 2014). In general, Restorative Discipline Interventions may be applicable at the secondary or tertiary tiers of prevention, for example, check in and check out. However, some practices such as class meetings or circles were useful as universal preventions (Sprague & Nelson, 2014).

A third component of Restorative Justice, peer mediation, was useful to mediate disputes between two or more students. “With this intervention, students mediate conflicts between two or more disputants. Using peer mediation needs utilizing conflict resolution skills and social competencies to reduce the threat of violence and increase peace in schools” (Pavelka, 2013, p. 15). Varnham (2005) described peer mediation as a meeting in which both parties in the disagreement shared their unique side of the story. The mediator then made points, and when both parties agreed on how to resolve an issue, they signed the agreement. Varnham (2005) suggested that senior students should receive training on mediating between students, and added that peer mediations were highly effective.

The final component, peer/accountability boards, had a case management aspect. “Peer accountability boards require the participation of board members (primarily student peers), victim(s), and wrongdoer(s). The participants identify the impact of the offense, determine responsibility and accountability, and develop an individualized case plan for the wrongdoer” (Pavelka, 2013, p. 15)

Several schools had taken part in Restorative Justice to reduce discipline problems and increase instruction. The Center for Restorative Approaches in New Orleans reported that since 2015, after incorporating Restorative Justice circles, “the circles have saved the city’s students 1800 instructional hours that otherwise would have been lost to suspension” (Shaw, 2007, p. 5).

Restorative Justice provided a way to continue to encourage positive relationships with students, teachers, and staff, and increase positivity in the school climate, fostering healthy relationships. “One objective of addressing school climate is to foster healthy resilient students who are ready for college and careers out of school. RJ is another approach that schools use to address climate issues” (Fronius et al., 2016, p. 22).

Restorative Justice repaired the damage done by a student’s behavior to another student, a teacher, a staff member, or the administration. Pavelka (2013) wrote:

Restorative Justice is a principle-based method of responding to crime and wrongful occurrences. It provides a new approach from which to address such issues as school discipline. The three core principles of Restorative Justice include:

Repair Harm. Restorative Justice requires that victims and communities are healed of the harm which resulted from the wrongful occurrence. Wrongdoers are

held accountable for their actions and encouraged to make positive changes in their behavior.

Reduce Risk. Community safety requires practices that reduce risk and promote the community's capacity to manage behavior.

Empower community. Schools, along with the external community, must take an active role in and responsibility for the restorative response by collectively addressing the impact of the wrongdoing and the reparation. Students are empowered as active participants in the resolution process. (p. 15)



*Figure 1.* Components of restorative practice.

Restorative Justice techniques were useful to reduce the number of office discipline referrals African American males received. “Although educators are challenged to address a number of issues in Black male education, school discipline has surfaced as one of the most troubling aspects” (Monroe, 2006, p. 103). Restorative Justice was not merely punitive but also supplied emotional restitution to the victims. Wachtel (2016) described Restorative Justice as overlapping resources and addressing the

needs and victimization of everyone who was involved in the incident, which led the group to become involved in the reconciliation process.

Using Restorative Justice in the classroom with African American male students was one way of decreasing office discipline referrals and increasing instructional time. Anyon et al. (2016) stated that the data confirmed Restorative Justice decreased the number of office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions for a single group and pre-/post-test designs. Recent studies did have limitations and lacked comparison data from other groups. Even without comparisons, the data showed the suspensions for African American students declined after Restorative Justice was in place in four major cities in the U.S (Anyon et al., 2016). When students stayed in class using Restorative Justice techniques instead of referring the student to the office, students did not lose instructional time. “Schools tend to rely heavily on exclusion from the classroom as the primary discipline strategy, and this practice may contribute to the well-documented racial gaps in academic achievement” (Russell, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010, p. 59).

Discipline referrals of African American male students created chain reactions in which the students fell further and further behind in schoolwork and more disruptive in the classroom. Vincent, Sprague, and Tobin (2012) from the University of Oregon wrote, “Taken together, our analyses showed that students from traditional minority backgrounds, especially from African American, Hispanic, and AI/AN backgrounds, were disproportionately over-represented in exclusionary discipline actions and lost the greatest number of days to those discipline actions” (Vincent, Sprague, & Tobin, 2012, p. 595).

Fronius, Persson, Guckenburger, Hurley, and Petrosino (2016) reported Restorative Justice could reduce disciplinary actions, but the research was still in the infancy stage. Researchers reported on a school in Texas where an 84% drop in sixth-grade suspensions occurred when Restorative Justice was implemented (Fronius et al., 2016, p. 20). Another school in Denver experienced a 44% drop in out-of-school suspensions (Fronius et al., 2016, p. 20). The authors also reported that other schools saw a decrease in out-of-school suspensions within a few years of implementation. The research showed some mixed or limited information about student achievement (Person et al., 2016). The research showed Restorative Justice influenced academic success only slightly by grade improvement, however, fewer students graduated (Person et al., 2016).

### **Responsive to Intervention (RtI)**

Teacher and administrators also found poor academic performance as a contributor to disruptive and defiant behavior. When students fell behind academically, disruptions diverted the attention onto the behavior and not the academic performance. “Response to Intervention integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavioral problems” (National Center on Response and Intervention, 2010, p. 2). RtI has provided school districts with the interventions to reduce academic achievement gaps with African American students. “Response to intervention (RtI; a.k.a., multitier system of supports) was promoted by the George W. Bush administration in the early 2000s as a more valid method of disability identification and as a promising reformation of general education” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017, p. 255). RtI ensures that students with behavioral and academic challenges received identification quickly so that more supports become available.

According to The National Center on Response to Intervention (2010), RtI has four components: screening, data-based decision making, progress monitoring, and multi-level prevention system.

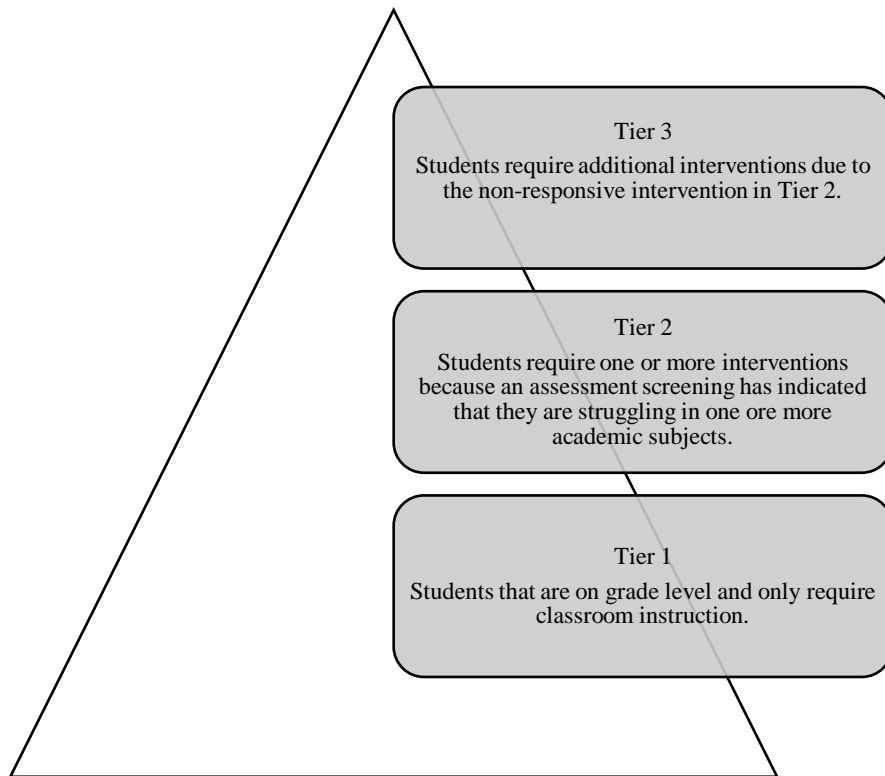
According to Werts, Lambert, and Carpenter (2009), the multi-level system of supports has three tiers to addressing student issues ensuring that the classroom instruction was research-based and included assessments to supply proper feedback to the teacher to determine the student's growth. Research-based instruction should be completed at all three tiers. The classroom teacher has the responsibility to implement Tier 1 classroom strategies in class to improve student performance before referring the student to Tier 2 or 3. Werts et al. (2009) admitted that classroom teachers are not assigned to Tiers 2 and 3 implementations as in Tier 1, so Tier 2 and 3 supports are not monitored and accurate because no one has been assigned to monitor the supports for fidelity.

Tier 1 teachers can serve in a variety of roles. "In Tier 1, special educator roles might include serving as trainers, consultants, and collaborators" (Björn, Aro, Koponen, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2016, p. 62). Werts et al. (2009) also stated that when students were not making progress as indicated on the assessments, implementation of Tier 2 supports occurred.

Tier 2 was for more intensive instruction, which may have included a variety of accommodations. "In Tier 2, these might include serving as trainers, consultants, collaborators, and implementers. Finally, in Tier 3, special educator roles are similar to Tier 2 roles" (Björn et al., 2016, p. 62). If students still struggled with Tier 2

interventions, those involved should create individualized plans to address the specific student. This intervention is the Tier 3 (Werts, Lambert, & Carpenter, 2009).

Sullivan and Castro-Villarreal (2013) reported, “Tier 1 of RtI involves the general education curriculum and emphasizes high-quality research-based instruction, which is the foundation for a successful and sustainable RtI system” (p. 182). Isbell and Szabo (2014) outlined more arguments for and against RtI. The proponents for RtI believed monitoring of student progress and the identification of students with an IEP or in need of extra support was beneficial. The critics of RtI believed the tiers had to build on each other and in sequential order. The critics also did not agree on the set up of Tier 3 and its functions.



*Figure 2.* RtI model.

McKinney et al. (2010) linked RtI to other interventions to support students. “School wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS), which is commonly referred to as behavioral RtI, is a proactive approach to addressing student behavioral and is grounded in applied behavioral analysis and empirically based approaches and behavioral management” (p. 28). Figure 2 shows the RtI chart that lists the tiers and the indications of more interventions needed.

### **PBIS to Help Reduce School Discipline in African American Male Students**

RtI and PBIS are systems that work together by addressing academic (RtI) and behavioral (PBIS) issues with students. “The RtI and PBIS approaches involve targeting specific areas in which students are struggling and then applying increasingly research-based interventions until the barriers to learning are addressed” (Averill & Rinaldi, 2011, p. 91). Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS), sometimes called Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) or Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Intervention Strategies (SWPBIS), is a three-tiered strategy for reducing discipline referrals. Simonsen, Sugai, and Negron (2008) described PBIS as a “proactive, systems level approach that enables schools to effectively and efficiently support student (and staff) behavior” (p. 33). Educators began using PBIS in the 1980s to supply interventions for students who were in behavioral disorder classes. The strategy has since expanded to include all students (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). Schools began to use PBIS to reduce discipline and increase class instructional time, and it was successful in schools when implemented with fidelity. Mergler et al. (2014) reported several benefits of PBIS, including a decrease in the number of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions,



increased attendance rates, increased student achievement, a more positive school climate, and increased safety in schools (Mergler, Vargas, & Caldwell, 2014).

**Tier I.** PBIS is “an evidenced-based disciplinary model that uses a three-tier system of behavioral support” (Mergler et al., 2014, p. 28). Bornstein and College (2015) stated, “Tier I universal instructional fidelity seeks to make sure that all students get research-validated quality instruction” (p. 248). Tier I addressed all students in the school and referred to “the core curriculum delivered to all students that has a high likelihood of bringing the majority of students to acceptable levels of proficiency” (Averill & Rinaldi, 2011, p. 92). Horner and Sugai (2015) described Tier I as a “(primary prevention) is proactive and designed to be administered before error patterns develop. Because all students receive Tier I supports, these practices must be highly efficient and logically integrated with all other elements of the environment” (p. 81). Tier I focused on finding proper behavior and celebrating. “Also included in the first tier are classroom management training and strategies for how educators should respond to misbehavior” (Mergler et al., 2014, p. 28). According to Simonsen, Sugai, & Negrón (2008), “research findings indicate that SWPBS creates an effective school environment where proactive behavioral practices can be implemented successfully” (p. 34).

**Tier II.** Tier II added intensive supports and focused on a smaller group of students. “Tier II (secondary prevention) practices focus on moderate intensity supports that address the most common needs of students with ongoing problem behavior” (Horner & Sugai, 2015, p. 81). Lindsay (2010) reported that Tier II supplied intense interventions to 10-15% of the students in a school. The creation of these interventions was to bring about quick responses to address inappropriate behavior. The strategies

needed flexibility but were highly efficient. Examples of Tier II interventions would be groups or a counseling intervention (Lindsay, 2010). The secondary tier supplied support services for students who had some disciplinary infractions. “This level of support is intended for students who need more support than the universal system but may not require an intensive individualized intervention” (McIntosh, Campbell, Carter, & Dickey, 2009, p. 2). Supports for Tier II included smaller classes, groups, or other interventions.

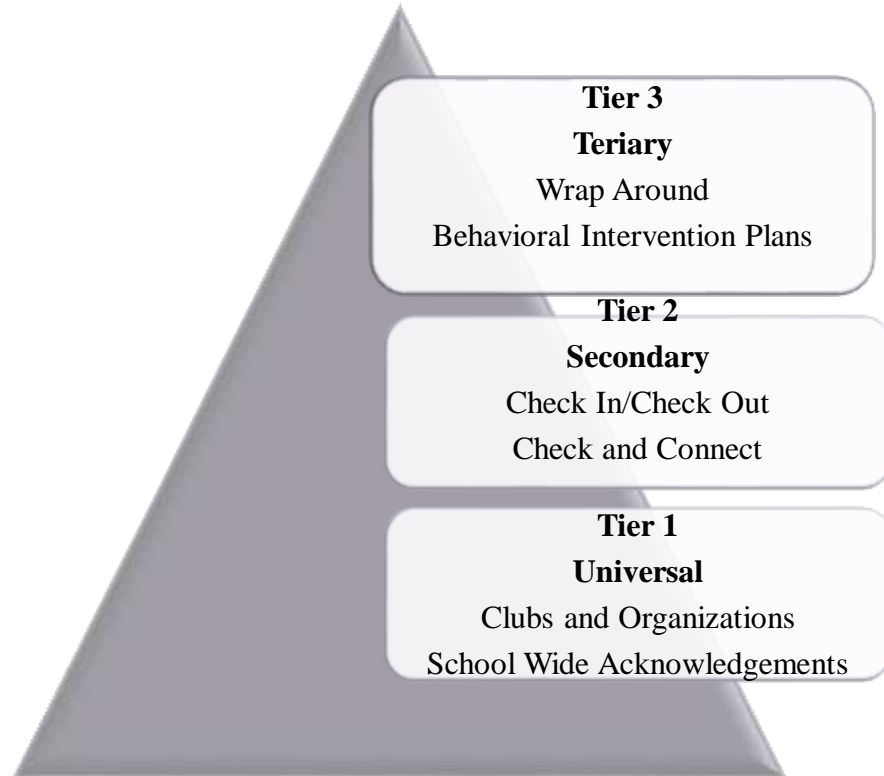
**Tier III.** Tier III provided “strength-based assessment, functional behavioral assessment, progress monitoring, intensive instruction applied behavioral assessment, and progress monitoring system (Ogulmus & Vuran, 2016, p. 1696). Tertiary interventions included social work services, wraparound services, functional behavioral assessments, behavioral intervention plans, and parent involvement. Simonsen et al. (2008) said that when implementation of PBIS was successful and with fidelity, the process is successful in schools. PBIS also addressed academic challenges for students. “Tier III involves the application of intensive instructional interventions designed to increase the rate of student progress. Tier III services may or may not include special education” (Averill & Rinaldi, 2011, p. 92).

Tier III included a whole child approach. “When implementing Tier III behavior supports, teams consider behavioral, academic, mental health, physical, social, and contextual variables. This is a high-intensity approach to support, intended for 5% or fewer students within a school” (Horner & Sugai, 2015, p. 81).

PBIS helped minority students by providing supports to decrease poor behavior and increase academic success if implemented with consistency and fidelity (McKinney et al., 2010). Programs that had quality implementations and buy-in from teachers

produced successful outcomes. Implementation quality matters because programs delivered with high quality are more likely to produce the desired effects (Molloy, Moore, Trail, Van Epps, & Hopfer, 2013, p. 593).

Teachers and administrators of PBIS had concerns with fidelity and continued misbehavior. Flannery, Fenning, Kato, and McIntosh (2014) revealed “schools that had higher School-Wide Evaluation Tool scores experienced greater reductions in ODRs than schools with weaker implementation, suggesting that high schools that more closely align SW-PBIS components have better outcomes” (p. 121).



*Figure 3.* PBIS model.

Some individuals voiced concerns PBIS had not swayed behaviors in the classroom. “School-wide prevention-based systems will not be as effective in supporting

positive outcomes for students if ineffective management practices are present at the classroom level” (Reinke, Herman, & Stormon, 2013, p. 39). The PBIS chart in Figure 3 gives some examples of interventions used at different tiers.

### **Detention**

Detention has been useful as a disciplinary action to detour students from inappropriate school behavior, but it can be used as an intervention when the alternative is out-of-school suspension. Fluke et al. (2014) described detention as “a consequence in which students are required to remain in a presumably undesirable place for a specified amount of time outside of school hours. Typically, detentions are served after school” (p. 1). Detentions do not interfere with instructional time, as opposed to suspensions, which remove students from class and deprive them of instructional time. Fluke et al. (2014) revealed the design of lunchtime detentions and after-school detentions were to have students serve a detention on personal time. At the school Fluke et al. (2014) studied, students were supposed to serve after-school detentions right after school, but the problem was students would have to set up transportation. If transportation was unavailable, students would not be able to serve the detention, leading to a more severe consequence. Fluke et al. (2014) reported that lunchtime detentions would not have the issue because the student served detention during his or her lunch period within the school day.

### **In-School Suspension**

In-school suspension (ISS) is a form of punishment used in most schools, but considered an intervention when the alternative is out-of-school suspension. “The goal of

ISS is to remediate behavioral concerns while also working to reconnect students to their traditional classroom” (Strawhun, Peterson, Fluke, & Cathcart, 2015, p. 1).

Although ISS is a punishment, students stayed connected to teachers and received help with schoolwork. DiMino (2013) reported the use of four models for in-school suspensions: the punitive model, the academic model, the therapeutic model, and the individual model. The punitive model was the more popular model, but it does not supply any added supports to ensure students will be successful when they returned to class. The other three models tried to find the source of the behavioral problem and give solutions (DiMino, 2013).

ISS may be a negative form of punishment, as stated earlier, because of the isolation. Allman and Slate (2011) stated that “one major concern with in-school suspension programs is that students miss educational opportunities for learning because their environment is solitary and isolated” (p. 4).

### **Social Work Services in Schools**

Social work services have been another support for students that had been useful in schools for years. Finigan-Carr and Shaia (2018) reported that social workers have used their professional relationships to connect and collaborate with other social worker and community agencies. The relationships that social workers have built in the community have help to meet the needs of the students and families (Finigan-Carr & Shaia, 2018). School social workers are trained to address the issues that students are faced with daily when they arrive at school. “Although the roles school social workers perform can vary notably across schools, contemporary social workers’ time and energies are primarily devoted to individual or small-group work, often focusing on students’

mental health needs or students receiving special education services” (Webber, 2018, p. 83.)

Social workers are trained in social-emotional learning, which is the foundation of social work. Gumz and Grant (2009) said, “Restorative Justice practices offer the social work profession an excellent opportunity to return to its historical roots” (p. 125). Social-emotional learning has also been an alternative to address student misbehavior in the school setting. “Social and emotional learning is a research-based approach that helps children learn critical skills like recognizing and managing their emotions, building positive relationships with others, and making responsible decisions” (Mergler et al., 2014, p. 29). Students learn to identify emotional triggers and how to deal with the triggers effectively. “According to CASEL’s SEL framework, there are five key interconnected sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making” (Yang, Bear, & May, 2018, p. 46). Schumacher (2014) reported that social-emotional learning should be a preventative measure when used with Restorative Justice techniques. Scholars believed that when social-emotional literacy skills are honed, schools will observe a difference with the connection that students have with the education environment.

### **Summary**

African American students, especially males, have had a disproportionate rate of discipline in schools since the government began to record data for subgroups. Recently, schools have made several changes to education policies to ensure unbiased discipline. With regards to zero tolerance and other disciplinary policies that excluded students from

the classroom for long periods of time, school districts and state legislatures determined the policies did not deter inappropriate behavior in schools and lacked provisions for individualized situations. The classroom disciplinary actions led to a disproportionate amount of suspensions and expulsions of minority students which created a loss of instructional time and contributed to the widening of the achievement gap.

The Illinois state legislature passed a bill that addressed the disciplinary policies in that state. School districts had the requirement to implement interventions instead of turning to suspensions and expulsions first. Consequently, schools turned to interventions like Restorative Justice, PBIS, and social work services which have been shown to reduce discipline infractions among all students, including African American males.

Schools implemented Restorative Justice in order to reduce the number of suspensions resulting from non-violent infractions in schools. Restorative Justice has proven effective in reducing African American male discipline and increasing instructional time because teachers used interventions to ensure students stayed in the classroom. This intervention proved to be a useful tool to close the achievement gap with African American males. Restorative Justice, implemented with fidelity, helped with reducing behavioral issues.

PBIS was also a growing trend in schools to help with reduction in discipline. PBIS supplies both behavioral and academic interventions and includes three tiers to address all students. The universal tier is for all students to acknowledge the school-wide expectations and to give recognition to all students when meeting a school-wide goal.

The secondary tier is for groups of students needing more supports with either academics or behavior. The tertiary tier is to individualize supports for an individual student.

Using Restorative Justice combined with other interventions in the school can reduce disciplinary issues with African American students, specifically males. School staff and administrators understand that disproportionality regarding discipline is a problem, but one that can be addressed by successfully implementing Restorative Justice along with other interventions in the classroom as well as in the hallways and other areas of the school. The next chapter discusses the research methods used to address the research questions and hypotheses, which were the focus of the study.



## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Historically, African American students had a disproportionate rate of school discipline. “Black and Latino students are far more likely than their White classmates to be removed from school as punishment” (Lindsay & Hart, 2017b, p. 72). In 2015, the Illinois General Assembly passed SB100, a law that addressed the high number of suspensions and expulsions in the state’s schools (Wilkie, 2015). Illinois schools implemented various initiatives in order to comply with the new law.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore the implementation of Restorative Justice with male students at a Midwestern urban public high school. Aware of the disparity of discipline regarding African American students, the researcher saw the potential of Restorative Justice to alleviate that disparity and made the school’s initiative the focus of her study.

### **The Research Site and Participants**

The student participants of the study were male freshmen and sophomores. The teacher participants taught freshmen and sophomore students. According to the 2017 Illinois Report Card, the researched school was a Midwestern urban public high school that enrolled 2,008 students. Of those students, 63.6% were Caucasian, 25% were African American, 1.1% were Asian American, 0.1% were Native American/Pacific Islander, 0.2% were American Indian, and 7.5% were two or more races. The student mobility rate was 12.2%. The racial demographics of the teachers consisted of 92.3% Caucasian, 4.8% African American, 0.2% Hispanic, and 2.6% Asian American. The

graduation rate was 86.1%. Forty-six percent of the students in the school were in low-income families, 14.8% of the students received Special Education services, and 1.3% of the students were homeless (Illinois Report Card, 2017). The demographics of the researched school were included to give a better perspective of the makeup of the school.

According to the school data produced by the district in-house Skyward Data Management System during the 2015-2016 school year, Black students accounted for more than 51% of the discipline referrals at the researched school. Figure 4 provides the breakdown for referrals by race.

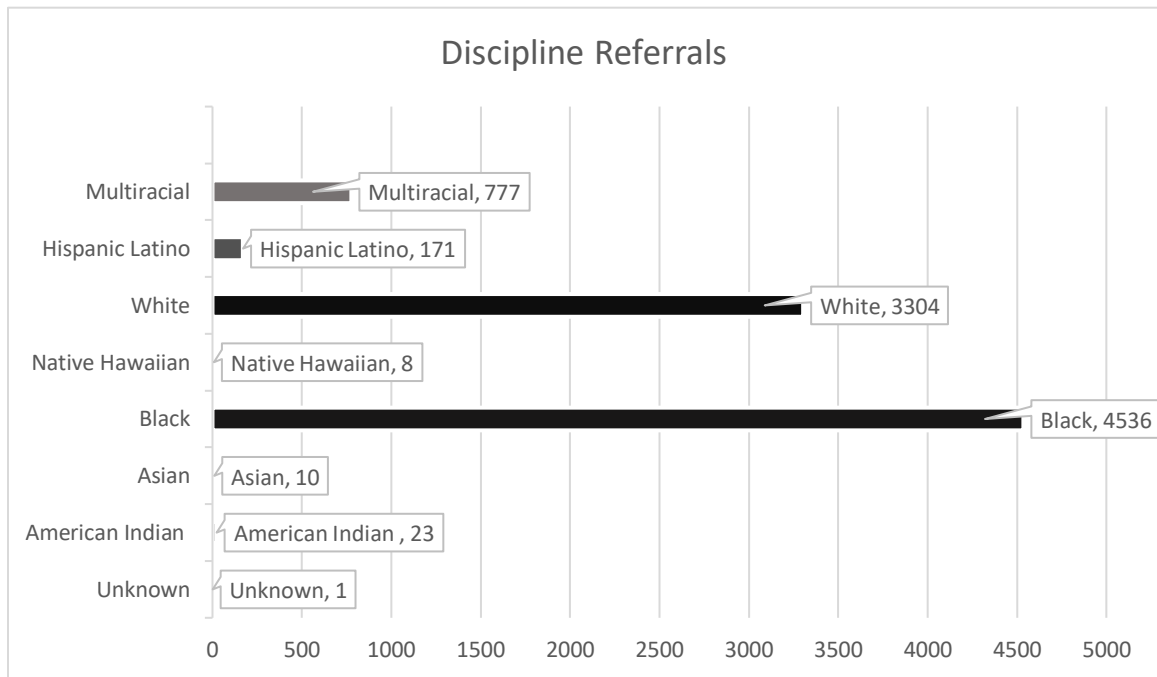


Figure 4. School year demographics 2015-2016.

According to the suspension data collected by the board office from August 2015 to May 2016 (monthly suspension reports), Black students represented 38% of out-of-school suspensions, even though they represented only 25% of the student population. Figure 5 shows the breakdown of out-of-school suspensions by race.

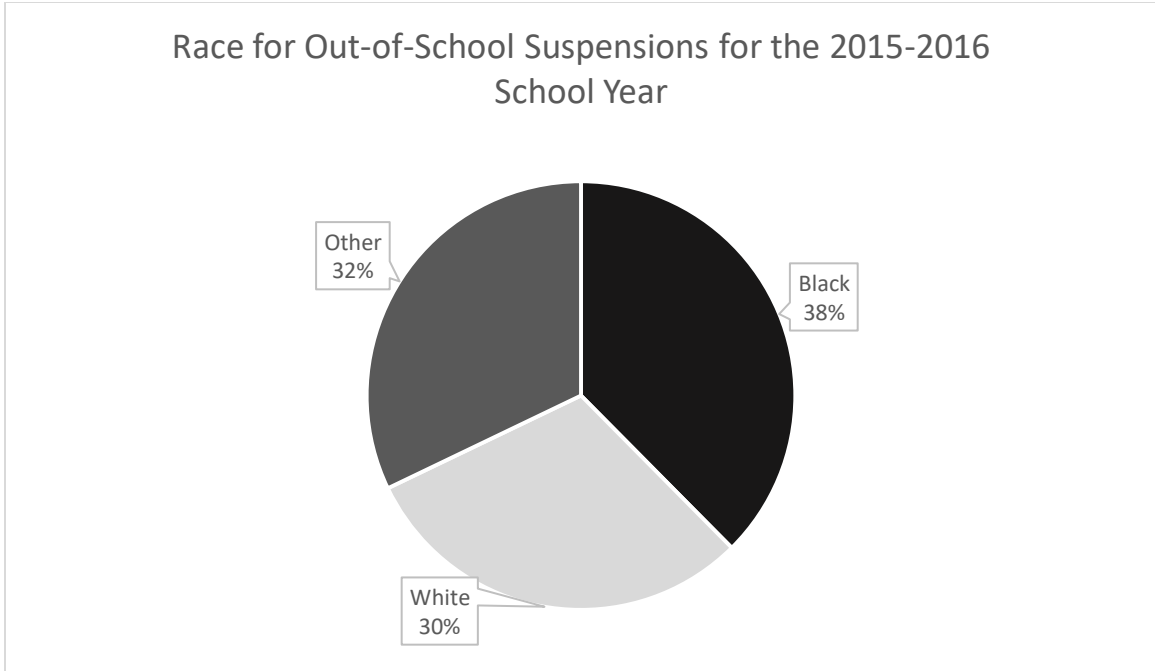


Figure 5. Race of out-of-school suspensions for the 2015-16 school year.

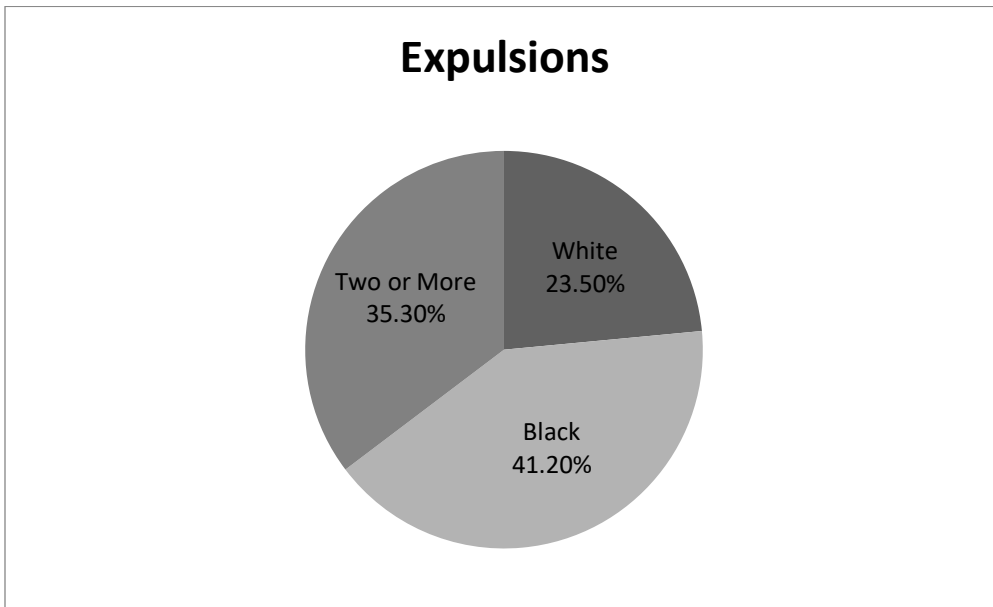
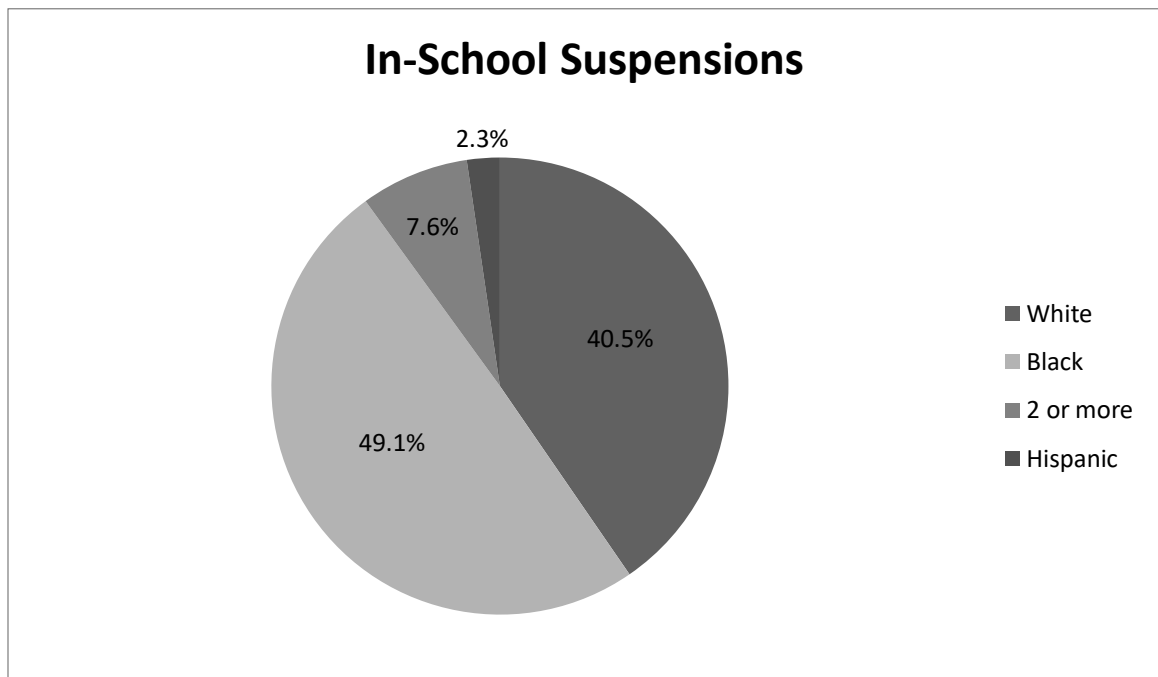


Figure 6. Race of expulsions for the 2015-16 school year.

According to the Office of Civil Rights, in 2015, the researched school expelled 34 students; 23.5% were White, 41.2% were Black, and 35.3% were two or more races.

Figure 6 shows the breakdown of expulsions by race. The Office of Civil Rights did not mention what the infractions were that led to the expulsions.

According to the Office of Civil Rights, in 2015, the researched school placed 40.5% of White students in in-school suspension; 49.1% of Black students were placed in in-school suspension; 2.3% of Hispanic students were placed in in-school suspension; and 7.6% of students identified as two or more races were placed in in-school suspension. Even though SB 100 did not classify in-school suspension as unlawful, there still was disproportionality in the researched school. Figure 7 shows the breakdown.



*Figure 7.* Race of in-school suspensions for the 2015-16 school year.

Office discipline referrals were given to students when the teacher had exhausted re-direction and the students had been warned. Students were then referred out of the class and to the discipline office to speak to the assistant principal. The assistant principal had to give the student 'due process' and allow the student to state what happened. The assistant principal then determined if the student had committed an infraction. Figure 8

provides data on the infractions for the researched school. The listed infractions were considered major offenses that could have led to a suspension or expulsion.

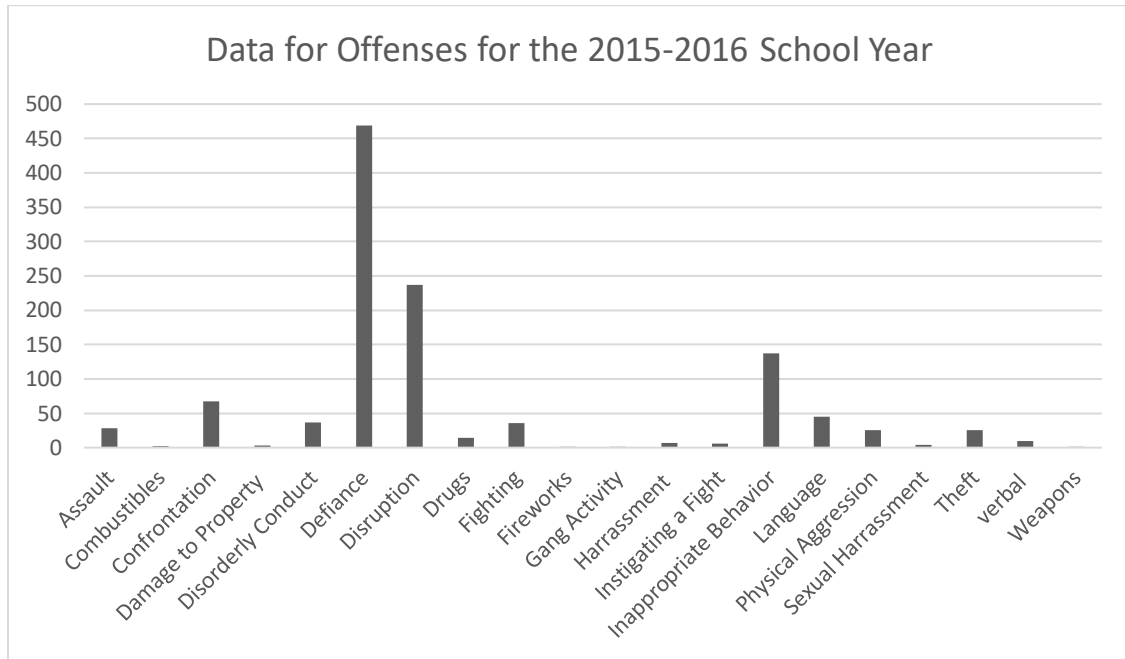


Figure 8. Major offenses of all students for the 2015-2016 school year.

**Research Questions and Null Hypotheses**

The following research questions and hypotheses guided this study:

RQ1: How do teachers perceive male behavior in the classroom?

RQ2: How do teachers perceive the use of Restorative Justice in the classroom?

RQ 3: How do students perceive the use of Restorative Justice in the classroom?

H1<sub>0</sub>: There is no increase of teacher knowledge of Restorative Justice as measured on the pre- and post-assessment surveys.

H2<sub>0</sub>: There is no increase of student perception of Restorative Justice effectiveness as measured on the pre- and post-surveys.

## **Methodology**

Data collection for this study included teacher assessment surveys administered before and after professional development, student pre- and post-surveys, teacher reflective journaling, and interviews with teachers and students. After obtaining approval from the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher enlisted the help of a non-evaluative staff member who contacted all teachers of freshman and sophomore students at the researched school, to seek participation in the study for the fall 2016 semester. Each teacher who agreed to take part in the study received an e-mail with a link to the pre-assessment on Restorative Justice.

Between November 2016 and May 2017, all teachers had the opportunity to participate in the online Restorative Justice training and were encouraged to use the techniques learned from the professional development. Again, participation was voluntary and teachers were not required to use these techniques. In her role as assistant principal, the researcher created and sent out a link to the online professional development workshop, which was available from October 4, 2016, until October 15, 2016. The workshop addressed the purpose of the study and answered any questions the participating teachers might have had about the study. Upon the conclusion of the professional development, the teachers completed the post-assessment survey, answering the same questions asked in the pre-assessment survey. To ensure the anonymity of the teachers, the non-evaluative staff member collected the results of both surveys and replaced the participating teachers' names with codes (t1, t2, etc.) before providing the data to the researcher for analysis. Restorative Justice training, completed by teachers hired as Restorative Justice coaches, continued after the original session.

All teacher participants received instruction to incorporate Restorative Justice in the classrooms. From November 2016 to May 2017, participating teachers were expected to complete weekly journals in which they answered a series of prewritten questions about the use of Restorative Justice in their classrooms. The participating teachers received the journal questions during the training, and the non-evaluative staff member picked up the participating teachers' journals on the last day of the month. To ensure participant anonymity, each teacher used an individually assigned code on the journal. The non-evaluative staff member transcribed the journal entries and removed all identifiers before the researcher received the journals for analysis. At the end of the study, the non-evaluative staff member sent participating teachers a \$10 gift card to a local merchant as a Thank You and as compensation for the participants' time and participation.

The non-evaluative staff member visited the participating teachers' classrooms, explained the study, and supplied parental consent and youth assent forms to all male students. The staff member asked each student to sign the youth assent form and gain parental permission. To participate in this study, signed consent forms from both parents and students were necessary. Prior to the meeting with students, the researcher held an informational meeting with parents to explain the study and answer any questions on the use of restorative practices. Participating students completed a pre-survey to assess individual beliefs of Restorative Justice in the classroom (see Appendix E). The students responded to the same questions in a post-survey at the end of the study.

During the study, the non-evaluative staff member was not involved in discipline decisions. Each month, she conducted face-to-face interviews with participating teachers

and male students. During these interviews, the teachers and students responded to questions about their beliefs about Restorative Justice in their classrooms and during Restorative Circles.

The researcher analyzed the qualitative data per each research question by coding for specific themes. A dependent sample *t*-test for difference in means was completed to analyze quantitative data through comparison of the pre-assessment and post-assessment teacher professional development surveys and the pre/post-surveys completed by the students.

### **Limitations**

The study included several limitations. Student participation was limited according to race, gender, and grade. The study included only Black, White, and Bi-Racial male students in the ninth and 10th grades. Female students, as well as those of other races and grades, were excluded. The study was limited, because the focus was just on African-American male students. The teacher participants taught ninth and 10th-grade students only. The researcher could not use 11th and 12th grade students because of a possible conflict, since the researcher was the administrator for 11th and 12th grades. Teachers evaluated by the researcher could not take part because of the potential conflict of interest. Surveys, interviews, and observations had to be completed during school hours. This posed an issue, because the non-evaluative staff member who served as a research assistant also had to complete her other assigned duties while she was at work. The research assistant had to collect data during her lunch break and other breaks. The researcher encountered no other anticipated risks or limitations with the research.



**Data Samples**

Freshman and sophomore teachers received an e-mail request to take part in the study from the non-evaluative staff member. The researcher selected the first 30 teacher respondents as participants in the research study after sending two e-mail requests over a span of six weeks. The non-evaluative staff member accepted a minimum of 15 teachers who initially responded from each grade level, for the convenience sample. All male students enrolled in the classes with the participating teachers had the opportunity to complete web-based pre- and post-surveys to avoid the 'singling out' of Black male students. Only students who had assented and obtained parental consent became research participants. The study included 30 male adolescents and 30 adult teachers. Fifteen to 30 of the teachers taught freshmen classes, and 15 of the 30 taught sophomore classes.

**Summary**

This mixed methods study explored qualitative data from two groups: (a) freshmen and sophomore African American males, Caucasian males, and Bi-Racial males; and (b) teachers who taught freshmen and sophomore African American males, White males, and Bi-Racial males. The data included weekly journals from the participating teachers, classroom observations, monthly teacher interviews, monthly student interviews, student pre- and post-surveys on Restorative Justice, and pre/post-assessments for teachers to assess their knowledge of Restorative Justice. The participating teachers received online training on Restorative Justice before data collection began, except for the teacher pre-assessment. The researcher asked all male students enrolled in the classes with the participating teachers to complete pre- and post-surveys. Chapter Four describes the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data.

## Chapter Four: Analysis

### Introduction

This research study explored the use of Restorative Justice in the classroom with male students. The researcher created the research questions and the null hypotheses to explore the perceptions of how teachers believed Restorative Justice would reduce the disciplinary infractions in their classrooms.

The data collection consisted of pre- and post-surveys for students, teacher pre- and post-assessments, teacher observations, teacher interviews, and teacher journals. The students and teachers who took part completed a pre- and post-survey about their beliefs regarding the use of Restorative Justice. The responses to student survey questions explored how students believed their behavior or the behavior of their peers improved when Restorative Justice techniques were in place.

The researcher analyzed the survey results and assigned a numeric value using the following rating scale from 1-5, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. A Microsoft Excel™ spreadsheet was useful in calculating the total and average of the results from both the teacher and student surveys. The researcher coded weekly teacher journals, teacher interviews, and pre- and post-assessments for teachers as positive, negative, or neutral, averaged the assigned values, and expressed the percent of response in each category.

### **RQ1: How do teachers perceive male behavior in the classroom?**

Teachers completed weekly journals from November 2016 to May 2017 to provide information regarding their beliefs about male students' behavior while implementing Restorative Justice in their classrooms. In each journal entry, teachers

were asked to respond to three questions. First, they were asked to describe male students' responses to Restorative Justice techniques, characterizing them as either positive, negative, or neutral/no response. Such techniques could include conferencing, circles, and journaling. The positive response indicated that male students were receptive to Restorative Justice techniques. Negative responses showed that students were not receptive to the interventions. The no response or neutral response showed that the teacher did not use Restorative Justice techniques for the week. The neutral or no response could also show that the teacher was not present at work for the week or that the teacher used Restorative Justice only for female students.

Based on the weekly journal responses completed by the teachers regarding male students' responses to Restorative Justice, the teachers believed the techniques worked for their students at the beginning of data collection; but, as the weeks progressed, there was a sharp decline in that belief. The negative response consistently stayed under 25%. February had the highest number of negative responses with 20% in the first week, 25% in the second week, 10% in the third week, and 15% in the fourth week. The neutral responses increased dramatically throughout the data collection. During the second week of April, 90% of responses were neutral or no responses. Table 1 summarizes the weekly results of the teachers' reporting of their male students' responses to Restorative Justice techniques. Figure 9 displays the same information graphically.

Table 1

*Summary of Teacher Weekly Journal*

Week	Positive Response (%)	Negative Response (%)	No/Neutral Response (%)
November week 1	67	0	33
November week 2	30	6	64
November week 3	40	10	50
December week 1	43	17	40
December week 2	57	6	37
January week 1	43	4	53
January week 2	37	6	57
January week 3	50	3	47
January week 4	27	6	67
February week 1	20	20	60
February week 2	23	25	50
February week 3	10	10	80
February week 4	20	15	65
March week 1	23	20	57
March week 2	13	7	80
March week 3	10	3	87
March week 4	23	3	74
April week 1	13	0	87
April week 2	10	0	90
April week 3	20	3	77
April week 4	3	3	94
May week 1	13	1	86
May week 2	10	1	89

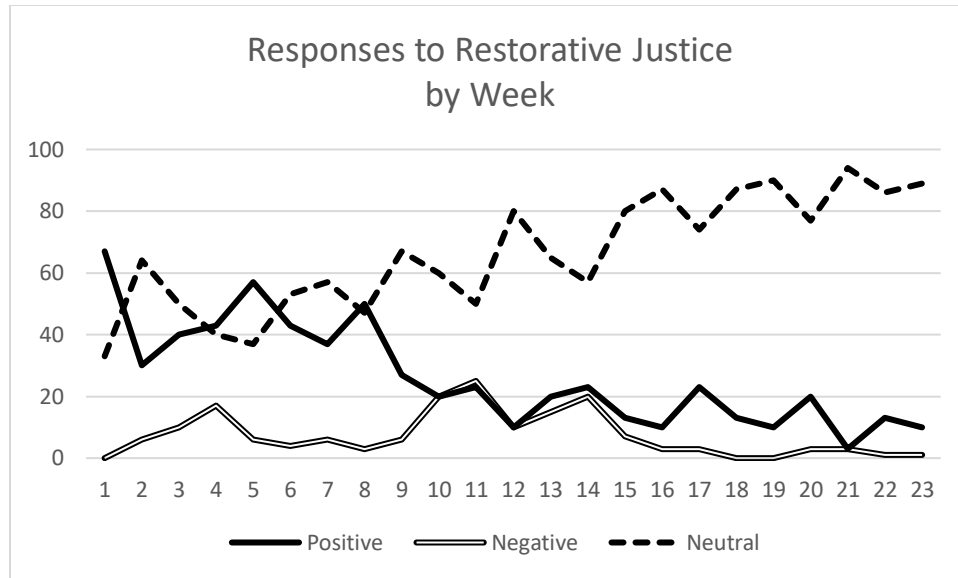


Figure 9. Students’ responses to Restorative Justice.

For the most part, male students responded positively to Restorative Justice techniques, or teachers did not have to use them in the classroom. In November especially, teachers’ responses were more positive or they indicated they did not need to use Restorative Justice. One teacher wrote, ‘Students responded very well. We were able to have an informative conversation. He was able to articulate the reason behind his behavior issue, happily worked on the solution, and was apologetic.’ Another teacher responded with a more neutral answer. She stated that when she was trying to conduct a circle it was not successful, but then she had a conference with students and it was more successful in addressing inappropriate behavior. That same teacher stated:

All of the students seem to like talking about their weekends and telling me what they do outside of school. Some of them are really bad about listening to others when they are talking (we have a talking piece). The males in particular always want to be the center of attention and when it is their turn, they seem very theatrical about it all. Ninety percent of the time, I am not sure what they are

talking about (I don't understand their vocabulary) even when I ask them what they are talking about, they all just start laughing so I'm guessing it's something not school appropriate and we typically end the circle there. The males give slightly better reactions when I take them out to the hallway vs. talk to them in class. When it is one on one, it seems they feel less inclined to talk back/over me. In front of the class, they almost have one or more smart remarks to respond with. They like to have the last word, which I am not ok with so it turns into a much bigger deal than it has to. I have started using the hallway as an alternative. The downside to the hallway is that I have to step out of the class and I don't like leaving the kids without me standing in the room even if it is just for a minute.

One teacher wrote, 'There was no response, but I did not use them.' Another teacher wrote:

The males in my class, which are only 4 as this is a Special Education class, really enjoy our circles. At first, they were a little unsure, but as the semester goes on one has even asked if we're going to have a circle after missing a Monday due to a holiday.

The teachers answered two other questions in the weekly journals. One asked, "What Restorative Justice techniques have you used this week?" The other question was, "How often did you use Restorative Justice techniques in class this week and for what reasons"? While technically not specifically addressing Research Question 1, the teachers' responses to these questions provided a clearer picture of the use of Restorative Justice in the classrooms.

Table 2

*Frequency of Interventions used by Month*

Month	Technique	Frequency
November 2016	Journals	3
	Conferencing	34
	Circles	12
	Mediation	2
	Peer Jury	0
December 2016	Journals	0
	Conferencing	9
	Circles	5
	Mediation	1
	Peer Jury	1
January 2017	Journals	1
	Conferencing	25
	Circles	15
	Mediation	2
	Peer Jury	0
February 2017	Journals	0
	Conferencing	35
	Circles	2
	Mediation	1
	Peer Jury	3
March 2017	Journals	5
	Conferencing	15
	Circles	4
	Mediation	0
	Peer Jury	9
April 2017	Journals	0
	Conferencing	22
	Circles	3
	Mediation	0
	Peer Jury	4
May 2017	Journals	0
	Conferencing	4
	Circles	0
	Mediation	0
	Peer Jury	0

Most teachers reported that they used the Restorative Justice techniques that they used during the online training, which consisted of conferencing, journals, circles, mediation, or referred the student to peer jury. The researcher conducted peer jury, but the students remained anonymous as to who referred them, and the student was a part of the data collection. Table 2 details the frequency of Restorative Justice techniques used during the seven months of data collection.

According to the data, participants used conferencing more with 34 times in November, nine times in December, 25 times in January, 35 times in February, 15 in March, 22 in April, and four times in May. In November, one teacher responded:

Last week, I was able to use Restorative Justice to turn a negative situation into a positive one. A male student refused to move to a new assigned seat. Student was given many chances to curb behavior, but chose not to, mother was e-mailed about the situation. The day of the new seat change, the student was rude and adamant he would never move seats. Student was given the opportunity to speak to an administrator about the situation. Student returned to my class because the administrator stated that the student needed to ask to conference with me. We worked together to find a new seat and work without disrupting other for a week, he could have his old seat back. I was able to turn a disruptive situation into a positive one. Student was able to have the opportunity to share why he did not want my first seat choice, work on an acceptable compromise, and have the opportunity to change his situation without discipline. This allowed me to build a better relationship with student and gain insight to why he had the issues in the first place.



For November, teachers reported that conferencing and other Restorative Justice techniques were successful. At the end of the data collection, the teacher responses were not as positive, because the inappropriate behaviors were not corrected with Restorative Justice.

In April, one teacher wrote about handling inappropriate behaviors with students and handling other issues that affect her classroom environment (e.g. Truancy). She discussed discussing the topics in a circle. Another teacher wrote:

Last week I experienced a situation where I had to forgive a student in my class for using language that I found extremely offensive. This student uses offensive language quite often and I finally decided he had enough warnings and now I was going to step up next time he used any inappropriate language. It did not take long for that to happen. When he said something offensive, I did send him out with a referral.

One teacher stated that she did not feel that Restorative Justice techniques would not work with in the particular situation, because it was not directed towards her. She wrote, "This week I honestly did not use any restorative justice practice methods in class because there was no need. I did send out a student due to defiance/disrespect, but it was toward me and not a fellow student."

Conferencing was the intervention that the data showed that teachers used the most. Teachers used conferences 144 times during the data collection. Conferencing was used many times in November, January, February, and April. Conferencing was used moderately in March. Conferencing was the only method of Restorative Justice that was

used at the end of data collection. This technique was used the most of all of the Restorative Justice techniques during data collection.

Teachers used mediation the least of all the Restorative Justice techniques. Mediation was used a total of six times, and not at all during the last three months of data collection.

Teachers had to refer students to Peer Jury. Peer Jury was not held in the classrooms. Teachers only referred students to Peer Jury 17 times, and nearly all of that occurred in February, March, and April. Journals were used 12 times during the data collection.

The reasons the teachers cited for using the Restorative Justice techniques were varied, but they fell into the following five categories:

1. Dealing with a disgruntled male student.
2. Helping a student overcome work issues.
3. Behavior in the classroom.
4. Build classroom community
5. Going back over expectations with students.

These five reasons were cited several times in the beginning of the data collection for teachers trying Restorative Justice techniques. One teacher stated:

I had several individual conferences with students about grades and attendance. One senior boy I talked to in 6th hour a few weeks ago is doing much better with his attendance which is helping his grade. My group of four boys in 6th hour are pulling it together and now are working as a team. I heard them remark that "they now like their group. (Group was put together 5-6 weeks ago

because none of them worked during the labs and other students felt it was unfair).

She successfully built a classroom community with Restorative Justice.

The techniques also helped students overcome work issues. Another teacher stated:

Update on 5th hour: Since I last wrote about climate of the classroom (we did whole class circle a few months ago, and I have done expectation reminders) the class is doing much better. Students are more focused and several students who were failing are pulling their grades up and now have D's.

Restorative Justice's main focus was rebuilding relationships, and she did that while reviewing expectations in the classroom.

The data pertaining to Research Question 1, "How do teachers perceive male students' behavior in the classroom?", indicated that teachers believed males were responding to Restorative Justice techniques at the beginning of the data collection, which was in November. November is still in the first semester. At the end of the second semester, teacher perceptions of the strategies were that they were not working.

**RQ2: How do teachers perceive the use of Restorative Justice in the classroom?**

To answer this second question, the researcher analyzed pre- and post-assessment responses. The pre-assessment data was collected before the teachers took part in an online professional development training on Restorative Justice. When they had completed the professional development training, the researcher asked the teachers to complete the post-assessment. The researcher coded responses as positive, negative, or neutral and averaged each category. Table 3 summarizes the results for teacher pre- and

post-assessment responses. The research assistant assigned the teacher with a number and matched the pre- and post-assessments together to ensure more reliable data. The researcher used question 2 of the assessment because it pertained to the research question. The question stated, “Do Restorative Justice Techniques reduce discipline?”

Table 3

*Participant Teacher Responses to the Question: Do interventions reduce the need for discipline?*

Pre-Assessment	Post-Assessment
Positive: 15/30 = 50.0%	Positive: 21/30 = 70%
Negative: 2/30 = 6.7%	Negative: 1/30 = 3.3%
Neutral: 13/30 = 43.3%	Neutral: 8/30 = 26.7 %

The data from the pre- and post-assessment found that before the professional development training, teachers were 50% positive regarding Restorative Justice techniques reducing discipline. After the professional development, that number rose to 70%. The number of teachers who believed that Restorative Justice techniques do not work went from 6.7% to 3.3%. The number of teachers who were neutral went from 43.3% to 26.7%.

The researcher coded 15 of the teacher responses to question 2 as positive on the pre-assessment. One such response noted that “they feel they are in control of their outcome, which leads to a more positive result and least likely to repeat the offense.” Another response from a teacher stated, “At first, I think students are a little unsure about the process, but once they become more familiar with the process, I think they respond and appreciate being heard.” One more example of a positive teacher comment was, “It helps them to see the damage that was done to the other person or class and be able to apologize and walk through why they made that choice in the first place.”

There were 21 post-assessment positive responses to question 2. One teacher stated:

At first, most students are hesitant and focused on the trustworthiness of those involved. After they feel these individuals are trustworthy, they are able to relax and open up about the issue(s) at hand. Most students appreciate the fact that people are willing to make the extra effort to correct their behavior and work towards growth rather than just issuing discipline.

There were only two pre-assessment responses coded as negative. One teacher listed observed, "They think it is a joke. They don't think it is fair. Some students are still getting different punishments that are not equal to the offense." Another teacher response stated, "I don't believe that Restorative Justice Practices would work in my setting."

There was only one post-assessment negative response: "Restorative Justice is just a way to excuse inappropriate behavior."

There were 13 neutral teacher responses for the pre-assessment question. One teacher responded, "I have not had any students that I know of experience RJ so I don't know." Another teacher responded, "This question is all encompassing. There is not one single answer to this question. Some students respond very well, while others respond better to negative consequences. It depends on the individual student." The post-assessment neutral responses totaled eight responses. One teacher stated, "Sometimes they do, sometimes they make it more prompting." Another teacher responded, "It depends on the student."

**RQ3: How do students perceive the use of Restorative Justice in the classroom?**

To answer research question 3, the researcher analyzed the student pre- and post-surveys. Students completed a pre-survey before the classroom interventions started and then a post-study survey at the end of the data collection. The survey focused on the students' views on the use of Restorative Justice in the classroom. The researcher assigned numbers to the Likert-scale survey responses using the following scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The researcher then calculated an average score for each question. Survey questions 1, 2, 5, and 6 directly related to research question 3. Those questions, as well as their average responses on the pre-and post-surveys, are listed in Table 4.

Question 1 of the pre-survey showed there was not much of a difference with students, regardless of race, concerning their beliefs of how Restorative Justice was working in the classroom. Black students had an average response of 3.30. White students scored 3.30, and Bi-Racial students scored 3.50. The post-survey scores of the Black male students dropped to 3.25. The White students stayed about the same with 3.33, and the Bi-Racial students dropped to 3.40.

On question 2, the Black students' scores decreased slightly from 3.95 to 3.93 from the pre- to the post-survey. White students stayed about the same with scores around 4.4 on each. Bi-Racial students increased from 3.0 to 3.4.

On question 5, Black boys showed a significant increase with scores going from 3.20 to 4.10. White boys stayed the same with 4.40. Bi-Racial boys stayed the same with 5.00.

Table 4

*Student Survey Results, Questions 1, 2, 5, and 6*

Student Survey Question	Pre-Survey			Post-Survey		
	Black	White	Bi-Racial	Black	White	Bi-Racial
Question 1: Restorative Justice works in the classroom?	3.30	3.30	3.50	3.25	3.33	3.40
Question 2: I would positively respond to teachers if Restorative Justice was used by all of my teachers.	3.95	4.40	3.00	3.93	4.44	3.40
Question 5: Teachers give me an opportunity to explain my behavior before they send me to the discipline office.	3.20	4.40	5.00	4.10	4.40	5.00
Question 6: I feel all male students are given the same opportunity as me to explain their behavior.	3.60	3.30	5.00	3.40	2.70	3.60

Question 6 had a decrease in scores for all three groups. There was a decrease from 3.60 to 3.40 for Black boys. White students also decreased from 3.30 to 2.70. Bi-Racial boys had a significant decrease from 5.00 to 3.60.

The surveys contained six additional questions, which, while not directly related to research question three, provided some information about the students' perceptions about their school. Table 5 displays the data collected regarding these questions.

Table 5

*Student Survey Results, Questions 3, 4, 7, 9, 10 and 11*

Student Survey Question	Pre-Survey			Post-Survey		
	Black	White	Bi-Racial	Black	White	Bi-Racial
Question 3: I would positively respond to staff if Restorative Justice was used by all of school staff?	4.00	4.10	3.00	4.00	4.20	4.00
Question 4: I would positively respond to staff if they used other resolutions to conflict before sending me to the office.	4.00	4.11	3.00	4.20	4.70	4.75
Question 7: I feel all make students are given the same opportunity as me to explain their behavior.	4.31	4.30	3.50	4.00	4.30	4.00
Question 9: My principal gives me an opportunity to explain my behavior before he/she gives me a consequence.	2.90	3.70	3.90	3.70	4.30	4.50
Question 10: I have one adult in the building that I can talk to when I am upset.	3.30	3.70	3.50	3.00	3.60	3.60
Question 11: I feel that the staff in my school are fair to all students.	4.20	4.10	4.20	3.00	3.80	3.70



The pre-survey indicated there was not much of a difference with the White students and the Black students about responding to Restorative Justice by all staff. The Black students scored 4.00. The White students scored 4.11, and the Bi-Racial students scored a 3.00. The post-survey showed there was not much of a difference with any male students regardless of race.

Pre-survey question 4 showed that Black students and White students believed that if teachers used other techniques to resolve conflict before sending students to the office, students would respond to the resolution. The Bi-Racial students scored lower, with an average score of 3.50. The same question asked in the post-survey showed that not all student responses were much different. Students felt that supplying resolutions before sending students to the office would be a positive response.

Pre-survey question 7 showed that Black and White students scored higher on this question, indicating that Black and White students did not believe they were given the same opportunities when explaining inappropriate behaviors. Black students scored 4.31 while White students scored lower with 4.30, and Bi-Racial students scored even lower with 3.50. The same post-survey question showed that the Black and Bi-Racial students had the same score of 4.0 while the White male students scored 4.3, indicating that while the Black and Bi-Racial are the exact same, the White group of male students were similar with the belief that male students receive the same opportunity to explain inappropriate behavior displayed.

Question 9 pre-survey showed there was not much of a difference with the male groups when asked about due process from the principal. Black males scored 2.90, while White males scored 3.70, and Bi-Racial students scored 3.90. The same post-survey

question showed that while Black students scored higher on this post-survey, White and Bi-Racial students believed that their principal heard them when explaining a behavior. The White students scored 4.3, and the Bi-Racial students scored 4.5.

Question 10 on the pre-survey showed that students had one adult in the school that they could talk to. Black students scored a 3.30. White students scored a 3.70, and Bi-Racial students scored a 3.50. The post-survey showed that while scores for all groups increased, Black students still scored lower than the other groups. Black students scored 3.0. White students and Bi-Racial students both scored 3.6.

Question 11 of the pre-survey asked students if they felt school staff was fair to all students. Black students scored 4.20, while White students scored 4.10, and Bi-Racial male students scored 4.20. The post-survey indicated that all three groups dropped in scores. Black male students scored 3.00, while White students scored 3.80, and Bi-Racial students scored 3.70.

### **Student Monthly Interviews**

The researcher conducted monthly interviews with students as a means to gather data on their beliefs about Restorative Justice in the classroom. Below are the questions the students answered. The researcher coded each response as “Yes”, “No”, or “Neutral.” Tables 6 and 7 show the percentages of each response, by month, for the two questions.

1. Do you believe that your classmates are responding to the Restorative Justice that the teacher is using in your classroom?
2. Do you believe that your behavior or your classmates' behavior is improved after the Restorative Justice intervention?

Table 6

*Question 1: 1. Do you believe that your classmates are responding to the Restorative Justice that the teacher is using in your classroom?*

Month	Yes (%)	No (%)	Neutral (%)
November	40	37	13
December	57	20	23
January	87	7	6
February	80	20	0
March	85	14	1
April	40	50	10
May	30	60	10

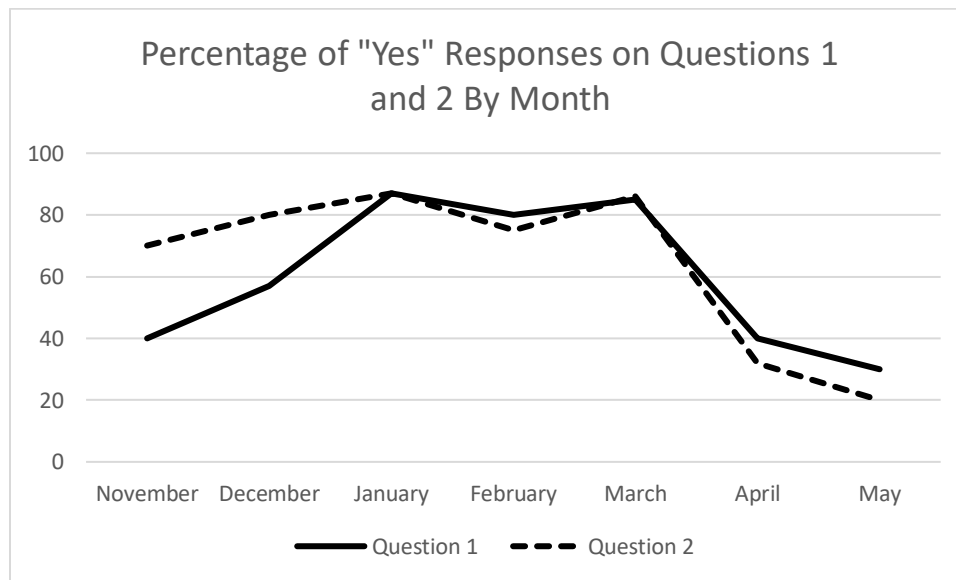
Table 7

*Question 2: 1. Do you believe that your behavior or your classmates' behavior is improved after the Restorative Justice intervention?*

Month	Yes (%)	No (%)	Neutral (%)
November	70	17	13
December	80	13	7
January	87	10	3
February	75	22	3
March	86	7	7
April	32	50	18
May	20	70	10

The data from the student monthly interviews showed the responses were inconsistent throughout the data collection. The “Yes” responses began average for Question 1 and spiked from January through March. During the first two months, students believed that even though their classmates were not very responsive to Restorative Justice as demonstrated by their answers to Question 1, they still believed

their behavior and the behavior of their classmates had improved after they received the Restorative Justice intervention, as seen in their responses to Question 2. During the months of January, February, and March, “Yes” answers to both questions were high, indicating that students were responsive to Restorative Justice techniques and that classroom behavior was improved as a result of them. The “Yes” responses to both questions declined sharply during the last two months of data collection, indicating that Restorative Justice was not very effective. Figure 10 shows the percentage of “Yes” responses to each question by month.



*Figure 10.* Percentage of “Yes” responses.

### **Teacher Monthly Observations**

The research assistant conducted monthly teacher observations in order to assess the classroom management and to check for the use of specific Restorative Justice techniques. Observations were 20 minutes in length and utilized a rubric in the form of three questions. The research assistant would come into the classrooms unannounced so

neither teachers nor students knew when the observations would take place. The research assistant used the following questions:

1. Is the classroom management going well?
2. Did the teacher use circles?
3. Did the teacher have to correct any behaviors using mediation?

Table 8

*Question 1: Is the classroom management going well?*

Month	Positive (%)	Negative (%)	Neutral (%)
November	90	7	3
December	80	13	7
January	90	0	10
February	97	0	3
March	97	0	3
April	97	0	3
May	93	0	7

Table 9

*Question 2: Did the teacher use circles?*

Month	Yes (%)	No (%)
November	3	97
December	0	100
January	0	100
February	0	100
March	0	100
April	0	100
May	0	100

Tables 8, 9, and 10 show the results of these observations, by month, throughout the data collection period.

Table 10

*Question 3: 1. Did the teacher have to correct any behaviors using mediation?*

Month	Yes (%)	No (%)
November	3	97
December	0	100
January	0	100
February	0	100
March	0	100
April	0	100
May	0	100

According to results for Question 1, the research assistant rated the classroom management as positive, 80% or above for all months of data collection. The lowest month was December, which was rated at 80%. Classroom management for March and April were rated as the highest, with both months reported as Positive, 97% of the time.

The research assistant included notes on the teacher observation rubric, commenting on what she witnessed. Accompanying ratings of Positive were comments such as, “Classroom management is going well. Students are participating without disruption. Students are active listening.” She also commented, “Students are not being defiant.” When the classroom management was reported as Negative, the additional comments from the research assistant were such things as, “Students were re-directed several times before the student re-engaged in the lesson.” The research assistant also noted that “even though the teacher had seen the inappropriate behavior, she allowed it to go on for a few minutes (talking) before she addressed the issue.”

The second question was on the use of circles. The only use of circles observed was in November when the observations first started. From December to May, there were no more circles observed during the observations.

Regarding question 3, the only month that teachers corrected any behaviors through mediation was in November. Three percent of the teachers were observed by the research assistant using mediation for November.

### **Hypotheses**

In addition to exploring the three research questions associated with the study, the researcher tested two hypotheses. The first involved the teachers who participated in the study. The researcher administered to these teachers two surveys assessing their knowledge of Restorative Justice. The first of these surveys was administered before the professional development, and the second was administered afterward. The null hypothesis is stated below.

H<sub>10</sub>: There is no increase of teacher knowledge of Restorative Justice as measured on the pre- and post-assessment surveys.

To test this null hypothesis, the researcher conducted a dependent sample *t*-test for difference in means. The differences between the pre- and post-assessment scores ( $M = 1.43$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ) indicated a significant increase,  $t(29) = 6.02$ ,  $p < .001$ . This caused the researcher to reject the null hypothesis and indicates that the teachers demonstrated significantly higher knowledge of Restorative Justice on the post-assessment survey than they did on the pre-assessment survey.

The second hypothesis involved the students who participated in the study. These students completed two surveys asking them about their perceptions of the effectiveness

of Restorative Justice. The first of these surveys was administered at the beginning of the data collection period and the second at the end. The null hypothesis is stated below.

H<sub>20</sub>: There is no increase of student perception of Restorative Justice effectiveness as measured on the pre- and post-surveys.

To test this null hypothesis, the researcher conducted a dependent sample *t*-test of means. The differences between the pre- and post-survey scores ( $M = 0.47$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ) indicated a significant increase,  $t(29) = 3.29$ ,  $p = .001$ . This caused the researcher to reject the null hypothesis and indicates that students perceived Restorative Justice to be significantly more effective on the post-survey than they did on the pre-survey.

Table 11 summarizes the results of these two hypothesis tests.

Table 11

*Results for H<sub>10</sub> and H<sub>20</sub>*

	Mean (Diff)	SD	t	p
Hypothesis 1	1.43	1.31	6.02	<.001
Hypothesis 2	0.47	0.78	3.29	.001

### Common Themes Found Throughout Data Collection

While reviewing the data collected from the teacher journals, teacher interviews, and student interviews, the researcher identified three themes that recurred throughout. These themes were disconnect, self-reflection, and relationship building.

**Disconnect.** Disconnect is a theme that presented in many responses from students. Disconnect, for the purposes of this study, is defined as a significant difference between the perceptions of students and teachers. Students felt that teachers were not reporting all of the disruptive behaviors in the classroom. They also felt that teachers were not taking the opportunity of using Restorative Justice practices to decrease



inappropriate behavior but instead relied on discipline referrals. One student stated in a monthly interview that his teacher “always writes us up. She does not pull us in the hallway to talk about our behavior.” Other students made similar comments when asked if Restorative Justice was implemented in the classroom. Other students, however, stated that teachers use Restorative Justice, but that the “other students in class won’t stop the behavior.”

In order to maintain confidentiality, the research assistant assigned a number to each teacher and student who participated in the study. When she presented the data from the surveys, observations, and interviews to the researcher, the responses were coded with these numbers. Two months into the data collection, the researcher noticed that the same five students consistently reported that no Restorative Justice techniques were being used in their classrooms. The researcher asked the research assistant to indicate the numbers of the teachers for these students so that she could compare the data.

The researcher found that the teachers of these students indicated they either did not need to use Restorative Justice practices in their classrooms, or that the behavior was explosive and that they had no opportunities for implementing Restorative Justice before they had to issue a referral. One of these teachers stated in one of her weekly journals,

It has been increasingly difficult to attempt Restorative Practices with my students due to increasing explosive behaviors. The behaviors escalate so quickly and to a level that the students need to be removed from the classroom before I have a larger issue on my hands. The social worker is often the one able to diffuse situations and talk students through these issues. The rest of the class has not been receptive to attempting these practices in the room.

Another teacher described his perception of trying to connect with some students in his weekly journal, but not being able to do so. He stated:

I have been having trouble motivating several young men. I have attempted to several things. I asked them some questions about consequences, asked them to come up with a plan to ensure they got their work done, and offered to work with them. I have not had any success with these attempts to motivate the unmotivated. My next step will likely be to attempt to use peer assistance.

The next week he wrote about the situation again. He stated:

My problem with the unmotivated young men has continued. I have been forced to write referrals due to their disruption, which is primarily caused by the students' lack of interest. I have gone to the guidance counselors for assistance. We have attempted to negotiate with these young men, but they are all insisting that they will get enough work done to pass. I wish I knew how to make them care about more than just passing.

The teacher seemed to be trying all options to work with these students, but he was unsuccessful. It should be noted that he did not state what racial background these students were.

**Self-Reflection.** During the data collection, teachers wrote weekly journals that asked three questions about the Restorative Justice techniques. Some teachers used that time to write additional information on the journals. One common theme was self-reflections from teachers on how they could handle discipline more effectively in their classroom, ways to improve the classroom using empathy with students, or other observations that the teachers found worthy of documenting. One of the teachers wrote,

This week I was having some trouble with several members of my fifth hour class being extremely chatty. After several attempts to fix the problem throughout the week, I decided to use a Restorative Justice technique. I drew a chart on the board with three categories: Negative, Neutral, and Positive. The categories moved from left to right. I explained what each category meant, and asked that each kid search his/her soul, and decide which of these categories he or she was in regarding the student's role in the class. Once they had chosen, I asked the kids to tell me how a student might move from a negative to a positive, or from left to right on the chart. I got a lot of good feedback, and the next day the chatting had stopped. It was a very helpful technique. I went to a Restorative Justice introductory training on Thursday of this week, and found it to be beneficial. So far, using Restorative Justice techniques has helped me avoid writing referrals several times this semester.

The same teacher wrote another reflection about his experience. He stated,

I had one student who is continuously late, and got into a dispute with another student. They were arguing back and forth, and I intervened before the situation escalated. The student who belongs in my class was escorted to the discipline office, but he yelled some disrespectful things in my direction before he left. I informed the student that his conduct was consistently disruptive, and that I no longer felt that he should be in this class. He wrote me an email, then came and apologized face-to-face. I told him that this is his last opportunity, and he needs to be a man, and do what is in his best interest, which is working toward graduation. He agreed, and shook my hand. He left the room knowing that his success is

entirely in his hands. I also recommended the young man for Peer Jury, but he was already scheduled to appear.

This teacher started finding ways to use Restorative Justice in class and reflecting on how he sought other ways to keep the student in class. Another teacher wrote about her struggles in school and how she is working to improve her classroom expectations. She wrote,

Last week I made a stronger effort to be more consistent with the classroom rule of no cell phones. This is a daily battle I fight all day, every day. At times I just want to give up. With a renewed energy, I am attempting to create a classroom community where no phones is the acceptable norm. Every student is expected to comply and the more students that join this community, the easier it becomes to enforce. Any student with their phone out becomes the abnormal in the room and they feel uncomfortable being singled out. The expectation is that every student and myself are participants in this rule (my phone is never out) and we all share in the common language of "no cell phones". The males are more stubborn about this and are harder to reach. I have had some success with the males but I am still struggling with a few. It takes much energy to fight this battle everyday but my hope is to create a community where it is an unspoken rule that everyone follows in order to be successful in and out of the classroom. I do not want to see any student fired from a job or not learn what is being taught because of being on their cell phone.

Another teacher stated,

I did not use Restorative Justice this week, but my co-teacher tried. She had to take a student out in the hall to discuss a prank he pulled on another student. It went poorly: the student was not receptive to it. He lied and became defensive even though several students witnessed his prank. His mother was called with no answer and he had to be written up. We kept him in class though; he did not need to be removed although he refused to do work after the confrontation. Principals were emailed and so was the student's mother. This student has to miss third hour quite a bit because of meetings he has with a boys' group and some assemblies. When he doesn't understand, he tends to act out. I wonder how much the group meetings are helping and if they are worth the cost of missing academic time. The more time he misses in class, the harder it is to get him on track.

Several other teachers used the journals as self-reflections. Another teacher wrote,

Last week I was able to use Restorative Justice to turn a negative situation into a positive one. A male student refused to move to a new assigned seat - student was given many chances to curb behavior but chose not to, mother was e-mailed about the situation - day of new seat student was rude and adamant he would never move seats. Student was given the opportunity to speak with an administrator about the situation – student returned to my class. We worked together to find a new seat we could both agree on. It was explained to him that if he could sit in new seat and work without disrupting others for a week, he could have his old seat back. I was able to turn a disruptive situation into a positive one. Student was able to have the opportunity to share why he did not want my first seat choice, work on an acceptable compromise, and have the opportunity to change his

situation without discipline. This allowed me to build a better relationship with student and gain insight to why he was hav[ing] the issues in the first place.

This teacher used her journal entry to point out that she was reflecting on positive ways to build relationships with students. One teacher journal also wrote that her approached had changed when she had addressed a student. She stated,

Nearly every day I reach out to students to correct their behavior and hold them accountable for their own actions. I do not lecture students as much as I used to. The male students respond especially well when they are held accountable. When I discuss their behavior with them and give them the chance to correct their behavior over time, they make attempts to not repeat the same unacceptable behaviors.

One teacher reflected on modeling an appropriate behavior in the classroom.

Last week I concentrated on modeling proper behavior. My patience was tested several times by student behavior and all eyes were on me when I was disciplining. I worked to keep my composure and handle my discipline issues in a professional manner, which I hope influenced my students in a positive way. I model behavior when I stand for the pledge every day, as several students would talk right through the moment of silence and the pledge if not instructed not to. I do not require students stand for the pledge but I do every day. When I am enforcing and modeling proper behavior, I do notice a different reaction from the male students. They tend to be more respectful when speaking to me and quicker to correct their own behavior after they have made a mistake. I never quit modeling behavior which gives me more consistent results with the male students.

The males are slowly becoming more respectful in regards to their language and aggressive tendencies.

The self-reflections allowed teachers to see their own growth when working with students. As an example of such a self-reflection, one teacher wrote,

I had a student make a threatening statement and I counseled him, but still alerted the SRO which I think was a big mistake. Since it was such a sensitive topic, I didn't do anything. It was pretty much a disaster. He wound up getting suspended. I would have liked to spend some time in a circle and discussing what kind of statements get people into big trouble at school.

**Building Relationships.** Building relationships was a final common theme that the researcher noted while decoding the weekly journals from teachers as well as the students. One teacher wrote, “One time a week I use a restorative circle to create a positive classroom community and build relationships.” Another teacher made a similar statement. She wrote, “The research assistant completed monthly observations and noted that when students and teachers have positive relationships in class, inappropriate behaviors were not observed as much as teachers that did not form a positive relationship with their students.”

The research assistant reported in her observation notes that “when observing in Teacher 5’s classroom, the teacher just got started with the lesson. She did speak to any student, or ask the class in general how they were doing.” The research assistant documented her observation in another class and noted, “Poor behavior management in class. Teacher could have corrected the behavior by sending the student in the hall. She elected to give the student a discipline referral instead.”

In another observation, she wrote,

The teacher has great classroom management. She came in and asked how everyone was doing. She reminded students that she had supplies for them and asked students to take a couple of minutes to get materials together. She circulated around the room to check everyone and make sure that all students were ready to learn.

One teacher had an incident in her classroom, but because she had built relationships with her students, she was able to sense that something was wrong. She wrote in her journal,

Peer Mediation was used in small group setting 4<sup>th</sup> hour on Friday. I had a 10<sup>th</sup> grade male (student A) walk out of the room. Friction in the room but no one would tell me what was going on. I called upstairs to inform office that a student walked out of the room. Mr. Taylor came to my door about the same time the male (student A) returned. I kept the male student in the hall to find out what was going on. Apparently, a full Mountain Dew disappeared during our lab on Wednesday; it showed up in the same location empty. Another student (B) who was absent Friday said she saw a male Student (C 12<sup>th</sup>) around the bottle and said he drank it. Friday: Student A put an empty Mountain Dew bottle on the counter, which stirred up the whole incident again. I called Student C and Student D (female student who owned the Mountain Dew into the hall). We talked about the incident. Student D: Started by admitting she snap chatted the incident because she was mad. She said she wished she didn't, but she was mad. We discussed what happens when you put something online when you are mad. Alternative is



to write on paper and throw away later. She said she was sorry. Student A said he should not have put the empty bottle on the counter. Student C said he was sorry but they made him mad because they were talking about him and he did not do it. We discussed what to do if there is another problem or if Anyone else brings up the topic (Call me over). Students shook hands and said they were all sorry. When they walked into the classroom the other students clapped and cheers. One student said, "Mrs. -----, you are the bomb" LOL.

The same teacher also had another incident that she wrote about:

Fourth hour I had a verbal fight that came short of a fistfight. One of my students separated one of the students trying to talk her down and I tried to block the other student. Another student grabbed the student I was blocking and took her into my back room. I took the other one out into the hallway. Two of my students peer mediated the student in the back room while I called security. The student in the back room came to my room before school the next day. She thanked me for allowing the students to talk her down, she thanked me for talking her down, and she thanked me for not sending in a referral. She also apologized for her behavior. (The students were both cousins and it was an outside of school issue. They had the opportunity to talk-it-out during mediation.)

This teacher established relationships and it allowed her to manage the behaviors in class, and no one was suspended. Even though the students were female students, this teacher is building relationships with all students through Restorative Justice.

## Summary

This study explored three research questions and two hypotheses regarding one school's implementation of Restorative Justice. Research question 1 asked how teachers perceived male behavior in the classroom. Weekly journals were given to the teachers to answer the question. The data showed at the beginning of the data collection that teachers believed Restorative Justice was working in their classroom. By the end of the data collection, there was a sharp decrease in that belief. Research question 2 asked how teachers perceived the use of Restorative Justice in the classroom. Pre-assessment and post-assessment data revealed that when teachers received training on Restorative Justice, they were more positive about the reduction of discipline when Restorative Justice techniques were used. Question 3 asked how students perceived the use of Restorative Justice in the classroom. The data showed that there were mixed perceptions with the students.

There were also two hypotheses. The first null hypothesis stated that there is no increase of teacher knowledge of Restorative Justice as measured on the pre- and post-assessment surveys. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that teachers demonstrated significantly higher knowledge of Restorative Justice on the post-assessment than they did on the pre-assessment.

Null Hypothesis 2 stated that there is no increase of student perception of Restorative Justice effectiveness as measured on the pre- and post-surveys. Again, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that students perceived Restorative Justice to be significantly more effective on the post-survey than they did on the pre-survey.

There were three common themes throughout the data collection which were labeled as disconnect, self-reflection, and relationship building. Students and staff both documented some form of each theme when journaling or being interviewed.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

To explore students' and teachers' perceptions of Restorative Justice, the researcher completed a mixed-methods study. The students and teachers taking part in the study learned about Restorative Justice to determine if using these techniques reduced the number of office discipline referrals that led to suspensions and expulsions of the African American male students. Some teachers had some working knowledge of Restorative Justice, but others did not. In the researched school, African American students had the highest rate of suspensions and expulsions in the five years previous to the study, as indicated by the district in-house Skyward Data Management System. This is disproportionate because the African American students made up about 30% of the school's population. The researcher used a mixed methods model to collect and analyze the data. The researcher used qualitative data consisting of student pre- and post-surveys, a pre- and post-assessment for teachers, classroom observations, weekly teacher journals, and teacher and student interviews. The researcher collected quantitative data and analyzed it using dependent-sample *t*-tests for difference in means for testing the null hypotheses.

### **Summary of Findings**

A summary of the qualitative data presents some similarities and some disparities in the collected data. The data showed that when teachers used Restorative Justice consistently, there was a difference in student perception of how they were perceived by the classroom teacher. One student said, "I get a chance to explain myself," regarding his behavior. When the Restorative Justice Practice techniques were not continually done with fidelity, students reported that the teacher was inconsistent with completing

Restorative Justice techniques. One student stated in his monthly interview that his teacher was “not using any of the things that the research assistant said that she should be using before she sends us out for a referral. She does not talk to us. She does not put us in a circle to talk about our problems. She just sends us out with a referral.”

Students believed that their classmates were responding to positive behavior in the classroom when the teacher used Restorative Justice techniques versus referring them to the office with an office discipline referral. The surveys completed by students provided evidence that Black students felt more confident in relationships with staff and teachers when they practiced Restorative Justice in the school or classrooms. However, the degree to which the Black students reported that belief was not higher than White or Bi-Racial students.

### **Questions and Hypotheses**

**Research Question 1: How do teachers perceive male behavior in the classroom?** To explore this question, the researcher collected and analyzed data from the teachers’ weekly journals. The positive responses showed that teachers perceived male student behavior as proper in the classroom when the teacher implemented Restorative Justice techniques. The negative response showed that teachers viewed student behavior as still inappropriate even while implementing Restorative Justice techniques, and the neutral response showed that they did not use Restorative Justice techniques that week. Negative responses were at a minimum for the beginning of the year.

As an administrator in the school that worked with the discipline data, the researcher knew that it was common for February to be a month for high discipline referrals and suspensions. During the administration meetings, the research school’s

administration team discussed how to reduce discipline in this month. One explanation for the discipline problems during February is that the Holiday break is over, and the students and staff are starting to become anxious for the school year to end. Student behaviors are up and teacher tolerance is down. The neutral responses were a surprise to the researcher. In the month of February, when there are the highest discipline referrals for the school, the majority of teachers reported not needing to use Restorative Justice in their classrooms, which does not match the facts for the month. In the last two months of data collection, a large amount of teachers did not report that they used Restorative Justice. Teachers reported to the research assistant that they concentrated on final review and they did not use Restorative Justice as much as they had in the past several months. They reported that they did not have time to stop their review to conference with a student or use any other techniques, because it interfered with their instructional time.

**Research Question 2: How do teachers perceive the use of Restorative Justice in the classroom?** The researcher analyzed data that looked at the beliefs of teachers regarding Restorative Justice techniques both before and after the Restorative Justice training. Before the training, 50% of teachers viewed Restorative Justice as a positive, while only 6.7% of teachers viewed Restorative Justice as a negative. Forty-three percent of the teachers viewed Restorative Justice as neutral. When they received training, the positive numbers increased to 70% of the teachers, while 3.3% of the teachers still viewed Restorative Justice as a negative, and 27% were still neutral. More teachers were optimistic about trying the new techniques in their classroom to increase instructional time and decrease disruptions that could lead to an office discipline referral or suspension.

**Research Question 3: How do students perceive the use of Restorative Justice in the classroom?** Research question 3 used data from student pre- and post-surveys, asking about their views of Restorative Justice in the classroom. Teachers had been introduced to Restorative Justice the prior year and some teachers were conducting some Restorative Justice techniques. The students had some working knowledge of the techniques because of earlier classes. The research assistant also informed the students what techniques the teacher should be using in the class as Restorative Justice techniques. The students used that knowledge to answer the surveys. The findings provided a variety of answers depending on the student's race.

**H1: There is an increase of teacher knowledge of Restorative Justice as measured on the pre- and post-assessment surveys.** To test this hypothesis, the researcher conducted a dependent sample *t*-test of difference in means, comparing the teachers' responses on pre-and post-surveys. The differences between the scores showed a significant increase ( $p < .0001$ ), allowing the researcher to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the teachers had significantly higher knowledge of Restorative Justice on the post-survey than they did on the pre-survey.

**H2: There is an increase of student perception of Restorative Justice effectiveness as measured on the pre- and post-surveys.** To test this hypothesis, the researcher conducted a dependent sample *t*-test of difference in means. The differences between scores showed a significant increase ( $p = .001$ ), allowing the researcher to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the students perceived Restorative Justice practices to be significantly more effective on the post-survey than they did on the pre-survey.

**Implications**

The researched school can use this information to work with teachers to be more consistent with using Restorative Justice and other interventions before writing an office discipline referral for minor offenses. The school can also use the data to look at teachers conducting Restorative Justice with fidelity and ask those teachers to mentor other teachers who are having issues implementing Restorative Justice in their classrooms. The results also mean that students will respond to interventions if implemented with fidelity.

The researched school could reduce the number of office discipline referrals and increase instructional minutes in classrooms. The research showed a correlation between teachers' positive perception on male students and using Restorative Justice techniques. Research indicated that Restorative Justice can be effective in lowering discipline. "A transformation to a restorative justice model would enable schools to emphasize social engagement over social control which could reduce the use of exclusionary discipline, allow for the reintegration of "problem" students, and ultimately create a true school community" (Payne & Welch, 2013, p. 19).

The researched school can also use this data to argue that it is necessary for training teachers about writing referrals without any classroom interventions. The data indicates that professional development is necessary to ensure that teachers and staff are implementing the interventions with fidelity. Professional development needs to be ongoing for teachers and can be completed by Restorative Justice Coaches. The research supported the need for Restorative Justice Coaches to return to the building, because ongoing training is supported by the research. Teachers begin to stop using Restorative



Justice techniques after a couple of months. The Restorative Coaches could be used to help teachers with continued professional development. After this study, the researched school cut the Restorative Justice Coaches, because the positions were grant funded, provided by the Healthy Schools grant. This grant was already granted to the school and was not related to the study.

The elimination of the Restorative Justice Coaches ended a support for teachers when implementing Restorative Justice in classrooms. Coaches could go into the classroom and ensure that teachers were conducting circles, mediations, and conferencing with fidelity. All teachers in the school were given the option of working with the Restorative Justice Coaches when the positions were filled. One teacher in the study inquired about the Restorative Coach support, but did not follow through with the referral. This researcher believes that teachers did not want coaches in their classroom, because they felt that they would be judged on classroom management or even instruction from the Restorative Justice Coach, who was their peer. The Restorative Justice Coaches also facilitated Peer Jury after school. With the elimination of the Peer Jury, the students with minor offenses received the traditional consequences that led to progressive discipline. Progressive discipline can and does lead to suspensions depending on the infraction.

Schools could also use this research to train administrators in Restorative Justice so that when students enter the discipline office with a referral, the administrator can look at alternatives to out-of-school suspensions.

On a statewide level, the state representatives could provide funding for professional development to school districts so that schools would use Restorative Justice

with fidelity. The data from this study shows that teachers did not know much about Restorative Justice, but they were educated about it when they were trained and could effectively use it in their classrooms. Since SB100 bill was passed by the state, the state of Illinois should also supply Restorative Justice training to teachers. This research indicates that teachers gain more knowledge of the practices when they are trained, but there is limited research on how Restorative Justice is reducing suspensions and/or expulsions. The teachers then have more tools to use in the classroom instead of sending the students to the discipline office.

### **Recommendations**

The researcher recommends that schools use Restorative Justice in collaboration with other interventions. This will allow teachers and staff to use more than just Restorative Justice, in case students stop responding to Restorative Justice techniques at the end of the year, as indicated in this research data. The researcher recommends that schools hire coordinators to oversee PBIS and Restorative Justice. The main job duties of these coordinators would be to coordinate, implement, and oversee these two interventions to ensure they are implemented with fidelity. This is in contrast to the duties of the coaches, who would work with teachers to implement Restorative Justice techniques or PBIS.

The researcher also recommends that schools expand their offering of social work services, along with progressive discipline. Gherardi and Whittlesey-Jerome (2018) concluded that social workers address non-academic issues that affect students in the classroom. Social workers address attendance issues, discipline issues, promoting positive interventions, and they have been case managers for Special Education. Social

workers advocate for macro changes to help with student success (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018).

Social workers in the researched school work with students who are on IEPs. The researcher recommends the hiring of more social workers to work with students that do not have IEPs. The researched school has an outside agency that supplies counseling services in the school, but the student must have access to certain insurance plans. The researcher recommends that the school district work with the agency to provide another counselor that would work with a limited number of students without healthcare insurance limitations.

The researcher recommends that the district hire a psychiatrist to diagnose and treat students that have mental disabilities. In the area where the researched school is located, psychiatric services are difficult to obtain. A psychiatrist on campus could reduce the number of students not receiving mental health assistance. It would also help manage behavior because students would have access to prescriptions that they need for mental health. The research does not imply that these interventions should replace discipline, but they may serve as a preventative method before the inappropriate student behavior calls for a discipline referral to the principal's office.

The researcher recommends that the Restorative Justice technique of Peer Juries be implemented in schools. During the data collection process, the researcher and the Restorative Justice Coaches conducted Peer Juries. The researcher was not aware of the students' participation when they were referred to Peer Jury. The teachers were also not identified as participants in Peer Jury. Peer Juries could provide a needed forum for students who do not feel that they received the adequate punishment for the infraction.

Teachers must commit to implementing Restorative Justice techniques with fidelity for the process to be successful. Teachers who state they will use Restorative Justice techniques but are inconsistent with interventions and discipline will not see progress. According to the student interviews, the students reported that some teachers were not implementing Restorative Justice techniques. They may report to other teachers that the techniques are not working in their room and will change the positive view of Restorative Justice. The researcher recommends that all teachers, staff, and administrators in the building receive Restorative Justice training, and that before a student can receive a disciplinary referral for a minor offense, the teacher must implement some Restorative Justice technique.

Professional development should occur regularly to ensure that staff members have refresher courses through the school year. Providers of Restorative Justice professional developments should also have a follow up session for coaches to ensure that they are receiving the support for the first year. The researcher recommends that the school districts conduct the trainings once a quarter. Another recommendation is that the school provide the staff and teachers with Restorative Justice Coaches to help support them with conducting any circles, conferences, and other techniques needed. Implementation of Peer Juries should occur for minor offenses and be communicated to all staff and students before forming the Peer Jury.

The researcher recommends that future studies should consist of choosing one Restorative Justice technique and studying outcomes with African American females to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions. Choosing one technique could give more in-depth data on the success of the technique versus focusing on all of the

techniques. During the data collection, teachers used Restorative Justice with the Black females also, but that data was not analyzed as part of this study.

Another challenge was the disruption of class time for students and teachers. The Research Assistant tried to make data collection as convenient and unobtrusive as possible. Thirty students who took part were called out of class once a month for 10 to 15 minutes and these students sometimes missed instructional time. When the Research Assistant completed classroom observations, some students would stop work to ask why she was in the room, even though the Research Assistant went every month.

As an alternative, future researchers may decide not to include classroom observations in the data collection process. Data could come from the other data collection resources used in this research study, so it would not interrupt the classroom instruction. For example, only journals and interviews could be used in a replicated study.

Other challenges included teacher submissions of weekly journals. Teachers had many competing responsibilities through the data collection period, and study participation was an added responsibility for all participants. Some teachers would forget to turn weekly journals in so the research assistant had to send emails or call the teacher to ask for the journals. Some teachers would also forget to schedule their monthly interview. The research assistant had to ensure that teachers were interviewed monthly. The researcher recommends using three research assistants to help with future studies. This researcher would assign one research assistant to work with the teachers to ensure that they complete their weekly journals on time and have them submitted. Collecting journals from teachers can become complicated and confusing. This complicated task should be assigned to just one research assistant. The second research assistant could

oversee the monthly student interviews and student surveys. This would allow faster feedback for the researcher. The third research assistant could be assigned to monthly teacher interviews and observations with the teacher. Having all of these responsibilities fall on a single research assistant was burdensome, and so the researcher recommends that the responsibilities be distributed.

### **Discussion**

During this study, the researcher believed that the Restorative Justice would help the researched school when implemented with fidelity by fully committed teachers. The research study revealed that at the beginning of the study, teachers were very invested. However, by the time the study was almost complete, the teachers were using Restorative Justice techniques much less frequently. The decrease of techniques began in February and continued through the end of the data collection. There were some teachers who requested the help of the Restorative Justice Coaches, but they did not follow up when they were given the referrals. Students also reported to the research assistant that some teachers were not using any Restorative Justice techniques before they received an office discipline referral.

Restorative Justice can be useful for K-12 schools, but the techniques must be used consistently. The weekly journals showed that over half of the teachers stopped conducting any Restorative Justice techniques, because they had become too time consuming. Teachers might continue to use the Restorative Justice techniques if they were used as a stress management option instead of a way to alleviate discipline. “Teachers may find personal stress venues, or may choose to find their coping mechanisms through professional opportunities” (Clement, 2017, pg.135).

**Conclusion**

This mixed-methods study explored the use of Restorative Justice with African American male students. The researched school was a Midwestern urban high school. The students who took part were males in the ninth and 10th grade. Teacher participants taught ninth and 10th grade. Thirty male students and 30 teachers took part in the study.

After receiving training, the teachers completed weekly journals documenting their use and perceptions of Restorative Justice in their classrooms. The research assistant conducted monthly observations and monthly interviews with the teachers. The teachers also completed pre- and post-assessments of their understanding of Restorative Justice. The students completed a pre- and post-surveys to collect data about the classroom environment and to determine if there was any difference when the teachers used Restorative Justice techniques. Data collection occurred from November to May.

The study concluded that teachers gained significant knowledge of Restorative Justice techniques when they were trained, and that such training should be reinforced regularly to ensure that the techniques are implemented consistently. When the techniques were used, students perceived them as effective.

Consideration of Restorative Justice also affords teachers the opportunity to reflect on their practices regarding discipline. When successfully implemented, Restorative Justice techniques can have a positive and even dramatic effect on the classroom. What is more, these techniques can provide a springboard for building relationships and facilitating communication and understanding between students and teachers.

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**Appendix A: Weekly Teacher Journal Questions**

1. What Restorative Justice practice methods have you used this week?
2. How often did you use Restorative Justice practices methods in class this week and for what reasons?
3. Describe the male student's response to the methods.



**Appendix B: Teacher Professional Development Pre-/Post-Assessment**

1. What do you know about Restorative Justice?
2. Do Restorative Justice techniques reduce discipline?
3. How do students respond to the Restorative Justice techniques?
4. Describe any discipline concerns you observe in your class.
5. Describe one or two classroom management strategies you utilize in our classroom.
6. Would you use restorative circles in your classroom?
7. If students are sent to the “peer jury” instead of the administrative office for an incident regarding discipline would a student’s behavior change? If yes, how?
8. Describe how Restorative Justice can be utilized in hallway supervision.
9. How frequently do you believe students would participate in Restorative Justice techniques in the classroom?

**Appendix C: (Student Pre-/Post-Survey)**

Restorative Justice works in your classroom. (Circle One)

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I would positively respond to teachers if Restorative Justice was used by all of my teachers. (Circle One)

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I would positively respond to staff if Restorative Justice was used by all of all school staff. (Circle One)

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I would positively respond to staff if they used other resolutions to a conflict before sending me to the office.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

If I knew the expectations of my teacher, I would follow them.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Teachers give me an opportunity to explain my behavior before they send me to the discipline office.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I feel all male students are given the same opportunity as me to explain their behavior.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

If you disagree with the previous question, which groups of male students are given different opportunities to explain their behavior.

- White male students
- African-American male students
- Asian-American male students
- Native-American male students

My principal gives me an opportunity to explain my behavior before he/she gives me a consequence.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I have one adult in the building that I can talk to when I am upset.

- Strongly Disagree

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I feel that the staff in my school are fair to all students.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree