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Restorative Practices in Schools and its Relationship to Decreasing Discipline Infractions in African American Males

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by

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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.

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Abstract

After passing the Zero Tolerance policies in 1994, schools began to have a substantial increase in the number of suspensions especially among African Americans and students of color. The researcher wanted to explore alternative methods to traditional discipline to ascertain if it would decrease the number of suspensions in African American boys. The purpose of this mixed-methods study on restorative practices is to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative discipline methods such as Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities in Midwestern urban inner city elementary school of African American male students, in third grade. There has been a true void in addressing the substantial amount of suspensions in African American boys. This mixed method study included collecting secondary data from two different Midwestern urban elementary schools information system to compare the discipline in African American boys particularly in third grade, which is known as the grade level that is the school to prison pipeline, one school that applied alternative methods to discipline and another school that did not apply alternative methods of Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities instead of traditional discipline methods. In addition, interviews, surveys, and questionnaires were completed with the schools' administrators, dean of students, school counselors and social workers. The participants overwhelmingly felt that the alternative methods of Restorative Practices and Mindful activities instead of traditional discipline methods decreased the number of suspensions in African American boys. However, the statistical data provided information that Restorative Practices and Mindful activities instead of traditional discipline methods did not decrease the number of African American third grade boys who were suspended. It was also determined; however, there was a significant difference

between the suspensions of African American third grade boys and non-African American third grade boys. The data collected from this mixed method study can further assist what type alternative methods need to be employed to further decrease the number of suspension in students who are African American, in particular third grade African American boys, other than traditional methods.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background of the Study

The history of the school board for St. Louis Public Schools started with its founding in 1833 and the development of elementary schools in 1838 (City of St. Louis, n.d.). This particular history of how schools developed in Missouri provides a context of how the school systems began in the state. Several years later, the Missouri public school system in the greater metropolitan area, known as St. Louis Public Schools, opened its first high school. This was the beginning of the structure of the St. Louis City public school system. William Torrey Harris built St. Louis Public Schools into a national model during the 1870s after realizing that education was more than just the proverbial Three R's of reading, writing, and arithmetic (City of St. Louis, n.d.). The city of St. Louis and the surrounding counties became the setting of dramatic school reform efforts for almost 40 years (City of St. Louis, n.d.). These efforts began in the 1970s and resulted in the 1980 court-ordered desegregation program, under which the Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Council (VICC) began transferring thousands of African American children living in the city of St. Louis to suburban school districts (City of St. Louis, n.d.).

Although St. Louis Public Schools and some private schools were providing education for St. Louis city residents, it fell short of what type of education the community wanted for the students. The VICC program was the first to provide St. Louis City residents another option to a then-failing school system (City of St. Louis, n.d.). Moreover, the VICC program represented one of the first efforts nationally to

provide parents a choice when their local schools were failing. The public pushed for other options outside of the VICC program, later know as charter schools.

The concept of creating public charter schools as alternatives to traditional public schools was first brought to public attention in the late 1980s by a small group of policymakers and educators (Chen, 2017, para 5.). "The notion gained traction in the early 1990s, and in 1991" (Chen, 2017, para 5). Missouri became the first state to pass a charter school law. The Charter School law provided other academic options to citizens in Missouri other than state public schools. This option would allow Missouri residents to choose a school that offered a unique learning environment, such as a school whose science classes were conducted in the field, or an offer of alternative learning methodologies, such as a specialization in arts education (Chen, 2017, para 11.).

In 1999, Missouri state legislation included the authorization of charter schools that then served 7,700 children in St. Louis at the same time (National Association of Charter School Authorizers, 2009, p. 6).

Charter Schools were independent public schools that were free from some rules and regulations that applied to traditional public school districts (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MODESE], n.d.). The state of Missouri required all charter schools to have a University that would sponsor them and provide support and accountability for operations. Therefore, charter schools were afforded the ability to have flexibility, and their school sponsors would be there to hold them accountable for school results overall. Like public schools, charter schools were non-sectarian, did not discriminate in their admission policies, and may not charge tuition or fees.

School District Achieve (a pseudonym) was founded in April of 2014. The conception of starting a school came from Dr. Susan Uchitelle. Uchitelle decided to develop a new paradigm shift in the inner city in urban education. She developed this concept amongst colleagues and brought the thought into fruition. At the time of this writing, School District Achieve comprised of three urban elementary schools; two of the elementary schools consisted of grades prekindergarten to sixth grade, and one elementary school consisted of pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. In addition, School District Achieve had two middle schools with grades sixth through eight and two high school programs. School District Achieve had seven graduating classes, at the time of this writing.

School District Achieve developed the school programming by researching, networking with other schools, obtaining sponsorship, and by procuring a board of directors and company to manage the day-to-day operations. In addition, School District Achieve worked to secure a location, financing, and procure staff, as well as canvasing the neighborhood to promote the idea that School District Achieve was the best option for the children's education.

The first school, School A, opened in 2003 at School District Achieve, North campus. School A comprised of 245 children in grades kindergarten through third. The second school District Achieve opened was School B, located in a historical urban city area. School B opened in 2004 and comprised of grades kindergarten through five. School District Achieve continued to add to their Local Education Agency (LEA), a third school named School C, located in an urban setting in the south part of town. School C opened in 2006 and comprised of grades kindergarten through fifth. Shortly thereafter

School District Achieve opened the first of their two high schools, School D, which began small by opening up with just grades nine and ten. Then in 2010, School District Achieve opened the fifth school in an urban midtown environment. This school had a primary focus in the arts, opened initially with just sixth through seventh grades, and grew each year by adding another grade level. School E serviced grades six through twelve, at the time of this writing.

School District Achieve had approximately 3,000 students in grades prekindergarten through high school. School District Achieve was a nonprofit public charter school. School District Achieve was provisionally accredited. It was completely self-managed and governed by a board of directors. The school district consisted of two separate university sponsors and board of directors that governed both schools. One LEA sponsored Schools A, B, C and D. The other LEA sponsored School E.

Moreover, the school districts profile for grades served, gender, race and ethnicity, free and reduced rate, students with IEPs, average daily attendance, teacher student ratio and classification of English Language Learners can be observed in Table 1. The ethnic groups with asterisks indicate that the number of students represented in this group was less than what MODESE (2016) would consider a significant number to report (less than 100).

Table 1 provides an overview of School District Achieve's district profile. It also provides insight that can help readers to understand the diversity and the needs of the community this school district serviced. Table 1 also indicates the percentage of ethnicities, ELL/Special Education, teacher-student ratio, percentage of students on free

and reduced lunch, the school gender count, grade level served, and the average daily attendance that School District Achieve serviced.

Table 1

School District Achieve District Profile

Grades Levels Served	Prek-12
Gender total number	Female: 1,454 Males 1,484
Race & Ethnicity percentage	African American 85.9%
	Asian *
	White *
	Hispanic *
Percentage of Free & Reduced Lunch	100%
Special Education percentage	7.9%
Average Daily Attendance percentage	74.5%
Teacher/Student Ratio	15/1
English Language Learners percentage	10.72%

Note. Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education School District Profile regarding all of MODESE School indicators (2016).

School District Achieve attendance overall fell in the 90% plus range, as attendance in an urban setting could be difficult to maintain for various social reasons. Table 2 outlines School District Achieve 's attendance percentages.

School District Achieve's attendance provides a frame of reference of the school's ability to have students to attend and provides a comparison of each school's attendance. Student attendance provides an avenue for students to be present to learn academically, socially, and emotionally. Walnut Park East was estimated at 97% African American and the remaining 3% was a mixture of White, Native American, and Asian (Census, 2010, para. 1).

Table 2

School District Achieve Attendance Percentages

Name of the School	2016 Attendance Percentage
School A	95.3
School B	91.3
School C	94.3
School D	85.5

District Neighborhood Demographics

The City of St. Louis was comprised of 79 different neighborhoods, each with its distinctive style and characteristics. Many of these neighborhoods had active community organizations and associations. Some charter schools were on the verge of closing, while others remained stable for decades, and still, others were striving for renewal.

> The City of St. Louis has two Walnut Park neighborhoods – an east and west. The boundary lines are between I-70 and West Florissant from Union to the city limits. Riverview is the line between the East and West Walnut Park neighborhoods. The Walnut Park East area is home for 4,115 residents. According to the 2010 US Census, 16% of the residents are under the age of 10 that correlates to 658 children. In addition, youth between the ages of 10-17 comprise 16% of the population in the Walnut Park East area. The total number of children and youth residing in Walnut Park East is approximately 1,316. (Census, 2010, para. 1)

Census (2010) data revealed 32% of households were single females with 66% single mothers with children under the age of 18-years-old (para. 1). The effects of growing up in single-parent households has been shown to go beyond economics,

increasing the risk of children dropping out of school, disconnecting from the labor force, and becoming teen parents (Mather, 2010). Mather (2010) noted that although many children were growing up in single parent homes, some succeeded, others faced significant challenges in making the transition to adulthood (para. 1). Children in lower-income, single-parent families, faced the most significant barriers to success in school and the workforce (Mather, 2010, para 1). At the time of this writing, nearly one-fourth (24%) of the 75 million children under age 18 lived in a single-mother family (Mather, 2010, para. 2, table 1).

According to the St. Louis City data from the Census Bureau (2010), Walnut Park East had 529 vacant homes. Many of these homes were dilapidated and neglected. They lined the streets in the areas where many of School B families resided and had a profound effect on the students and families' abilities to feel safe. These buildings were seen as places that could potentially be high crime hotspots. The crime statistics for School B are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Crime Rates for School B

Property Crimes		Violent Crimes	
Burglary	1,954	Assault	2,488
Theft	2,799	Murder	153
Motor Vehicle	1,069	Rape	0
Robbery	611		

Note. Census Bureau, 2010.

School District Achieve was located in a low impoverished urban area in St. Louis, Missouri. One of the two schools discussed in this dissertation is school B, located

in a historical urban city area of the city of St. Louis, Missouri. The neighborhood demographics for School B are represented in Table 4.

Table 4

School B Neighborhood Demographics

Population	4,310
African American Population	3, 995
White Population	53
Asian	2

Note. Census Bureau, 2010.

The second school in School District Achieve, School C, was located in an urban setting in the south part of town. School C neighborhood demographics are represented in Table 5.

Table 5

School C Neighborhood Demographics

Population	15,770
African American Population	8, 016
White Population	5,600
Asian	947

Note. Census Bureau, 2010.

MODESE Information on Discipline Collection

Section 160.261, RSMo, required the local board of education to establish rules for student conduct and that school district teachers, administrators, and staff hold every student accountable for any disorderly conduct in school (MODESE, n.d.). This included behavior on school property, including the school parking lot, playground, on the school bus, and during school-sponsored activities (MODESE, n.d.). The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE, n.d.) reported every year each

school district's behavioral infraction numbers, based on the school's enforcement of the student code of conduct.

Table 6

School District Achieve Discipline Data, 2016, per 100 Students

Enrollment	2,918
Total Number of Incidents	418
Incident Rate (per 100 students)	14.30
Type of Offense	
Alcohol (number | rate)	3 | 0.1
Drug (number | rate)	25 | 0.9
Tobacco (number | rate)	0 | 0.0
Violent Act (number | rate)	98 | 3.4
Weapon (number | rate)	6 | 0.2
Other (number | rate)	263 | 9.0
Type of Removal	
In-School Suspension (number | rate)	99 | 3.4
Out-of-School Suspension (number | rate)	319 | 10.9
Expulsion (number | rate)	0 | 0.0
Length of Removal	
10 Consecutive Days (number | rate)	240 | 8.2
More than 10 Consecutive Days (number | rate)	178 | 6.1

Note. MODESE (n.d.) Discipline Collection

In the several years previous to this writing, there was a rise in school suspensions, especially among African Americans. Table 6 includes School District Achieve 's 2016 Discipline Data, expressed per 100 students. The data reported provides information stating that out of 2,918 students there were a total of 418 incidents. Out of

every 100 students enrolled in School District Achieve 3.19 were suspended out of school.

MODESE (n.d.) measured student discipline and kept a record of student discipline data for public school students across the state. School District Achieve recognized that there was a concern from the district level and the state level regarding the increasing number of students suspended at an alarming rate. The identified students with high suspensions were more frequently African American males, in comparison to their counterparts. In efforts to address these concerns, School District Achieve piloted programming in two of their schools. This programming consisted of instituted Restorative Practices and Mindful Moments in their daily practices.

Purpose

The purpose of this mixed-methods study on restorative practices was to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative discipline methods, such as Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities in a midwestern urban inner city elementary school, specifically involving African American male students in third grade. Restorative Justice practices were a process involving the primary stakeholders in determining how best to repair the harm done by an offense. Participation is a voluntary, community-based response to criminal behavior that attempted to bring together the victim, the offender, and the community, in an effort to address the harm caused by the criminal behavior (Gonzalez, 2012). Mindful activities were self-regulation practices focusing on training attention and awareness, in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities, such as calmness, clarity, and concentration (Davis & Hayes, 2012). The researcher

examined these two alternative discipline methods in elementary schools, specifically third grade African American males.

The researcher analyzed the then-current discipline suspension data of African American male students in third grade via the district program's SWISS data, which indicated what the suspensions were for, as well as quantity. These data were used to verify if African American boys' suspensions decreased or increased, based on the alternative interventions applied, Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities. This study included speaking with administrators, counselors, and social workers regarding their use of the alternative discipline practices of Restorative Justice with third grade boys. The researcher then compared the school's data when using Restorative Justice in the LEA with another school in the LEA not using the Restorative Justice practice, but using traditional discipline methods with third grade boys. After completing the study, the researcher provided the data collected as a measuring tool and additional insight into the successes and or challenges of discipline interventions or the lack there of and its effects on African American Boys in third grade.

Rationale

High suspension rates in schools, at the time of this writing, had become a pressing issue; African American students and especially African American boys received more out-of-school suspensions and expulsions than their counterparts (Rudd, 2014). The researcher observed working in an urban educational setting in several capacities as a school counselor, assistant principal, and principal, and in several instances, the suspension rates for African American boys increased in contrast to other

ethnicities. These disproportionate numbers were to climb yearly, according to the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE, 2016a; 2016 b).

> According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016 a; 2016 b) required by Congress, showed that African-American K-12 students are 3.8 times as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions as white students. While 6% of all students received one or more out-of-school suspensions in the 2013-2014 school year, the percentage was 18% for African-American boys and 10% for African-American girls. By contrast, among white students, only 5% of boys and 2% of girls were suspended at least once, according to the data, released biannually by the department's Office of Civil Rights. (p. 3)

Across the nation, Black students appeared to be suspended at much higher rates than students of other races or ethnicities (Hoffman, Llagas, & Snyder, 2003). Many districts struggled, and due to this, local, state, and national governments looked into the disparities of their school discipline data. The government examined discipline data, due to the high rate of African-American students and especially boys having the highest rates of out-of-school suspensions. According to the Civil Rights Project (2000) a great deal of statistical and anecdotal evidence supported the conclusion that African American students were unfairly suspended and arbitrarily kicked out of school for incidents that could have been easily handled using alternative methods. Furthermore, this supported the research of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2008) where schools had an assumption that with zero discipline policies, this would provide an overall fair discipline policy for all students regardless of their race. However, according to the APA (2008), it was quite the contrary; the disproportionate discipline of students of color

continued to be a concern and the overrepresentation suspension and expulsion was found consistently for African American students.

According to Smith and Harper (2015), during the 2011-2012 academic year, Black students comprised only 18% of preschoolers in the United States, but were 42% of students suspended once and 48% of students suspended multiple times (p. 1). Another example, according to Mendez and Knoff's (2003) study, was Black students were being suspended at disproportionately high rates as early as elementary school in the district. Consistently, data supported that African American boys were suspended more, with no decrease of suspension on the horizon (Mendez & Knoff, 2003). There were then-currently a limited number of studies providing suggested interventions and/or solutions to the disproportionate number of suspensions for African American males.

Furthermore, the researcher noted the void in addressing the disproportionate number of suspensions among African American males with implementing alternative methods or interventions of restorative practices and mindfulness and its impact in the disproportionate suspensions among African American males in elementary schools. Restorative Practices was a social science that studied how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning, and decision making (Latimer, Dowden, & Muise, 2005). Restorative Justice was a process involving the primary stakeholders in determining how best to repair the harm done by an offense; it was a voluntary, community based response to criminal behavior that attempted to bring together the victim, the offender, and the community, in an effort to address the harm caused by the criminal behavior (Gonzalez, 2012).

This research study was developed out of the lack of resources to attempt to decrease suspension in schools, especially in urban education among African American males. It was surmised that the number of suspensions of African American males in urban education could be abated. In addition, this research could provide some insight into alternative discipline methods or interventions instead of just suspending students, comprised of Restorative Practices and Mindfulness Activities. The then-current research did not present how restorative practices and trauma inform (mindfulness) the disproportionate suspensions among African American males in elementary schools, specifically third grade. This study could also provide the researched school district with information on how implementing restorative practices and mindfulness addressed the disproportionate number of suspensions among third grade African American males, and assisted with students staying in school versuss suspensions for behavioral infractions.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: What alternative discipline methods or interventions could decrease the number of suspensions in African American boys in third grade?

RQ2: What association do Restorative Practices and Mindfulness Activities have in decreasing the number of suspensions in African American boys?

Alternate H1: Third grade African American boys in a school with traditional discipline methods have more suspensions compared to the third grade African American boys in a school with Restorative Justice discipline methods.

Alternate H2: There is a difference between third grade African American boys' and non-African American boys' suspension rates in a school with traditional discipline methods.

Alternate H3: There is a difference between third grade African American boys' and non-African American boys' suspension rates in a school with Restorative Justice discipline methods.

Limitations

There were limitations involved in this study. One of the limitations apparent in this study was the inexperience of the teachers on the third grade team at School A. School A had high turnover of teachers in third grade during the course of the school year. In addition, to teacher turnover there was a change in the administration during the course of the year. Teachers were replaced during the school year, who quit and were replaced with substitute teachers, who may have not been trained in the processes of the school. In addition, the researcher then-currently worked in the study district, which may have caused some limitations through bias. For example, administrators may not have wanted to be honest if they thought programing was not effective. In addition, faculty may have noted the need for change but not provided viable feedback to support a necessary modification.

Definitions of Relevant Terms

Mindfulness - is the act of being intensely aware of what you are sensing and feeling at every moment without interpretation or judgment (Davis & Hayes, 2012).

Mindful activities - self-regulation practices focuses on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calmness and clarity (Davis & Hayes, 2012).

Restorative conferencing - is an approach to addressing wrongdoing in various settings in a variety of ways. A restorative conference is a structured meeting between offenders, victims, and both parties' family and friends, in which they deal with the consequences of the crime or wrongdoing and decide how best to repair the harm (Wachtel, 2013).

Restorative Justice - is a process involving the primary stakeholders in determining how best to repair the harm done by an offense. A voluntary, community-based response to criminal behavior that attempts to bring together the victim, the offender, and the community, in an effort to address the harm caused by the criminal behavior (Gonzalez, 2012). Although it originated from criminal justice, the field of cognitive behavior adopted the use of restorative practices for schools.

Restorative Practices - is a social science that studies how to build social capital, and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision making (Latimer et al., 2005).

Self-Regulation - is the ability to monitor and control our own behavior, emotions, or thoughts, altering them in accordance with the demands of the situation (Cook & Cook, 2009).

Social Capital - is defined as the connections among individuals (Putnam, 1995).

Trauma - a response to a negative external event or series of events, which surpasses the child's ordinary coping skills. It comes in many forms and includes experiences, such as maltreatment, witnessing violence, or the loss of a loved one (McIneny & McKlindon, 2014).

Summary

The purpose of this mixed-methods study on restorative practices was to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative discipline methods, such as Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities in a midwestern, urban, inner city, elementary school of African American male students, in third grade. In Chapter One, the researcher set the foundation for this study by providing the background information regarding the two schools studied within School District Achieve. Chapter One outlined and detailed the premises of this study and provided the terminology and definitions needed to receive a clear understanding of this study. Lastly, the rationale provided regarding this study acts as a guide for this researcher to delve into the interventions of Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities and its correlation to decreasing the school discipline data in third grade African American boys.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review focuses on a pressing issue in schools, at the time of this writing. African American students, especially African American boys, received more out-of-school suspensions and expulsions than other ethnic groups, such as White, Asian, and Hispanic students. This literature review also provides some insight into alternative discipline methods or interventions to suspending students, such as Restorative Practices and Mindfulness Activities.

According to the USDOE (2016), African American boys represented disproportionate numbers of being suspended, and the numbers were climbing yearly. The number of African American boys and minorities were increasing in suspensions as clarified in the USDOE reports. Nationwide, African Americans were suspended at a significantly higher amount than other ethnicities (Hoffman et al., 2003). In part, many districts struggled with the local, state, and national governments looking into the disparities, due to the high rate of African-American students, especially boys. According to the Civil Rights Project (2000), statistical anecdotal evidence supported the conclusion that children were unfairly suspended and arbitrarily kicked out of school for incidents that could have been easily handled using alternative methods. The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014) reported, nationally, over three million public school students received at least one out-of-school suspension and 130,000 were expelled during the 2011-2012 academic year.

The Center for Civil Rights Remedies, at the Civil Rights Project at UCLA (as cited in Losen & Gillespie, 2012) discussed the suspensions lead to larger problems.

Losen and Gillespie (2012) stated, “Well over three million children are estimated to have lost instructional ‘seat time’ and to have been suspended from school, often with no guarantee of adult supervision, in 2009– 2010” (p. 10). That is about the number of individual children it would take to fill every seat in every major league baseball park and every NFL stadium in America, combined (Losen & Gillespie, 2012, p. 10)

The alarming number of suspensions started a ripple effect of school-to-prison pipeline. The U.S. Secretary of Education, John King (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2016) stated, “The findings bare the USA’s systemic failure to educate all students equally” (p. 1). These disparities affected students in the state of Missouri, as well. The Ferguson Florissant School District was placed in the public eye after the Michael Brown case for racial disparities in school discipline. Brown was a former student of the Ferguson Florissant School District. His death created the epicenter for the beginning dialogue in the county of Ferguson/Florissant regarding how students in these districts, for years, were known to have high suspension rates for African American students. In examining the Michael Brown case, Howard (2015) outlined that the case revealed that statewide Missouri elementary schools suspended more than 14% of their Black students at least once in 2011-2012, compared with only 1.8% of their White students (p. 24). The Ferguson effect was known as the attitude towards the criminal justice system and its lingering effects in schools, such as the Ferguson Florissant School District, where Brown attended.

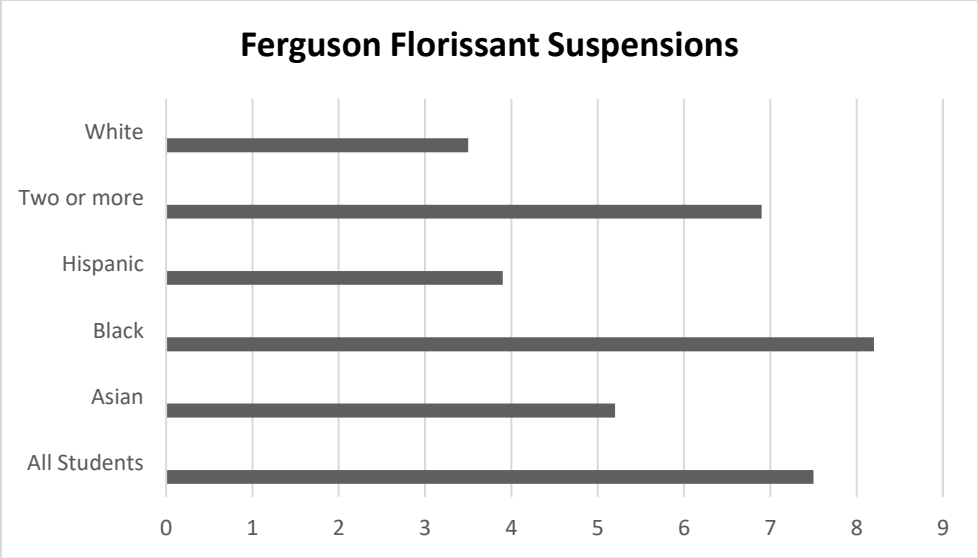


Figure 1. Ferguson Florissant school suspension data. Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2014).

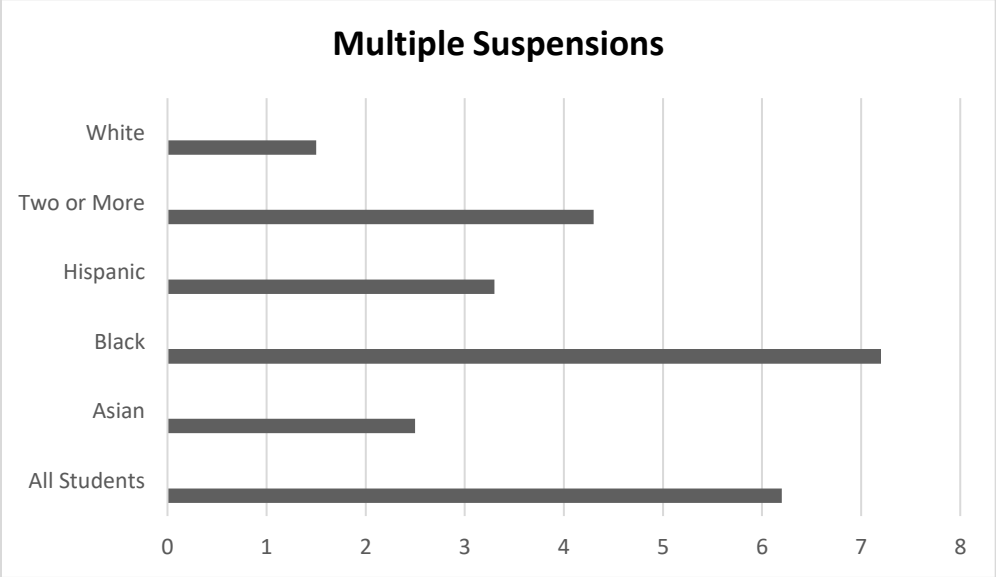


Figure 2. Racial disparities for Ferguson Florissant students with multiple suspensions. *Source:* U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2014).

Figure 1 shows the disproportionate number of African American students disciplined in the Ferguson Florissant school district. There was a significant difference in the suspension overall per capita of students, according the U. S. Department of

Education Civil Rights (2014) data collection. Figure 2 shows that higher proportions of the district's Black students were suspended than their peers.

The higher proportion of African American students having higher suspensions was alarming, when compared to other elementary school districts across the nation. The analysis indicated that the Normandy school district, where Ferguson shooting victim Brown attended school, was one of the highest-suspending districts in the nation, with the overall suspension rate of Black students close to 50% (Howard, 2015, pp. 24-26). However, the APA (2008) reported quite the contrary, that the disproportionate discipline of students of color continued to be a concern and the overrepresentation of suspension and expulsion was found to be consistent for African American students (p. 8).

Moreover, Gonzalez (2012) noted that punitive discipline policies tripled the national prison population from 1987 to 2007 (p. 2). Moreover, Gonzalez (2012) documented that punitive school discipline policies deprived students of educational opportunities and failed to make schools a safer place (p. 2). According to Staats (2014), the criminal juvenile system increasingly handled student disciplinary cases for minor, nonviolent offenses. Thus, it was vital that schools' principals, assistant principals, and superintendents work to address the role of implicit bias and end racially disproportionate discipline (Staats, 2014).

Alternative Methods

To combat the disparities in discipline, some districts were implementing alternative methods or interventions to address the disproportionate suspensions among African American males in elementary schools. Schools and school administrators turned to an intervention called Restorative Practices. Restorative Practices was a social science

that studied how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning, and decision making (Latimer et al., 2005). Gonzalez (2012) defined Restorative Justice as a process involving the primary stakeholders in determining how best to repair the harm done by an offense. This process provided a different approach to addressing school discipline without just suspending students. It was a voluntary, community-based response to criminal behavior that attempted to bring together the victim, the offender, and the community, in an effort to address the harm caused by the criminal behavior (Gonzalez, 2012). Restorative Practices started being used for criminals as educators saw the benefits they began using it in schools and other arenas.

Suspensions

As cited in Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002), zero tolerance policies disproportionally impacted minority children and children with disabilities (p. 317). The article addressed that zero tolerance policies fostered an environment where there were no opportunities to bond with adults and provided troubled students with an unlimited amount of unsupervised free time (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002, p. 317). The disproportionate discipline of minority students, in particular Black students, was a real problem that played out for millions of kids and families each year (Hoffman, 2017).

According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014) there were disproportionately high suspension/expulsion rates for students of color. Moreover, Black students were suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than White students (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). While African American males then-currently made up 17% of the total school population, they

accounted for 32% percent of the suspensions and 30% of all expulsions (Riddick, 2010, p. 151).

Moreover, as cited by Riddick (2010), Nashville, Tennessee, then-recently received nationwide media attention for an alarming trend highlighted in a Web article entitled, “Nashville Middle School Suspends 50 Percent of Black Boys” (p. 151). In Nashville this disparity was not only occurring at the middle school level, it was occurring at local elementary schools, too (Riddick, 2010). Although disciplinary practices that removed students from classrooms and schools were used widely, their use was not distributed equally across the population (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008).

Interestingly, the reasons Black and White youth were sent to the office were different, with Black students being sent to the office for more subjective reasons, such as “disrespect” and “perceived threat” (Wallace et al, 2008, p. 151). White students were more likely to be referred for more objective reasons that included smoking, vandalism, and leaving school without permission (Wallace et al., 2008). Urban, African American male adolescents experienced disproportionately higher rates of discipline referrals, suspension, and expulsion, which was attributed to numerous ecological factors, including cultural conflicts and misunderstandings between the students’ culture of origin and school (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005).

A study done around the world found that the majority of school suspensions occurred in response to relatively minor incidents that did not threaten school safety (Alvarez, 2014). The top three infractions were tardiness, absenteeism, and physical conflicts between students (Alvarez, 2014). Table 7 displays the number and type of

offenses for which students were suspended, some which could be addressed in ways other than suspension (Alvarez, 2014).

Table 7

Suspension Offenses and Percentages

Discipline reported by Principals in their schools

Type of infraction	Percentage of students suspended
Student Tardiness	40%
Student Absenteeism/Class Cutting	25%
Physical Conflicts Among Students	21%
Student Tobacco Use	14%
Verbal Abuse of Teachers	12%
Student Drug Use	9%
Vandalism of School Property	8%
Student Alcohol Use	7%
Trespassing	4%
Possession of Weapons	2%

Note. (Alvarez, 2014).

Table 7 indicates schools utilized suspensions at a higher rate for far fewer infractions. An example of this would be students who were tardy were suspended for what most schools would utilize in-school suspensions or detention. In essence, infractions for suspension could be diminished, if other alternative discipline methods could be utilized, while analyzing to see if suspensions were the correct response to infractions or an overall deterrence to students repeating the same offense. In retrospect, Shollenberger (2013) compared suspension to self-reported behavior, including property offenses and violent behaviors, and revealed that substantial shares of suspended youth had not engaged in serious delinquency by the time they were first suspended from school (p. 2). This is an example of one of the first causes of discrepancies in student

suspensions and accumulation of suspension. Furthermore, in light of these findings, policymakers were interested in improving educational outcomes for all youth (Shollenberger, 2013, p. 2). Policy makers wanted to ensure equity across racial and ethnic groups. In order to do this, policy makers must begin to promote alternatives to suspension, as well as identifying and supporting schools with high rates of exclusionary discipline (Shollenberger, 2013, p. 2).

Smith and Harper (2015) cited during the 2011-2012 academic year, Black students comprised only 18% of preschoolers in the United States, but were 42% of students suspended once and 48% of students suspended multiple times from preschools. Mendez and Knoff (2003) confirmed Black students were suspended at disproportionately high rates as early as elementary school. Data supported that African American boys were suspended more, with no decrease of suspension on the horizon (Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Triplett, Allen, and Lewis (2014) deduced collective actions signaled a paradigmatic shift in the debate over school discipline, from a racialized perspective based on fear and punishment to one that more closely adhered to the ideals of educational equity embodied in the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision.

Moreover, numerous studies also reported rates of suspension and expulsion that were two-to-more than three times higher for African American students than their White peers (Sandomierski, 2011). A summary of 12 separate studies, which spanned over 20 years, examined the overrepresentation of minority students in school suspensions and expulsions (Sandomierski, 2011). It documented that ethnic minority students, particularly African American males, were overrepresented in exclusionary discipline consequences as early as 1975 (Sandomierski, 2011). A 2010 study found that among

students classified as overtly aggressive, African Americans were more likely to be disciplined than any other group (Rudd, 2014). However, Rudd, 2014 mentioned this trend varied, based on the racial background of the teacher. As cited by Winn (2015), there was a preponderance of evidence demonstrating that punitive consequences were meted out in staggeringly disproportionate numbers to students of color, even though these students were no more likely to deserve punishment.

As cited in an article by Green (2015), the discrepancies were particularly egregious in certain parts of the country. As *The New York Times* reported, a new analysis of the federal data found that Black students in 13 Southern states were suspended or expelled "at rates overwhelmingly higher than white children" (Green, 2015, p. 161). A plethora of research on student discipline emphasized the inequities surrounding the distribution of disciplinary actions taken by schools and school districts in regards to behavior, particularly for African American males (Butler, Joubert, & Lewis, 2009). In an effort to combat disciplinary bias, the federal government warned every school district in the country that they faced legal action if their discipline policies had a "disparate impact" — "a disproportionate and unjustified effect" — on students of a particular race (Green, 2015, para. 5). Butler, Joubert, & Lewis (2009) conducted a study based on this bias of 6,301 behavior occurrences committed by African American males in a K-12 urban school district in the mid-western region of the United States; a counterargument suggesting that African American males were not the primary culprits of disruption. Still, despite widespread concern about the "discipline gap," the recommendation has sparked a good deal of backlash, including from pundits who

speculated that children of color would actually be the ones most harmed (Green, 2015, para. 6).

Interpreted federal data showed that more than 60 years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision public school was a different place for many minority students than it was for White students (Camera, 2016). *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), at the time of this writing, acknowledged as one of the greatest Supreme Court decisions of the 20th century, unanimously held that the racial segregation of children in public schools violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. *Brown v. Board of Education* of 1954 was justifiably needed to assist with providing a quality education to all students.

Sandomierski (2011) noted, although *Brown v. Board of Education* of 1954 was to provide racial segregation and equality, in one school where Black students represented 16% of the student population, 32% to 42% of Black students were suspended or expelled. In comparison, White students represented a range between 31% and 40% of students suspended or expelled, but were 51% of the student population (Sandomierski, 2011). Although the number of students suspended (see Figure 3) seemed similar, there was a discrepancy in that the Black students represented a smaller portion of the total population. Black students were only 16% of the population in comparison to the White students (Figure 3), but they had a higher percentage of suspensions. Therefore, although Whites made up more of the population in the school, it showed there was a disproportionate number of suspensions for Black students. In addition, Figure 3 shows there were further discrepancies among expulsions and in-school suspensions. Figure 3 compares White, Black, Asian, Native American, and

American Indian students. Moreover, within all of the ethnicities displayed in Figure 3, Black students had the highest percentages of discipline shown.

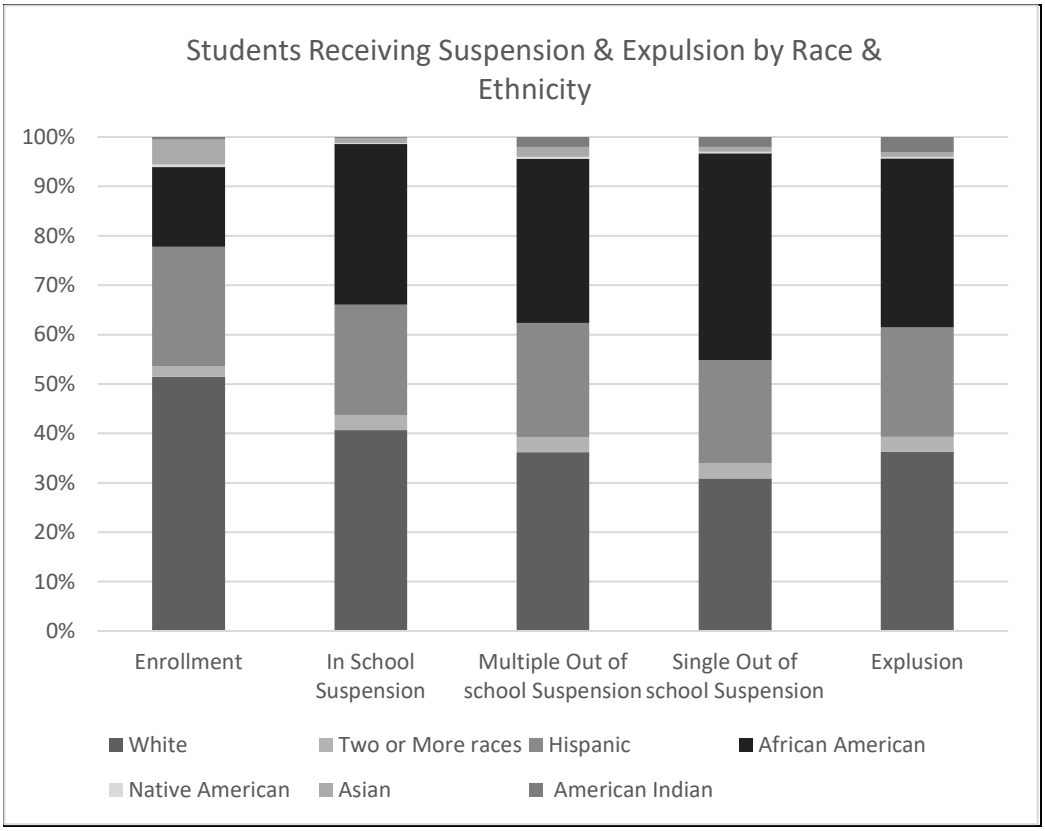


Figure 3. School discipline among multiple ethnicities nationally (Sandomierski, 2011).

Disciplinary exclusion through suspension and expulsion deprived misbehaving students of educational opportunities, while still generally failing to make schools safer places for other students (Suvall, 2009). Punitive discipline unilaterally imposed punishment on offenders, thereby failing to turn disciplinary violations into learning experiences (Suvall, 2009). This missed opportunity was particularly problematic, because of the socializing function of schools (Suvall, 2009). School was where students learned and developed a sense of community and socialization skills (Suvall, 2009). Therefore, schools should provide an environment or milieu whereby students obtain appropriate and typical social skills. Suvall (2009) noted school communities, comprised

of students, teachers, and administrators, had long been viewed as fulfilling important roles in affirming democratic norms and other positive social values. If schools did not address disciplinary violations in ways that promoted positive norms within the school community, then their disciplinary policies were not meeting the needs of the school environment (Suvall, 2009).

Zero-Tolerance

The Gun-Free Schools Act (1994) imposed a federal requirement on school districts to adopt a gun-free schools position that required zero-tolerance policies and minimum one-year expulsions from school for gun possession, in exchange for federal funds for school districts (as cited in Cerrone, 1999, p. 131). Schools adopting a zero-tolerance policy contributed to an increasing number of students suspended out of school. Most school-based zero tolerance policies initially focused on weapons and substance use; many schools later expanded these policies to include infractions that had relatively little impact on school safety; for example, insubordination and tardiness (Wallace et al., 2008). Zero tolerance policies were commonly used during the early 1990s and called for students to be suspended for fighting, brandishing a weapon, or possessing drugs at school.

Zero tolerance policies were based on the theory that the threat of removal would deter students from committing serious violations of school rules, or that the actual punishment would be so aversive that the inappropriate behavior would not recur (Williams, 2016). The term ‘zero tolerance’ referred to policies that dealt with severe punishment for all offenses, ostensibly in an effort to treat all offenders equally in the spirit of fairness and rule breaking (Henault, 2001). Research showed that these

behavioral thought process origins come from B. F. Skinner. Whereas, the behavior that was wanted would be reinforced by a stimulus; and likewise, an unwanted behavior would be given a punishment or negative response (Skinner, 1953). Therefore, it was akin to a student suspended for fighting; discouraging the same behavior the next time they indulged in the same type of behavioral infraction.

However in fact, because students were sometimes able to avoid detection and/or escape punishment, the consequence itself may become an intermittent reinforcement, whereas, sometimes the punishment or discipline was not consistent, making it more difficult to extinguish the behavior than it had been before the then-current offense (Williams, 2016). In addition, as cited by Williams (2016), studies of school discipline consistently found that suspension was one of the most frequently-used discipline techniques. This technique was a leading cause of disproportionate suspensions for African American boys. In contrast to a punishment, suspension was delivered to punish an already committed inappropriate act or behavior; it rarely had a logical functional or instructive connection (Mendez & Knoff, 2003).

Therefore, school districts, legislators, education scholars, and the Obama Administration were plunging headfirst into the fight against disproportionate discipline within K-12 schools, making disproportionate discipline a hot topic in the education and school law world, at the time of this writing (Hoffman, 2017). Disproportionate discipline discussion came about from the overwhelming number of students suspended from school. According to the USDOE (2016), of the 49 million students enrolled in public schools in 2011-2012, 3.5 million students were suspended in-school; 3.45 million students were suspended out-of-school; and 130,000 students were expelled

(para. 1). There was also a growing amount of evidence suggesting that these policies increased the vulnerability for students who historically received unequal treatment in school (Williams, 2016).

In the decade previous to this writing, an estimated 7%, or approximately 3.1 million students in the United States, missed at least one day of school due to out-of-school suspension (Magor-Blatch, 2011). The APA (2008) noted there could be no doubt that schools had a duty to use all effective means needed to maintain a safe and disciplined learning environment. There was an abundant controversy created in schools and communities throughout the nation in the actual implementation of zero tolerance policies and practices (American Psychological Association [APA], 2008). Magor-Blatch (2011) examined that zero tolerance was found to have no preventative effect and was associated with more negative outcomes, including a negative relationship between school suspension, expulsion, academic achievement, increased rates of misbehavior and suspension among those who had been suspended.

Triplett et al. (2014) examined through the mechanism of zero tolerance, a nation of urban minority students were punished for the actions of a small number of predominantly White suburban/rural gunmen. Zero tolerance school discipline practices were associated with a national increase in suspensions, a practice that had a disproportionate negative impact on Black students (Helibrun, Cornell, & Lovegrove, 2015). School discipline emerged as a critical arena in the quest for racial equity in education, as a growing number of urban students of color were disproportionately subjected to punitive discipline because of zero tolerance policies (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). Studies suggested that school-to-school variations in suspension rates

could not be adequately explained by differences in student behavior, however, caused by differences in the attitudes held by school principals regarding the value of school suspension as a disciplinary practice (Helibrun et al., 2015).

Evidence gathered over the three decades previous to this writing showed that zero tolerance failed as an educational intervention to ensure student and staff safety, or to improve the learning environment and student learning outcomes (Magor-Blatch, 2011). In January 2014, Secretary of Education Duncan and Attorney General Holder released a series of guidelines, which urged schools to abandon zero tolerance discipline policies (Triplett et al., 2014). Historically schools were implementing zero tolerance policies and also trying to promote tolerance, typically across differences such as race, class, culture, ability, and religion (Rice, 2009). Rice (2009) identified zero tolerance policies were then used to prohibit such a wide range of student conduct; these policies could actually undermine the conditions that might otherwise foster tolerance in schools.

Zero tolerance policies did not allow for subjective review of the circumstances on a case-by-case basis, many schools handed out extreme punishments for normal child behavior (Morin, 2014). In an article in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch,* Judge Edwards, who resided over students affected by thee zero tolerance policy, examined that students to whom zero tolerance applied were children who had very little of what they needed (Redden, 2016). Redden (2016) stated, “We are never talking about children who have what they need when we talk of children for whom zero tolerance applies” (para. 3). Children affected by zero tolerance policies were not on the same playing field of students who were from other ethnicities and social economic status. The ‘zero tolerance’ policy established was based on the belief that children had the minds of adults

and could do right all the time, if they tried (Redden, 2016). However, children did not have the mindset of adults and could not always rationalize or think from an adult's perspective and make appropriated decisions that led into consequences.

Zero tolerance policies came under increasing criticism from parents, students, professors and agencies across the nation as arbitrary, unfair, and unreasonable methods to mete out punishment for various misbehaviors in the nation's schools (Henault, 2001). Moreover, zero tolerance policies appeared to run counter to best knowledge of child development (APA, 2008). Advancement Project (2003) noted that zero tolerance policies were a cure in search of a disease, meaning that the implementation of zero tolerance policy was looked on as an answer to deter and address behavior. However, the Advancement Project (2003) noted it contrary of addressing behaviors, but as damaging thousands of lives every year by forcing children into the jailhouse track.

Within communities, schools deemphasized traditional school-based disciplinary interventions, while greatly expanding the use of zero-tolerance disciplinary approaches that excluded students form their schools through out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to alternative schools or programs (Restorative Practices Working Group, 2014, p. 6). Furthermore, this type of approach then forced students out of school for disruptive behavior, and they were usually sent back to the origin of their angst and unhappiness — their home environments or their neighborhoods, which were filled with negative influence (Amurao, 2013). The APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, after evaluating school disciplinary policies for 10 years, concluded that zero-tolerance policies failed to do what they were designed to do: they did not make schools safer (Restorative Practices Working Group, 2014, p. 4).

The American Academy of Pediatrics released a statement criticizing zero tolerance policies (Morin, 2016). The report expressed concern that such policies were harmful to students, because students who received suspensions and expulsions were 10 times more likely to drop out of high school (Morin, 2016).

It was noted by the California Department of Education (2014) that the top three reasons for suspension in 2012-2013 were: number one, disruption and defiance; number two, student fights; and number three, abusive language and vulgar acts. This report was congruent with research regarding the incongruous use of out-of-school suspensions in reference to the Zero Tolerance policy. It also illustrated how African American suspensions continued to increase compared to counterparts. Figure 4 illustrates the increase in suspension rates, over time, as issued by the California Department of Education.

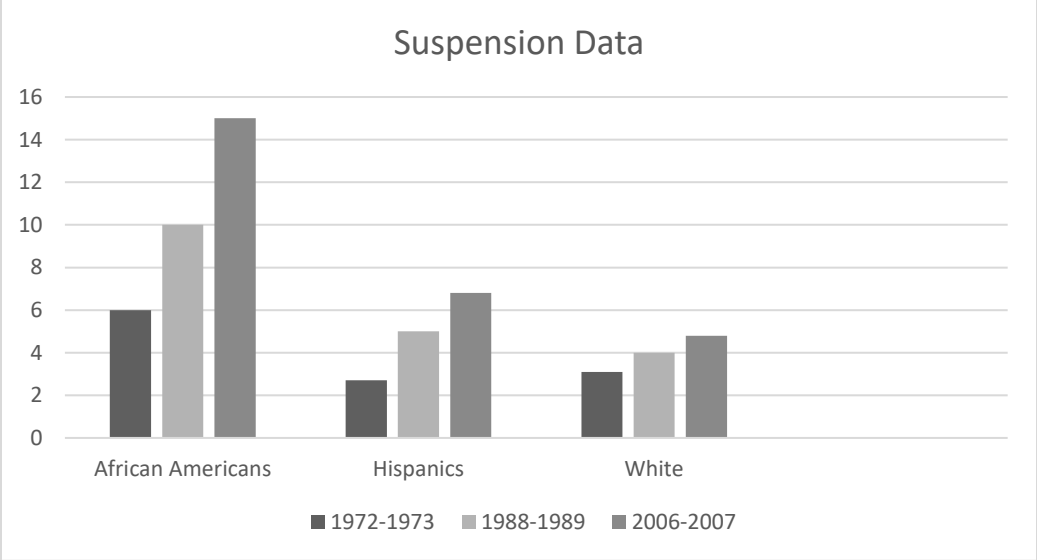


Figure 4. Ethnicity suspension disparities. Source: The California Department of Education, 2014.

On the contrary, APA (2008) identified changing the relationship between education and juvenile justice; zero tolerance may shift the locus of discipline from relatively inexpensive actions in school settings nationwide to the high cost processes of arrest and incarceration. The rate of suspension due to zero tolerance policies was alarming in the Black student population. Moreover, Skiba et al. (2002) reported that although Black children received a disproportionate share of disciplinary referrals and corporal punishment, White children tended to be referred for disciplinary action for more severe rule violations than Black children. An excellent example of this was in the Palm Beach County Public Schools. The Palm Beach County Public School statistics and ratios of Black enrollment and suspension rates showed that Black students made up only 29% of enrollment in their elementary schools; but 74% of the suspensions (Advancement Project, 2003).

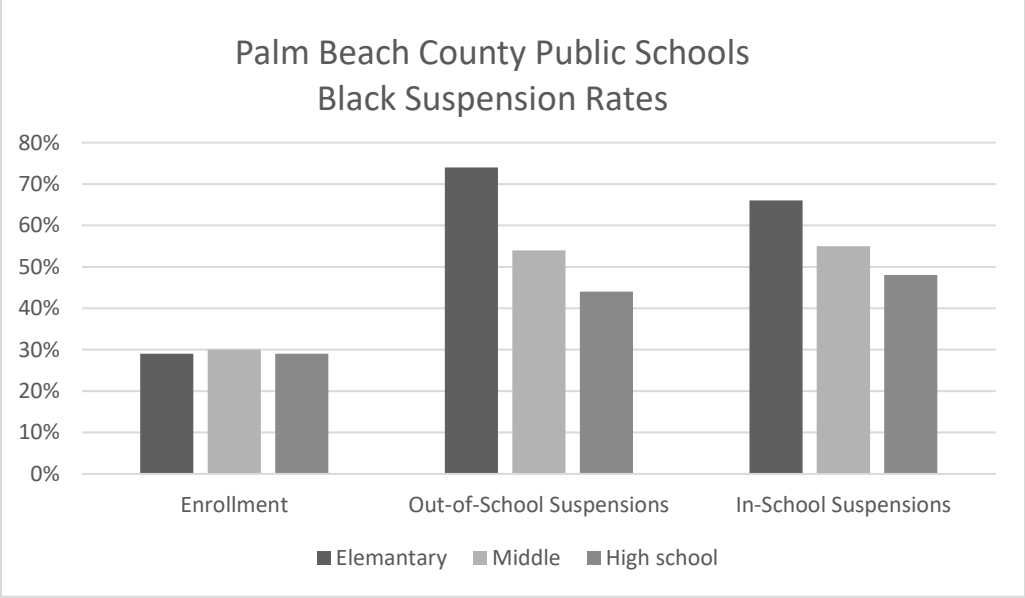


Figure 5. Black suspension rates for zero tolerance policies. Source: Walsh & Shapiro, 2006.

Figure 5 illustrates how zero tolerance policies affected the number of suspensions for students. Figure 5 also illustrates how the number of suspensions among Black students were higher in out-of-school suspensions and in-school suspensions.

This illustrates the disproportionate number of Black students enrolled in school were low in numbers compared to their counterparts; however, the Black students had a larger number of suspensions than their peers. At the time of this writing, discipline practices that criminalized student behavior and created a school culture of fear and social control replaced reason and judgment (Dupper, 2010, para. 3).

Evidence emerged that boys engaged more frequently in a broad range of disruptive behaviors; but there were no similar findings for race (Skiba, Arredondo, Rausch, Williams, & Kupersmith, 2014). Qualitative analysis of classrooms inferred that classroom discipline exchanges resulting in the removal of ethnic minority students may be based on cultural misunderstanding of communication, rather than just behavior of the student (Shriberg, Song, Halsell, & Radliff, 2013). Moreover, in these studies there appeared to be a differential pattern of treatment, originating at the classroom level, wherein African-American students were referred to the office for infractions that were more subjective in interpretation (Skiba & Williams, 2014).

As reviewed, zero tolerance policies were not shown to decrease violence in schools. The APA (2008) found that zero-tolerance policies may make schools less safe, because schools with higher rates of suspension and expulsion “appear to have less satisfactory ratings of school climate, to have less satisfactory school governance structures, and to spend a disproportionate amount of time on disciplinary matters” (Restorative Practices Working Group, 2014, p. 4).

Although widely accepted as a no-nonsense approach to violence prevention, there was little or no evidence that strict zero tolerance policies contributed to reducing student misbehavior or school safety (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Investigators noted that administrative responses to discipline events were inconsistent and also prone to influence by racial stereotype (Anyon et al., 2014). Zero tolerance policies directly affected those of other racial ethnicities that were stereotyped.

Moreover, there was no evidence that there was a link between high suspension and poverty or increased behaviors in school in comparison to Black students and their counterparts. Just the mere action of removing students from school could be a short-term effect to the school's culture and climate. It did not change the students' behaviors (Staats, 2014). The pervasive impact of zero tolerance discipline policies was overstated; the swift 'one size fits all' punishment resulted in near epidemic (Dupper, 2010). Skiba et al. (2014) examined significant safety violations, which represent less than 5% of all school disciplinary infractions and minor offenses, were often met with the same consequences. However, zero tolerance policies were over utilized for minor infractions when they were intended for major infractions.

School to Prison Pipeline

Gonzalez (2012) stated,

> High suspension rates for black students with punitive discipline policies within schools, also have negative effects on the offending student, by increasing the likelihood of future disciplinary problems, and ultimately increasing contact with the juvenile justice system known as the prison to school pipeline. (Gonzalez, 2012, para. 2)

The school-to-prison pipeline obtained its name because it appeared actively to collect school-aged youth and funnel them toward a future in prison. "The school-to prison pipeline implicates the educational system in the structuring of a path that leads to incarceration" (Simmons, 2009, p. 229). The USDOE (2016) stated that while Black students represented 16% of student enrollment, they represented 27% of students referred to law enforcement and 31% of students subjected to a school-related arrest (para. 5). However, there was a large disparity in comparison to White students, who represented 51% of enrollment, 41% of students referred to law enforcement, and 39% of those arrested (USDOE, 2016, para. 5).

The overrepresentation of ethnic minority students, particularly African American males, in the exclusionary discipline consequences of suspension and expulsion was consistently documented during the three decades previous to this writing (Fenning & Rose, 2016). Researchers consistently documented African American disproportionality in a range of exclusionary disciplinary referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and corporal punishment (Skiba et al., 2014). Children of poverty and those with academic problems were also overrepresented in such discipline consequences (Fenning & Rose, 2016). Sadly, a direct link between these exclusionary discipline consequences and entrance to prison was documented and termed the school-to-prison pipeline for those most vulnerable students (Fenning & Rose, 2016). Skiba et al. (2014) noted that the disparities in the use of school discipline by race, gender, and sexual orientation were well documented and continued to place large numbers of students at risk with short and long-term negative outcomes.

Many in the St. Louis area marched on urging an end to what they called the 'school-to-prison pipeline,' a cycle of trauma and institutional punishment they said targeted young people of color (Taketa, 2016a). Elementary school students were suspended for infractions that could range from failing to follow instructions to throwing chairs (Taketa, 2016a). As noted in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, studies found that zero tolerance led to higher rates of detention, suspension, or expulsion among minority students, compared to Whites for the same infractions (Edwards, 2016).

Missouri's Black students were 4.5 times more likely to be suspended than White students (Baker, 2017). In Missouri, the issues with suspensions were not charter school versus district issues. They were issues related to finding the best practices to address inappropriate student behaviors, such as Restorative Justice. These were practices charter schools were working diligently to bring into their schools and classrooms.

Some experts said that out-of-school suspensions were not effective disciplines in that they punished, but did not remedy the cause of the misbehavior, which often came from trauma or poverty endured by students (Taketa, 2016b). In fact, Missouri had the greatest racial disparity in suspensions in the nation, a 2015 study found (Edwards, 2016). As cited in the article, "Putting Kids out of School: What's Causing High Suspension Rates and Why They Are Detrimental to Students, Schools, and Communities," exclusionary discipline measures were inequitably used. Students who were male, who were African-American, or who had disabilities were suspended at a much higher rate than were other students (Sundius & Farneth, 2008, para. 2). The following city-specific data illustrates the magnitude of this problem: African American students in Portland

public schools black students were 3.6 times more likely to be suspended or disciplined than white students (Cody, 2013).

In addition, the article cited what could be considered as very blaring evidence of racial biases in schools as evidence by the following: Research shows that African American students, and especially African American boys, were disciplined more often and received more out-of-school suspensions and expulsions than White students. Perhaps more alarming was the 2010 finding that over 70% of the students involved in school-related arrests or referred to law enforcement were Hispanic or Black (Education Week, 2013). A 2009-2010 survey of 72,000 schools (kindergarten through high school) showed that while Black students made up only 18% of those enrolled in the schools sampled, they accounted for 35% of those suspended once, 46% of those suspended more than once and 39% of all expulsions (Rudd, 2014, para 1). Overall, Black students were three and a half times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their White peers (Lewin, 2012).

Furthermore, suspension could be life altering (Flannery, 2015). It was the number one predictor, more than poverty, of whether children would drop out of school and walk down a road that included greater likelihood of unemployment, reliance on social-welfare programs, and imprisonment (Flannery, 2015). The punitive and overzealous tools and approaches of the modern criminal justice system seeped into schools, serving to remove children from mainstream educational environments and funnel them onto a one-way path toward prison (Heitzeg, 2009). New York Civil Liberties Union addressed if a child was subjected to suspensions or arrests in school,

they were less likely to graduate and more likely to end up involved in the criminal justice system (Kenfel, 2013).

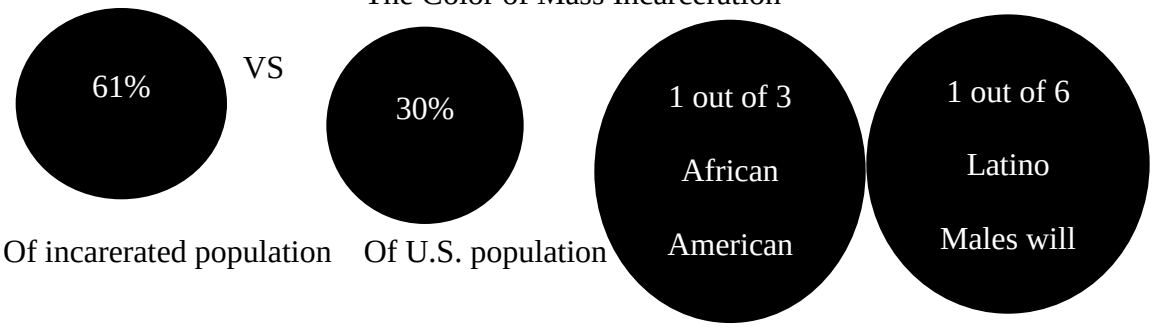
Are Our Children Being Pushed Into Prison? The Pipeline to Prison: The US has the highest incarceration rate in the world and its persons and jails are overwhelming filled with Afrian Americans and Latinos. The paths to prison are young African and Latino males are many, with the starting points are often schools and foster care students.	
From School To Prison Pipeline Students of color face harsher discipline and are more likely to be pushed out of school than whites.	From Foster Care To Prison Youth of color are more likely than whites to be placed in the foster care system, A reeding ground for the criminal jsutice system.
40% of students Expelled from U.S. shcools each year are black.	50% of children in the Foster Care System are Black or Latino
70% of studnets inivlved in “In-School” Arrests or referred to Law Enforcement are black or latino.	30% Of fostercare youth entering the Juvenile Justice System are palcement related behaviral cases.
3.5X Black studneta are three and a half times more likely to be Suspended than whites.	25% of young people leaving foster care will be Incarcerated within a few years after turning 18.
2x Black and latino studnets are twice as likely to Not Graduate high school as whites.	50% of young people leaving foster care will be Unemployed within a few years after turning 18.
68% Of males in state and federal Prison do not have a high school Diploma.	70% of inmates in California State Prison are former foster Care youth.
The Color of Mass Incarceration  	

Figure 6. The school to prison pipeline for students of color. Adapted from Amurao’s (2013) Fact sheet: How bad is the school-to-prison pipeline.

Aside from the impact on school climate and student progress, zero tolerance exclusionary policies had drastic effects on the justice system (Schiff & Bazemore, 2012). The School-to-Prison Pipeline was one of the most urgent challenges in education, at the time of this writing (Heitzeg, 2009). Many suspended youth were referred directly from schools into juvenile justice agencies, where some ended up on diversion caseloads, probation, or even in secure detention facilities for relatively minor, generally nonviolent infractions (Schiff & Bazemore, 2012). Kenfel (2013) argued that it meant students were on a path to prison, not graduation.

Overall, zero tolerance policies had their most insidious impact on Black youth, whose rate of suspension or expulsion from schools was accompanied by an unprecedented number of school-related referrals into the juvenile and criminal justice systems (Schiff & Bazemore, 2012). Nearly 40 years of research almost universally found Black students, Black males in particular, to be overrepresented in the use of exclusionary discipline, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion (Skiba, Shure, & Williams, 2011). Major urban, high-poverty schools utilized these practices most frequently; and disciplinary disproportionality was most evident in these same types of districts (Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010). Studies provided little to no evidence that African American students in the same school or district were engaging in more seriously disruptive behavior that could warrant higher rates of exclusion or punishment (Skiba et al., 2011).

Restorative Practices

There was an increasing interest in exploring how to support students whose behavior was considered unacceptable at school by establishing partnerships with

students and home communities to help encourage more socially appropriate student behavior (Wearmouth, McKinney, & Glynn, 2007). How to manage and address conflicts in schools continued to challenge educators all over the world (Shaw, 2007). Restorative Justice had its conceptual origins within the criminal justice arena and was based on a belief that crime was fundamentally a violation of people and interpersonal relationships (Shaw, 2007). In simple terms, Restorative Justice was about healing, rather than hurting through punishment, and was typically a conference that brought together the affected parties to look at how to address what was done wrong and correct it (Shaw, 2007).

Flannery (2014) noted that restorative practices were the more healthful alternative to suspensions and expulsions. Diverse models of Restorative Justice were implemented in schools across the United States to address concerns of significant negative impact of exclusionary discipline, particularly for African Americans (González, 2015). This concern stressed the need of alternative interventions. Restorative Justice models contributed to the goal of education by emphasizing accountability, restitution, and restoration of a school community (González, 2015).

The restorative approach, with high control and high support, confronted and disapproved of wrongdoing, while affirming the intrinsic worth of the offender, and the essence of Restorative Justice was collaborative problem-solving (Wachtel, 2000). This approach could be used in a multi-faceted form. Restorative practices provided an opportunity for those most affected by an incident to come together to share their feelings, describe how they were affected, and develop a plan to repair the harm done or prevent a reoccurrence (Wachtel, 2000).

Restorative Justice sought to understand and address the circumstance which contributed to the crime, in order to prevent recidivism once the offender was released; the racial/ethnic disparity in what youths received school punishments and how severe their punishments were, even when controlling for the type of offense (Skiba et al., 2011). Although absolute rates of suspension and expulsion were higher at the secondary school level for both Black and White students, the discrepancy between Black and White rates of suspension was greater at the elementary school level (Rausch & Skiba, 2006). Thus, schools and districts were investigating methods that reduced reliance on traditional school sanctions, such as suspension and referral to police, while retaining the ability to hold misbehaving students accountable (Fronius, Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2016).

Restorative Justice was an approach to improving the school learning environment and student behavior; it was based on three core principles: repairing harm, involving stakeholders, and transforming community relationships (Watchel, 2013). The first documented use of Restorative Justice in schools began in the early 1990s with initiatives in Australia (Gonzalez, 2012). In restorative practices in education, the whole school community, all school staff, pupils, and sometimes parents, were involved (Hopkins, 2004). Restorative Justice in the school setting viewed misconduct not as school-rule-breaking, and therefore as a violation of the institution, but as a violation against people and relationships in the school and wider community (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001).

The introduction of restorative practice challenged deeply held beliefs around notions of discipline and authority (Blood & Thorsborne, 2015). Moreover, restorative

practice represents a work in progress where readers needed to engage in ongoing dialogue regarding issues and meeting the challenges of developing a restorative culture within schools (Zehr, 2004). Restorative practices challenged the traditional approaches to student discipline. The greatest challenge was in schools where offending students encountered a tradition of impersonal, bureaucratic, and retributive practices (Shaw & Wierenga, 2002).

Restorative practices focused attention on the quality of relationships between all members of the school community (Blood & Thorsborne, 2015). Further, restorative practices offered the promise to transform student-to-teacher relationships and achieved equity in school discipline; thereby, narrowing the racial discipline gap, according to a study led by Gregory of Rutgers University (Lewis, 2009). Furthermore, restorative practices offered a means of developing collective responsibility for well-being and problem solving strategies to repair harm associated with incidents (Shaw & Wierenga, 2002). Classrooms with a high level of restorative practices implementation had fewer disciplinary referrals for defiance and misconduct, compared to classrooms with a low level of implementation (Lewis, 2009). Restorative practices were based on a philosophy of reparation, holding youth accountable for their actions directly to the persons or communities they harmed, and including all stakeholders in the decision-making and agreement processes about what happened and what must be done to repair the harm (Schiff, 2013).

As noted in the article by Morrison and Ahmed (2006), Restorative Justice was conceived in the literature in two broad ways. One was a process conception, the other was a values conception. The process conception was characterized by a process that

brings together all parties affected by harm or wrongdoing (e.g., offenders, and their families, victims, and their families, other members of the community, and professionals) (Morrison & Ahmed, 2006).

Wachtel (2000) evaluated the whole community and what structures/boundaries needed to provide discipline and the support needed for the whole school culture and community (Figure 7).

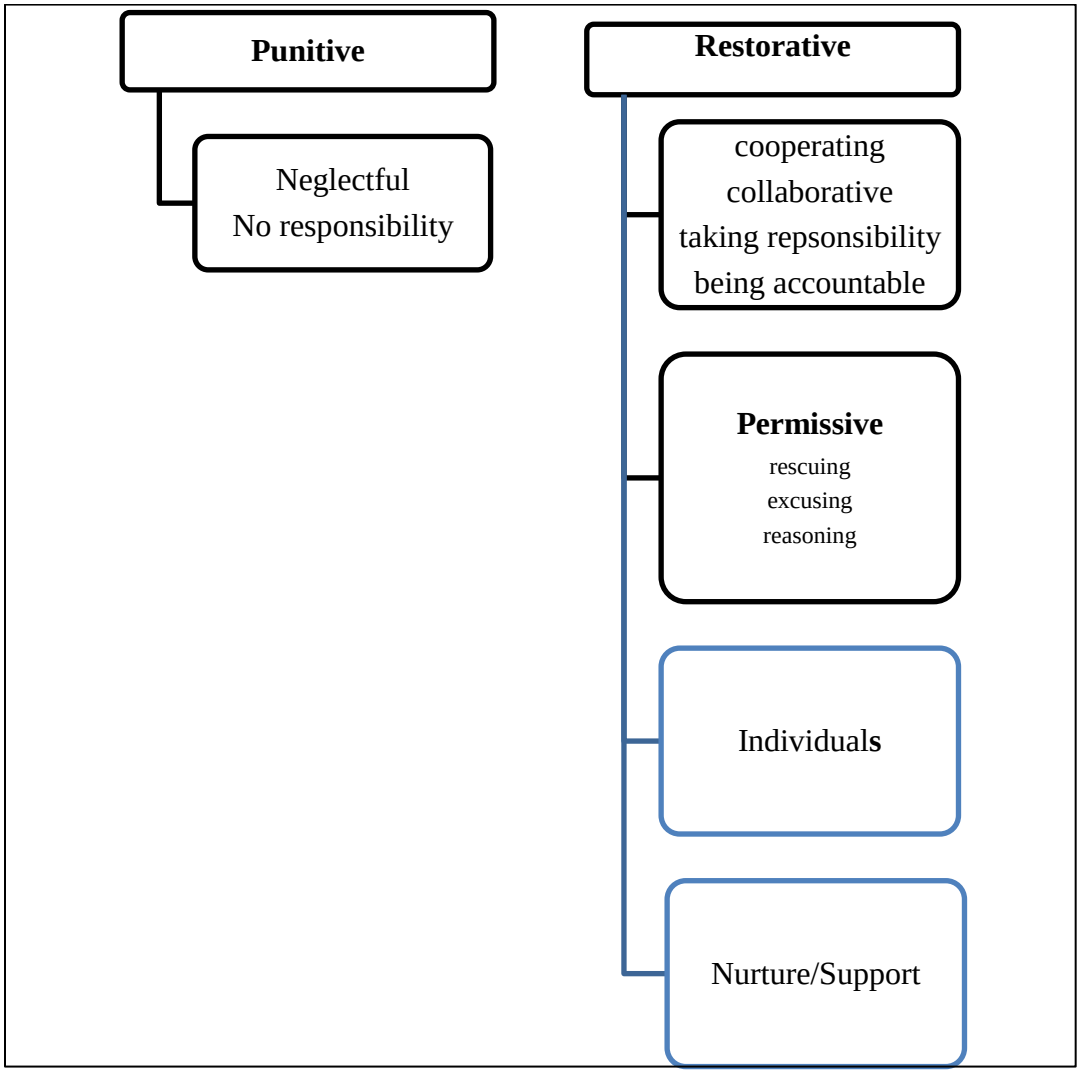


Figure 7. Restorative versus punitive. Source: Building Social Capital, adapted from Wachtel (2000).

Restorative Practices In-Suspension Classrooms

Evidence suggested that proactive and preventive behavioral interventions reduced discipline incidents and protect students from suspension and expulsion (Anyon et al., 2014). Restorative practices could be a particularly effective approach to preventing office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions (González, 2012). The U.S. Federal Government issued new guidelines recommending that schools revise their discipline policies to move away from zero tolerance policies, which excluded large numbers of students with suspensions and expulsions, often for minor infractions (Lewis, 2009). Instead, the guidelines recommended the use of methods such as restorative practice, which fostered positive school climates (Lewis, 2009).

Schools often responded to disruptive students with exclusionary and punitive approaches that had limited value (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010). One of the fathers of modern psychology, Skinner, remarked, "When we punish a person for behaving badly, we leave it up to him to learn how to behave well" (as cited in Drewery, 2004, p. 1). In schools that used restorative practice, students learned to confront their unacceptable behaviors, repair the harm they have done, and build community (Mirsky, 2011). Restorative Justice emerged as one of a host of effective policies for keeping youth in school and out of the school-to-prison pipeline (Schiff, 2013). There was consensus among many researchers, policy makers, educators, and school-based mental health professionals that exclusionary school discipline practices rarely improved school safety and, in fact, exacerbated racial inequalities in education and incarceration (Schiff, 2013). However, according to Schiff (2013), this new movement caused friction between

teachers and unions and others. Some thought it caused more friction in the classroom, because students thought they would not receive consequences.

According to the Restorative Practices Working Group (2014), restorative practices worked when they were implemented school wide and integrated into the fabric of the school community. When the whole school was infused with restorative strategies, it became easier to address issues faster and respond in a thoughtful way, because the caring and supportive culture was already present (Restorative Practices Working Group, 2014).

Schools, at the time of this writing, were more frequently using punitive discipline practices to control student behavior, despite the greater effectiveness of community-building techniques on compliance that were based on Restorative Justice principles found in the criminal justice system (Payne & Welch, 2015). In many ways, schools were already communities of care, but there was a need for a reexamination of the notion of care that predominates (Drewery, 2004, p. 334). The aim of Restorative Practices and utilizing Mindful Activities was a direct method to address the reoccurrences of student behaviors. Students were able to assess what they did wrong. Students were able to make an amends for what they had done. It also allowed the person who was offended to receive some sense of acknowledgment from the offender. It helped heal the school community and changed the milieu in the school and in the classroom. The justice process in this way strengthened the community and promoted changes that would prevent similar harms from happening in the future (Maiese, 2003).

Trauma Informed & Suspensions

A child's reaction to trauma can 'commonly' interfere with brain development, learning, and behavior, which had a potential impact on a child's academic success, as well as the overall school environment (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Trauma could directly impact a student in many different ways. Trauma was a negative external event or series of events which surpassed the child's ordinary coping skills (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). These events masked themselves in reactions that could be misdiagnosed.

Moreover, traumatic experiences could impact brain development and behavior inside and outside of the classroom (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Children with an underdeveloped pre-frontal cortex often presented disruptive and unsettling behaviors in early elementary classrooms, due to separation distress and not having the neurological structure necessary for self-regulation (Oehlberg, 2008). These behaviors could be misinterpreted as misbehaviors, not stress behaviors, and were reacted to with disciplinary actions (Oehlberg, 2008).

Trauma-informed schools implemented practices that prevented childhood trauma and that stopped further traumatizing already traumatized children or adults (Stevens, 2013). Moreover, schools who adopted trauma-informed practices and implemented trauma-informed practices can assist with behavioral issues in schools more readily. One result was drastically reduced suspensions and expulsions (Stevens, 2013). School officials and teachers acknowledged that it was often more difficult to teach in urban classrooms in St. Louis, where many students came to school dealing with trauma and toxic stress (Taketa, 2017).

Studies showed that nearly every school had children exposed to overwhelming experiences. Adverse Childhood Experience studies (ACEs) were adverse childhood experiences that harmed children's developing brains and led to changing how they responded to stress. According to the ACE Study, the experiences were physical, emotional or sexual abuse; witnessing their mother treated violently; having a parent with substance abuse or mental health issues; or living in a household with an adult who had spent time in prison (Center for Disease Control & Prevention [CDC], 2016). If we add those who were chronically bullied, experience periods of homelessness, and living in the proximity of persistent community violence, the number of children exposed to traumatic experiences grows even higher. Trauma resulting from overwhelming experiences has the power to disturb a student's foundational development for learning. According to ACEs too High (n.d.), trauma can undermine the development of language and communication skills, impede the establishment of a coherent sense of self, compromise the ability to focus on classroom tasks and instructions, interfere with the ability to organize and remember new information, and hinder the grasping of cause-and-effect relationships — all of which were necessary to process information effectively (para. 3).

Moreover, many of the effects of traumatic experiences on classroom behavior originated from the same problems that created academic difficulties and the inability to process social cues and to convey feelings in an appropriate manner. Additionally, whether a child who experienced traumatic events externalized (acts out) or internalized (withdraws, is numb, frozen, or depressed), a child's behavioral response to traumatic events could lead to lost learning time and strained relationships with teachers and peers.

The classroom for traumatized students was unfortunately a place that elicited a flight, fright, or freeze response to classroom activities and peer and teacher relationships.

Mindfulness

Since the 1980s, mindfulness techniques were increasingly utilized in clinical psychology, often as an adjunct to cognitive or behavioral interventions and with a growing evidence base (Cash & Whittingham, 2010). Mindfulness was the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we are doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what is going on around us (Mindful, 2014). Mindful activities self-regulation practices focused on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities, such as calmness and clarity (Davis & Hayes, 2012).

Professor Kabat-Zinn helped to bring the practice of mindfulness meditation into mainstream medicine and demonstrated that practicing mindfulness could bring improvements in both physical and psychological symptoms, as well as positive changes in health attitudes and behaviors (as cited in Siegel, 2014). Mindfulness was the act of one being intensely aware of what he or she was sensing and feeling at every moment without interpretation or judgment (Davis & Hayes, 2012). Several disciplines and practices could cultivate mindfulness, such as yoga, tai chi, and qigong; however, most literature focused on mindfulness that was developed through meditation (Davis & Hayes, 2012).

Researchers theorized that mindfulness meditation promoted metacognitive awareness, decreased rumination via disengagement from perseverative cognitive

activities, and enhanced attentional capacities through gains in working memory (Davis & Hayes, 2012). The then-recent surge of interest regarding mindfulness in therapeutic techniques could be attributed to the publication of some well-designed empirical evaluations of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (Chambers, Gullone, & Allen, 2006). These cognitive gains, in turn, contributed to effective emotion-regulation strategies (Davis & Hayes, 2012). Emotion regulation referred to regulatory processes involved in initiating or altering affective experiences and expression (Jha, Kiyonaga, Wong, & Gelfand, 2010). Self-regulation practices focused on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control; thereby, fostering general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities, such as calmness, clarity, and concentration (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). Persistently stressed children were vulnerable to difficulties in learning how to effectively regulate their thoughts and emotions. Emerging evidence found that childhood adversity triggered neurobiological events that could alter brain development, potentially impairing the stress response systems.

Furthermore, studies researched the trait mindfulness intervention and its effects and found participants with higher levels of pre-intervention trait mindfulness documented larger increases in mindfulness and declines in perceived stress and higher levels of hope and empathy after one year (Shapiro, Brown, Thoresen, & Plante, 2011). There were several benefits to mindfulness activities, such as cognitive flexibility, emotional reactivity, focus, boost of working memory, and stress rumination (Pfeiffer, 2017). Several authors noted that the practice of mindfulness may lead to changes in thought patterns, or in attitudes about one's thoughts (Baer, 2003). Baer (2003)

suggested that nonjudgmental observation of pain and anxiety-related thoughts may lead subjects to understanding that they were ‘just thoughts,’ rather than reflections of truth or reality, and did not necessitate escape or avoidance behavior.

Mindfulness practices provided opportunities to gain insight into the nature of thoughts and feelings as passing events in the mind, rather than as inherent aspects of the self or valid reflections on reality (Bishop et al., 2004). Mindfulness was developed or cultivated through systematic meditation practice (Malinowski, 2008). Thus, mindfulness was a measure of emotional awareness and the ability to see relationships between thoughts, feelings, and actions and to discern the meaning and causes of experience and behavior (Bishop et al., 2004). This would assist with being prone to being drawn into dysfunctional patterns of behavior (Bishop et al., 2004).

Summary

In conclusion, there are many reasons that aid or add to the increasing suspension rates of African American third grade students. Some of those reasons could be attributed to childhood trauma. Studies showed that nearly every school had children exposed to overwhelming experiences. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) were adverse childhood experiences that harm children’s developing brains and lead to changing how they respond to stress and damaging their immune systems so profoundly that the effects show up decades later (CDC, 2016). Drawing on the ACE Study findings and those of many other childhood trauma studies, an orientation to service delivery gained momentum that used childhood trauma as a lens to understand the range of cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral symptoms (Leitch, 2017, para 16).

Moreover, many of the effects of traumatic experiences on classroom behavior originated from the same problems that created academic difficulties and the inability to process social cues and to convey feelings in an appropriate manner. Additionally, whether a child who experienced traumatic events externalized (acts out) or internalized (withdraws, is numb, frozen, or depressed), a child's behavioral response to traumatic events could lead to lost learning time and strained relationships with teachers and peers. The classroom for traumatized students was, unfortunately, a place that elicited a flight, fright or freeze response to classroom activities and peer and teacher relationships. These types of behaviors were often mistaken for behavioral issues, which led to suspension.

There was great disparity in suspension and expulsion rates between Black and White students. There were additional disparities among female and male students. African American male students had a higher rate than female students and male White students in being suspended. Restorative practices/justice was an intervention that could address the high number of suspension in schools and address the disparities in suspension. Restorative Justice was viewed by many as one approach that kept young people in school, addressed the root causes of the behavior issues, and repaired relationships between students (Fronius et al., 2016). Moreover, this literature review led the researcher to believe more research needs to be done regarding suspension rates and restorative practices.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Purpose

The subject of school discipline was one of the most critical issues facing our educational system (Herrera, 2017). There was a high number of African American boys disciplined in comparison to their peers of other ethnicities. Administrators were resorting to such practices as corporal punishment, zero tolerance, and exclusionary practices, such as alternative school placement, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions (Herrera, 2017).

The inequitable use of suspension in schools contributed to the overall inequitable treatment of African-American boys in schools across our country (Monley, 2017). Moreover, African-American boys represented a small percentage of total students in most school settings, but accounted for the largest percentage of students receiving disciplinary sanctions (Stout, 2017). The researcher examined the difference in suspensions of African American boys in third grade in two different inner city urban schools. Moreover, this researcher compared whether there were fewer suspensions of African American boys in third grade with the utilization of Restorative Practice and Mindful Activities in contrast to traditional methods of discipline.

The purpose of this mixed-methods study on restorative practices was to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative discipline methods, such as Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities in a midwestern urban, inner city, elementary school of African American male students, in third grade. Mixed methods research was a research design with philosophical assumptions, as well as methods of inquiry (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p. 5). As explained by Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011), mixed method studies

involved philosophical assumptions that guided the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise was that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provided a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Baguley, Findlay, & Kerby, 2015, p. 104). The researcher utilized a mixed method study to evaluate the data qualitatively and quantitatively.

This researcher wanted to exam the disproportionate suspensions of third grade African American boys in two inner city, urban, elementary schools. One school utilized Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities and one used traditional methods of discipline. This grade level was chosen, because historically third grade was researched as the prison-to-pipeline risk age. Fowler (2011) noted that a multiyear study determined that schools' discretionary decisions to suspend, expel and/or criminalize student misbehavior contributed to students push out and dropout and what researchers described as the school-to-prison pipeline (pp. 17-19). These types of disciplinary methods, such as suspension, particularly for third grade students, led to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Moreover, the quantitative aspect of this study allowed the researcher to evaluate the effectiveness of utilizing alternative methods of Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities to discipline with third grade African American boys, in contrast to traditional methods. The qualitative aspect of this study was collected to provide research and insight on whether Restorative Practice and Mindful Activities, as alternative methods, could decrease the number of suspension among African American boys. These qualitative data were gathered from administrators, school counselors, and social workers through use of interviews, surveys, and questionnaires. The district’s staff were able to

provide insight and assessment of alternative ways to discipline, such as restorative practices and mindfulness, other than using suspensions and traditional discipline. Moreover, the qualitative data collected were gathered to research if there was an association between using alternative discipline methods that could decrease the numbers of suspensions among African American boys. The quantitative data would provide very detailed facts to assess, as to whether providing these alternative methods would decrease the number of suspensions in third grade African American boys. It could also provide school districts a way to explore methods across the board for discipline versus punitive methods that led to further suspensions, which affected grades, graduation completion, and the school-to-prison pipeline.

The qualitative data allowed for administrators, school counselors, social workers, and staff to expound on whether alternative methods to discipline really worked in their school settings. Qualitative data may also provide an opportunity to provide suggestions they may have in implementing the programing of alternative methods of discipline. This study afforded an opportunity for the researcher to address the concerns of high suspension rates among African American boys.

Then-presently, there was little to no research to examine the effects of other alternative methods to discipline. Respectfully, the conceptual framework for this study was implementing Restorative Practices and Mindful Moments in the fabric of the school, although, there was little support for Restorative Practices, due to the small amount of research in this area (Shaw, 2007). There was great hesitation about how Restorative Justice worked, what impact it may have on then-current approaches, and how it was measured (Shaw, 2007).

Interview Questions

Before starting the study, the researcher received approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the permission of the school district, through the Chief Educational officer (CEO) (see Appendix A & Appendix B). Principals, Assistant Principals, Deans of Students, School Counselors, and School Social Workers participated in voluntary interviews. This researcher developed the interview questions asked of each participant (see Appendix C). Each participant received an explanation of the significance of the interviews and the research purpose. All participants were asked the same questions. All participants were given the autonomy to answer the questions openly about the discipline methods , alternative methods if any in their schools, and suggestions of what they saw could assist or needed to be changed to address the outstanding suspension of African American third grade boys. This researcher used the answers to interview questions to narrow down specific themes and code them accordingly to provide a deeper understanding of suspensions among African American third grade boys.

Administrative Survey

This researcher also distributed an administrative survey as a component of the study. Each participant completed an informed consent (see Appendix B) before completing the survey. There were approximately five to 15 administrators, deans of students, school counselors, and social workers who worked specifically with the third grade students whose suspension data were examined in this study. Each participant received an explanation of the significance of the survey and the research purpose.

Eleven participants responded to the online survey. Each survey question included answers to choose from: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The scores were collected with an online tool, Survey Monkey, and emailed to each participant with their responses submitted anonymously. Qualitative data were collected from the survey and coded themes were established.

Administrative Questionnaire

This researcher also developed and distributed an online questionnaire of open-ended questions for the study. Each participant received an explanation of the significance of the questionnaire and the research purpose. The 11 questions were answered anonymously, collected, and coded for common themes. Ten participants responded.

Secondary Data

There were secondary data collected on third grade suspension rates from School District Achieve B and School District Achieve C. There were approximately 15 adults asked to participate in this study, which consisted of administrators, deans of students, school counselors, and social workers. A breakdown of the secondary data collected from Infinite Campus (IC), School District Achieve 's reporting tool is provided in this section.

There were approximately 65 African American boys enrolled in both elementary schools. This researcher examined data from two schools. One school, which utilized Restorative Justice practices, and the other school that did not utilize restorative practices. The population of all third grade boys' discipline data were examined in both schools. The secondary data were retrieved from the school's IC Data that were recorded to meet

MODESE (2016) requirements for all students. In this study the data were specific the third grade boys in both schools. The students were identified through IC Data that indicated student suspension records, time, date, resolution, the infraction, and how many times the students were suspended. The participants were recruited from two elementary schools located in School District Achieve, which was a charter school. The secondary data were represented by SWISS data, IC, and MODESE's (2016) school data, gained from the report on IDR's from School District Achieve.

Methodology

This researcher gained IRB approval from Lindenwood University, permission from the study site (see Appendix A), and a paper copy of the informed consent was given to the participants (see Appendix B). The researcher interviewed the principals, assistant principals, deans of students, school counselors, and school social workers that serviced third grade boys at two separate schools in the same district. Each interviewed administrative staff was kept anonymous and was referred to as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6.

A location, date, and time for the interview (see Appendix C) was prearranged with the potential participant via email and/or phone conversations between the researcher and participant. Both the participant and researcher mutually agreed upon the interview date and time. The participant and researcher also agreed upon the location. The interview was held at a neutral location. At the interview, the following took place: an introduction to the participants explained the purpose of the study. In addition, at this time each participant was thanked personally for his or her participation in this study. At the interview there was an additional review of the informed consent topics (anticipated

length of interview, risks associated with the study, benefit of contributing to the body of knowledge related to Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities). It was also reiterated that participation in this study was voluntary. It was explained that participants may step out of the interview at any time. Each participant received the explanation that it was acceptable to decline answering any or all of the questions and that the interview was confidential. Lastly, time was allowed for the participants to ask questions about the study.

The researcher administered surveys to the participants via email, in the form of a link to a Google Form, Survey Monkey. The surveys were submitted electronically and anonymously to the administrative staff members that serviced third grade boys (see Appendix D). The researcher administered a questionnaire to the participants via email in the form of a link to a Google Form, Survey Monkey. The questionnaires were submitted electronically and anonymously to the administrative staff members that serviced third grade boys (see Appendix E). The researcher explored emerging themes in questionnaires and surveys, as well as from the interview responses. The researcher categorized the data into common themes, coded, and analyzed data for relevance to the study research questions, surveys, and questionnaire (Maxwell, 2013).

The researcher collected secondary data from IC that indicated student suspension records, time, date, resolution, the infraction, and how many times the students were suspended. This data also indicated what each student's resolutions were for their infractions. In addition, the data indicated what student referrals were given to the Restorative Practice Center. The data were required per MODESE (2016) to be collected by the school's in the district. This researcher compared the school's data using

Restorative Justice in the district with another school in the district not using Restorative Justice practice but using traditional discipline methods with third grade boys.

Null Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1*:* Third grade African American boys in a school with traditional discipline methods have the same suspensions compared to the third grade African American boys in a school with Restorative Justice discipline methods.

Null Hypothesis 2*:* There is no difference between third grade African American boys' and non-African American boys' suspension rates in a school with traditional discipline methods.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no difference between third grade African American boys' and non-African American boys' suspension rates in a school with Restorative Justice discipline methods.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What alternative discipline methods or interventions could decrease the number of suspensions in African American boys in third grade?

Research Question 2: What association do Restorative Practices and Mindfulness Activities have in decreasing the number of suspensions in African American boys?

Research Sites

During this study, participants were included from two school sites. The two school sites were located in midwestern urban, elementary schools. Those participants consisted of principals, assistant principals, deans of students, school counselors and school social workers that serviced third grade boys. Tables 8 and 9 show the student

population and school demographics of each campus, labeled School District Achieve B and School District Achieve C.

School District Achieve B was located in an urban setting in the west part of town. School B enrollment demographics in the 2016-2017 school year for third grade are displayed on Table 8.

Table 8

School District Achieve B: Third Grade Boys, Demographics 2016

School District Achieve 3rd graders	2016
Total number Enrollment in 3rd grade	101
Total number of Enrollment of Boys in 3rd grade	58
Asian number Enrollment in 3rd grade	0
Black Boys number of Enrollment in 3rd grade	57
Hispanic number of Enrollment in 3rd grade	0
Indian number of Enrollment in 3rd grade	0
Multi-race number of Enrollment in 3rd grade	0
Pacific Islander total of number Enrollment in 3rd grade	0
White total number of Enrollment in 3rd grade	1
Free Reduced Lunch	100%

School District Achieve C was located in an urban setting in the south part of town. School C enrollment demographics in the 2016-2017 school year third grade are represented in Table 9.

Table 9

School District Achieve C: Third Grade Boys, Demographics 2016-2017

School District Achieve	2016
Total Enrollment	99
Total Enrollment number of 3rd grade Boys	46
Asian Total Enrollment number in 3rd grade	0
Black Total Enrollment number in 3rd grade	30
Hispanic Total Enrollment number in 3rd grade	16
Indian Total Enrollment number in 3rd grade	0
Multi-race Total Enrollment number in 3rd grade	0
Pacific Total Enrollment number in 3rd grade	0
White Total Enrollment number in 3rd grade	0
Free Reduced Lunch	100%

Table 10 shows School District Achieve 's total population and demographic make-up of the school district. The information was retrieved from MODESE (2016) and was calculated for every 100 students. Therefore, the other ethnicities in the school percentages were too low for them to report.

Table 10

School District Achieve: Total School Demographics

School District Achieve	2016
Total Enrollment: All District Achieve	2,918
Asian Percent	0%
Black Percent	85.9%
Hispanic Percent	11.9%
Indian Percent	0%
Multi-race Percent	0%
Pacific Islander Percent	0%
White Percent	0%
Free Reduced Lunch percent`	100%

Note. MODESE (2016)

Limitations

One of the limitations during this study was that the researcher then-currently worked in the study district. Working in the district may have caused a limitation to the study, as this researcher was concerned the participants would not be transparent. There were 15 participants recruited to participate in this study, only 10 participated. Of the participants in this study, job roles included the principals, assistant principals, deans of students, school counselors, and school social workers. Therefore, this researcher was limited in receiving feedback from all of the 15 participants. Additional limitations to the study was the teacher turnover during the school year. The third grade teaching staff at School B changed mid-year. The teaching staff comprised of one seasoned teacher, a student teacher, and two substitute teachers. Lastly, another limitation was new leadership took over at School B midway through the study.

Summary

This researcher conducted this study using mixed methods. The participants, background of the researched schools and district, and discipline methods were provided in this study as a basis to explore this new intervention method that was piloted in the school district. The aim of this study was to provide insight on whether student discipline was decreased with implementing mindful activities and restorative practices in the school setting, in particular for third grade African American boys. Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities were implemented at School District Achieve (a pseudonym). The purpose of Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities was to provide an alternative method of addressing students' suspensions. The results of this study will be explored in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four: Results

Overview

This study utilized mixed-methods, which involved both quantitative and qualitative data. The researcher reviewed all surveys and questionnaires completed on Survey Monkey by the two researched schools' administrative teams that comprised of principals, assistant principals, deans, school counselors, and social workers. Each participant's answers were anonymous and responses to interview questions were kept confidential and coded by the researcher. Secondary data were collected from the schools' data system, IC, for third grade boys in both schools. This researcher prepared the results of the surveys, questionnaires, and responses to interview questions to investigate if the Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities affected the suspensions of the African American boys in third grade. The researcher's interest in this study came from her concerns while working in schools as an administrator and observing the increase of suspensions of students in general and then specifically in African American boys. More concerning was the fact that third grade was an indicator of the school-to-prison pipeline. The researcher wanted to know how schools could avoid or avert the school-to-prison pipeline, especially after the researcher worked in a prison and saw how the effects of alternative methods prior to incarceration could have helped inmates evade being in the penal systems.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher investigated the following Null Hypotheses and Research Questions to determine if there was a relationship between Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities versus traditional methods of discipline in

third grade African American boys, with regard to the number of types of school suspensions.

Null Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1*:* Third grade African American boys in a school with traditional discipline methods have the same suspensions compared to the third grade African American boys in a school with Restorative Justice discipline methods.

Null Hypothesis 2*:* There is no difference between third grade African American boys' and non-African American boys' suspension rates in a school with traditional discipline methods.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no difference between third grade African American boys' and non-African American boys' suspension rates in a school with Restorative Justice discipline methods.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What alternative discipline methods or interventions could decrease the number of suspensions in African American boys in third grade?

Research Question 2: What association does Restorative Practices and Mindfulness Activities have in decreasing the number of suspensions in African American boys?

Null Hypothesis 1

The student suspension data of African American boys were analyzed to determine if there was difference between traditional discipline methods of those who have nontraditional methods of discipline and those who participated in the alternative method.

Null Hypothesis 1*:* Third grade African American boys in a school with traditional discipline methods had the same rate of suspensions compared to the third grade African American boys in a school with Restorative Justice discipline methods. After compiling the data from both schools and completing a *z*-test for difference in proportions, the researcher found that the rate of suspensions at the school with Restorative Justice discipline methods (63.3%) was not significantly different than the rate of suspensions at the school with traditional discipline methods (46.6%), with z = 1.487 and critical values = +/-1.96. Therefore, the researcher failed to reject Null Hypothesis 1. Despite the intervention of Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities, suspensions for third grade African boys had the same rate of suspensions.

Table 11

Z-Test for Difference in Proportions: Null Hypothesis 1 Results

Students	Count	Suspensions	Proportions
School B Total Population AA Boys	58	27	0.466
School C Total Population AA Boys	30	19	0.633
z-value	1.487		
critical value	1.96		

Note. AA: African American

Null Hypothesis 2

Null Hypothesis 2*:* There is no difference between third grade African American boys' and non-African American boys' suspension rates in a school with traditional discipline methods.

This researcher did not have enough data to run a statistical test for this hypothesis. School B only had one student who was of another ethnicity (White). This student had no suspensions reported in third grade.

Null Hypothesis 3

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no difference between third grade African American boys' and non-African American boys' suspension rates in a school with Restorative Justice discipline methods.

After analyzing the data of third grade African American boys' and non-African American boys' suspension rates in a school with Restorative Justice methods and running a z-test for difference in proportions, the researcher found that the suspension rate of African American boys (63.3%) was significantly different from the suspension rate of non-African American boys (6.3%); z = 3.714, critical values = +/-1.96. Therefore, the researcher rejected Null Hypothesis 3.

The results are located in Table 12.

Table 12

Z-Test for Difference in Proportions: Null Hypothesis 3 Results

Students	Count	Suspensions	Proportions
School C Total AA Boys	30	19	0.633
School C Total Non-AA Boys	16	1	0.063
Z-value	3.714		
Critical value	1.96		

Note. AA: African American

Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What alternative discipline methods or interventions could decrease the number of suspensions in African American boys in third grade?

Two different alternative discipline methods were explored in this study, instead of suspension. One method was Restorative Practices. The common themes that emerged from the responses to interview questions regarding Restorative Practices

involved that utilizing Restorative Practices in school helped the students tremendously. The administrative teams' responses, overwhelmingly 9 out of 10, shared that implementing Restorative Practices provided the students an opportunity to right their wrongs. It also gave the administrators a scope and reference to understand why students responded the way they did to an issue. Restorative practices gave the staff a chance to understand the behavior of students. It also empowered them to take responsibility for what they did.

One of the administrators expressed that Restorative Practices 'helps teach students about self-empowerment, honesty, respect, healing, restoration accountability and problem solving.

Another participant mentioned:

> Students are able to figure out what triggers them and work on ways to avoid those triggers. . . . It also enables the student to have a better relationship with the teacher now that she knows what the triggers are. . . . Restorative practices make schools personal and connected.

Moreover, participants felt the use of discussing the incident or incidents that occurred and realizing the means of handling or defusing the behavior made students realize they could control their own behaviors. Participants also felt that through restorative practices the students see their behavior had consequences, but they could control the consequences they received. Many participants stated,

> By discussing and developing behavior plans, the use of suspensions is greatly reduced. The value of restorative practices varies based on the type of infraction and the type of student. The use of restorative practices has been of greatest value

> for first or second time offenses when there is a clear connection between the infraction and the practice. Secondly, students who, with support, take ownership for their behaviors and can reflect on the poor choice benefit the most.

Moreover, many participants stated,

> I think many students are looking for their champion. Students need a person who they feel like believe they will succeed at school and takes an active role on checking in on them. Restorative Practices help provide and identify adults who can do this. It is helping them in that whether they are in Restorative Practices or In School Support the teacher's works with them in the same way to try to change behaviors. There is some help derived from working with students to expose them to alternative responses to frustrations and confrontations.

Although all of the participants felt that Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities helped decrease the suspension of African American boys, one participant shared,

> That it is certainly not a foolproof. Some students still respond to problems in ways unacceptable and making consequences unavoidable. . . . However, if implemented properly students are less likely to fall behind or fail from missed school due to suspensions. . . . That it give students chance to reflect on what accrued and to think about how it could be avoided in the future.

The second method explored in this study instead of providing suspension to third grade boys was the use of Mindful Moments. Participants were asked to participate in the qualitative study portion of this study where they completed a questionnaire, survey, and participated in an interview. In the interview process, the participants were asked a

series of questions. One of the questions dealt with, do they find utilizing mindful activities decreased the number of referrals? If so how? Eight out of the 10 participants believed that mindful activities over all decreased the number of referrals in school and/ or believed that it helped the students overall.

One participant expressed, 'Yes, I do find it decreases the number of referrals because it reduces the students' frustrations and anxiety.' Another stated, 'It gives a change behavior while promoting appropriate student social behavior. . . . Mindful activities really are relaxing. . . . They help with emotional regulation." Another participant mentioned, 'Mindfulness activities help students to calm down when they are upset. In addition, it also helps them to make better choices. . . . If students and teachers are taught how to use mindful activities, they can avoid suspensions, buddy rooms, and ISS.' Another participant stated, 'Students are being taught real life self-regulation skills that they can take with them and utilize while at home as well.'

Correspondingly, another participant stated, 'Mindful activities decreases the number of referrals. Teachers use mindful activities to teach the students how to center themselves to be calm and relaxed.' One administrator stated, 'By starting your day using mindful activities students begin the day calm, relaxed and focused . . . students are less likely to let things bother them and to use smart decision-making skills to avoid issues.'

Another administrator explained their experience and feedback in using mindfulness in their school.

> 'The use of mindfulness concepts seem to help students especially when it is an individualized mindfulness activity, I find it is quite successful in giving them a replacement behavior. . . . However, it must be an intentionally tailored

> mindfulness activity that provides students a legitimate replacement to extreme behaviors.'

Moreover, a school social worker expressed the importance of using mindfulness.

> 'Mindful activities must be practiced on a daily basis so they become habit forming. . . . Mindfulness activities once again provides empowering self-regulation tools for students to use throughout life. . . . Using mindfulness and other practices to help regulate the dis-regulated student is key to helping the student calm down in order to prevent further issues.'

Another administrator statement was specific to the school's milieu when mindful activities were employed during the school day.

> 'Lastly, incorporating mindful activities in the whole school daily at twelve noon allowed the students to be in the moment and refocused on learning after lunch and recess. . . . Many teachers began to incorporate mindful moments within their classroom at different times of the day. It was a quick moment to refocus students' attention on learning.'

Moreover, conversely, two of the participants expressed a neutral response to using mindful activities.

> 'Though the use of mindful activities did not seem to decrease the number of referrals this year; I believe there is still potential for that outcome. . . . Students became more comfortable with the activities and referenced them, and some even utilized independently. . . . More practice and more time may yield a decrease in referrals.'

One of the two participants, in answering the question about the use of mindful activities, 'believed that mindfulness does help it, but there is no way to quantify that. It is simply anecdotal based on conversations with staff who you have conversations regarding specific students who appear to be exhibiting improved behaviors.'

Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What association does Restorative Practices and Mindfulness Activities have in decreasing the number of suspensions in African American boys?

Participants scored overwhelmingly that restorative practices and mindfulness had a definite impact in decrease the number of suspensions in African American boys. Ten out of 10 of the participants answered favorably during the interviewing process when asked if they thought Restorative Practices and mindfulness were helping students that would otherwise be suspended. However, two participants expounded on the usefulness of Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities.

Participants were eager to share how Restorative Practices were helping students. One of the staff members reflected on the association of mindful activities with decreasing the number of suspension in African American boys.

> Restorative practices has assisted students' in their home life. It can greatly influence his/her ability to be successful at school as well. Restorative Practices has allowed us to keep more students in school and in their safest environment. . . . It also gives us an opportunity to have deep conversations about behavior and re-teach school expectations. . . . More students are learning to understand how their behavior effect the class/school as a whole and why consequences may be given.

Another stated,

> I believe it is help students because it teaches them alternative ways to respond to issues that they may not otherwise had copying skills. . . . Restorative Practices teaches students coping skills their roles and the role they played in the situation with peer mediation which intern would yield a more productive outcome then in school suspension.

Nine out of 10 participants responded overwhelmingly that Restorative Practices worked. A common theme noted by 9 out of the ten participants was Restorative Practices kept more students in class, which would support a higher student achievement level. Students were previously sent home, and they never understood the fact that their behavior could affect their student achievement. In addition, when they were suspended they were not at school learning. One of the 10 participants stated, 'Restorative practices builds relationships and that former ways of discipline build anger and resentment.'

Another participant explained how Restorative Practices and Mindfulness Activities decreased the number of suspensions in students in third grade. African American boys were of the highest being suspended in third grade.

> A mixture of restorative practices, mindfulness training, and awareness of trauma and reconsideration of our standards for discipline have all combined to broaden our perspective regarding what is appropriate in a variety of circumstances. . . . Kids have a chance to reflect and look at how to avoid behaviors that lead to consequences. . . . Before, it was just punishment, then try again, and again. . . . Some got it, some resented it.'

A staff member expressed the following:

> There is no comparison. . . . The former ways was to due process the student and suspended, either Out of school or Out of In-School, no problem solving. . . . Restorative Practice uses discussion, self-reflection, behavior plans to improve behavior, modeling of positive behavior and how to use positive intervention to stop the negative behavior. . . . Basically, in a nut shell looks at the whole dietetics as traditional discipline looks at an a limited situation experience. . . . Which does not present a good social aspect. . . . The traditional methods do not yield consentient practices. . . . Restorative Practice to traditional discipline is day and night, no turning back.

One out of the 10 participants, however, stated,

> That adding Restorative Practices feels like we are using the old system while understanding something did not work so we are tweaking it. I feel like we are not changing the fundamental idea of restoration in our schools. The therapeutic side is not as present as I feel like it needs to be in order for the true restorative process to be in place. I feel like our best restorative practices happen now in pockets in individual classrooms or in individual interactions, but not in a school wide way. Replacing punitive consequences, where appropriate, is a positive change, but is still a work in progress.'

Another participant noted, 'they agreed that the restorative practices worked but had some reservation on how it affected the students' behavior. 'Restorative Practices is a good addition to an In School Support room to help students reflect on why they are there but, I do not think it in itself changes the behavior.'

In looking at the results of the 10 questions asked in the questionnaire of the principals, assistant principals, deans, school counselors and social workers, the participants were very specific in their experiences with Restorative Practices and mindfulness. There was a common theme that emerged from the participants' answers. Participants were asked their understanding of how participants were referred to the restorative practice center. The researcher wanted to ascertain if there was a common practice and or systematic way in which the students were referred for Restorative Practices. The theme that emerged from participants' responses regarding their experience and understanding of how students were sent to the Restorative Practice Center was from either a staff or behavioral referral.

Referring Students to the Restorative Practice Program

Participants expressed that students were referred to the Restorative Practice program (RPP) by administrators and/or the wrap-around team. Another participant shared, 'The students are referred to the program based on the number of referrals they have received. Once students are assigned to the empowerment center the process begins.' 'Moreover, Restorative Practice program is assigned when it is an appropriate consequence to a behavior that requires repairing a relationship with a staff member or student at school. Students are sent there sent after classroom intervention do not work.' Lastly, 'students who would be facing In-school suspensions or Out-of-school suspensions would instead complete Empowerment Plans to address their behavior instead of receiving In-school-suspensions or Out-of-school suspensions.'

Experience with the Restorative Practice Program

Three common themes were identified in the questionnaire from the 10 participants' personal experiences with the RPP that was positive staff success, positive student success, and neutral response to their experience with the program. Nine out of the 10 participants had a positive experience with Restorative Practices. There was one participant, however, who had positive experiences but had mixed feelings on the results, due to being overwhelmed with the implementation of the program. Following are some of the common themes that emerged and the participants' responses.

Staff Success

Participants shared that **'**the program is an excellent use of having students understanding their own behaviors.' They also, acknowledged that it help the students to utilize problem-solving techniques when issues arose. One participant discussed, 'Restorative Practice Program has been an asset to our school, primarily because of the fantastic teacher we have in Restorative Practice center.' 'She helped students work through their conflicts and make a plan moving forward.'

Another participant stated,

> I have the students talk out the issues with each other. I model the first time and step back a little each time until the students' only need a space to deal with the problem not me, but I am always there to mediate if needed.

Positive Student Success

One participant stated, 'Some students enjoy going to Restorative Practice center but, their needs to be more wrap around services to support those students.' Another participant experienced that there was positive success in utilizing RPP. She stated:

> I do believe that some of the students that have been through the program have made positive changes and they can use the tools that they learn to help them make better decisions in the future. I do know that the de-escalation process is extremely important when a student is having a heighten moment. Using mindfulness and other practices to help regulate the dis-regulated student is key to helping the student calm down in order to prevent further issues**.**

Mixed Feelings

Two of the participants gave responses that would be themed as having mixed feelings about the Restorative Practices and mindfulness. One participant stated,

> At the beginning of the year, I was participating as a student's champion; I was helping the student work through the empowerment plan and identify ways to be successful. This quickly fell by the wayside when we realized we had too many students who required the intervention and not enough manpower to implement the intervention with fidelity.

Another participant shared, 'They really try to follow the hurt to heal process.'

The researcher wanted to ascertain the participants' understanding of how they structured the RPP in their school. The common themes that emerged were that the program was implemented in some of the teachers' individual classrooms and as well in the Restorative Practice Center. They also, 'mentioned that staff were trained and it was structured to address students as preventive and as restorative practice.' One participant stated,

> The program was structured by the district trauma team and ran by empowerment coaches. The goal is to keep data to see how many students that have been seen as

> ‘repeat offenders’ actually use what they learn to not end up back in the center. The data also helps hold the staff members accountable who are supposed to be ‘champions’ for the student as well as holding the student accountable for making positive gains and working towards staying in school and having less discipline issues.

Another participant addressed the support of Restorative Practices and how it assisted students with the hurt-to-heal process. The participant stated, ‘The hurt-to-heal process is a major part of Restorative Practices. She shared, ‘Students are sent to the program and they complete the steps.’ ‘They are then sent back to the classroom after the Restorative steps are completed.’

Moreover, another participant expounded,

> The certified teacher who has been trained in Restorative Practices provides character education lesson plans; students are placed in the Restorative Practice program for the same amount of time they would have traditionally spent in an ISS environment. This allows for the student to obtain tools and repair the harm before returning to the classroom.

Lastly, a participant shared,

> The program is structured with positive posters and messages throughout the room for students to review and learn. It also provides uses trauma informed techniques and stress reliving materials. This practice I use with my students to help them learn how to handle individual situations.

Staff Personal Initiative & Effects of Restorative Practice

The researcher examined each participant's responses to their personal initiative and its effects on the success of the RPP in their role in the school, as well as whether they believed that this initiative was effective for the school culture. One of the common themes was participants' overall restorative practices had great effects on students.

One participant mentioned, 'As part of the student support team, I teach the same skills that are taught in the RPP in order to reinforce them. With more teacher and parent buy-in, it would be very effective.'

Moreover, another participant shared, 'Restorative Practice is best aligned to my discipline philosophy that includes consequences being natural and logical. Yes, with strong leadership it can be very successful.' 'I think in time it will have a positive impact.' Another participant asserted, 'Research shows ISS/OSS are not effective ways to decrease behavioral issues. I am hoping to help others learn the practices and use them with our students. It helps them adapt to situations'

The second theme that stood out during the questionnaire process was some of the participants did not believe the process was effective. Three of the participants were not sure and expressed the sentiment for different reasons as documented in this section. One stated,

> I work with the Restorative Practice teacher to identify potential next steps for students. I make sure to check with students who I know have an empowerment packet. I also check in with the student who are repeats in the center who may need extra encouragement and reminders to continue to follow their plan to assure that they can successful remain in school. However, I don't believe that the

initiative is effective because it hasn't been consistent and the empowerment "coach", teacher has changes several times.

Another one expressed, 'I believe that we did not know enough about what works with students of trauma before implementation. Also we need to continue the use of PBIS.'

An additional participant expressed,

> Initially, I tried to go down to the Restorative Practice lab frequently and work with students who are down there. This became impossible as the school year wore on. The initiative as it stands is not effective for the school culture. School administration and school staff do not really understand the purpose of RPP. They also feel like RPP represents 'second chances' that are fostering a disciplinary culture of not giving consequences. This is probably because there was no teacher buy-in from the start because teachers were not consulted or included in the process of developing the program. The program was also set up to fail because we did not have the capacity to implement the program with fidelity.

Restorative Practice Program Suitableness

In examining the responses of the 10 participants' survey responses, there were mixed feelings regarding the question of whether or not the RPP was suitable to the needs of the school, as illustrated in Table 13.

Table 13

Restorative Practice Program: Suitableness

Suitable	Not Suitable	Somewhat
60%	30%	10%

Note. Percentages of participants' responses

Six out of the 10 participants emphatically said, ‘yes that the Restorative Practice Program was suitable to the needs of the school.’ One of the six participants who felt the RPP was suitable stated, ‘Because most students in the school have experienced or are currently experiencing trauma it is very suitable. It keeps students in a safe environment and provides natural and logical consequences, teaching them to restore relationships.’ Another who agreed mentioned, ‘we need a program so all could teach continually and our students would have less conflict that would grow into enormous situations.’ ‘Yes it is, combined with being trauma informed it is very well received and needed.’

Strengths and Weaknesses

During the study, the researcher wanted to ascertain from the participants their feedback on the strengths and the weakness of the RPP. The common themes that emerged were there was a lack of staff needed to run the program effectively. In addition, the program needed to be practiced school wide and not in pockets. Additional themes that emerged regarding the strengths of the RPP revolved around students learning how to work through their concerns with others. Moreover, there were positive results seen in the students overall and how they handled concerns. Included in this section are each participant’s responses that were expressed regarding the strengths and the weakness of the RPP:

One participant number one stated, ‘the strengths are that a certified teacher runs the restorative practice center and provides support for the students. The weaknesses is we are not staffed to support all of the students.’

Participant number two stated, ‘the Weakness is the follow up with the students on the empowerment packet and holding them accountable for making more positive strides towards.’

Participant number three stated, ‘the strengths are that I have seen some positive impact on some students. The weakness are there is not enough teacher buy in.’

Participant number four stated,

> The strengths are there are caring adults who help with the development of ‘Champions’ in the school. The consequence are logical and natural, students are able to get help identifying their triggers, suspensions are reduced, and students are able to help other students.’

Participant number four did not express any weaknesses in the program. However, Participant number five stated,

> The weakness of the Restorative Practice Program the parents and classroom teacher involvement is low, which affects the way students' skills are reinforced when they leave the center. The strengths of the program are the compassion and dedication of the Restorative Practice teacher, as she is able to connect with the students and provide a safe place for them to discuss real-world issues.

While Participant number six focused on strengths and weaknesses:

> The strengths are Restorative Practice Program/ISS facilitator is wonderful. She has great relationships with the kids, knows how to be empathic, and has endless patience. The weaknesses of our Restorative Practice Program is having one person in charge of RPP and ISS is not conducive to implementing RPP appropriately. We have one room for both programs and occasionally have a wide

> range of age groups in the same room. The RPP/ISS person does not have enough time or manpower to implement RPP with fidelity and in a way that can effect real change.

Participant number seven stated

> The strengths are that students learn to understand that they can solve their own behaviors and learn how to open to others about present and past experiences. The program focuses on building problem solving skills and not just being suspended and nothing positive happens. The weaknesses is that I feel the school needs more than one program. Two programs would be excellent.

Participant number eight stated, 'It is not practiced school wide it is done in pockets. That is definite weakness. But a strength would be it you can see the difference with the students I work with on the process.' Participant number six stated, 'The strength of the program is that it gives students a safe place to go to reflect on their emotions. The weakness of the Restorative Practice Program is it needs to be more structured.' Participant number 10 stated, 'The strength of the Restorative Practice Program reduces amount of time kids get out-of-school suspension. The weakness it time doesn't always allow for all parties to get together as soon as possible.'

Overall, the participants seemed to note that the program had qualities and effectiveness that could provide another outlet or option other than suspension for students. The common themes that emerged were that with fidelity and staff support the program could be successful. Although there were some weakness, they were things that could be improved upon to add to the strengths to provide solid programing.

RPP Supportive Relationships

Regarding the question of, how does or does not the Restorative Practice Program foster positive and supportive relationships with students and teachers in your school, the researcher identified three common themes regarding if the RPP fostered positive and supportive relationships. One of the themes acknowledged was seven out of 10 participants explained 'that Restorative Practice Program foster positive and supportive relationships with students and teachers in their schools.' Two participants had negative feedback regarding its ability at this point, fostering positive and supportive relationships.

One participant expressed, 'We are not at the stage where we have seen Restorative Practices foster positive and supportive relationships.' Two other participants noted,

> The RPP staff member herself fosters positive relationships with students and teachers just by her being available, being patient, being empathic, and being understanding. The RPP program does not foster supportive relationships. Teachers feel resentful of the RPP program and confused about its purpose and whether it is effective or not.

Moreover, another participant explained,

> Some students have continuous negative interactions with their classroom and specialist teachers and these are the ones who do the write ups that cause the students to be sent through the empowerment center. Often times when the student returns they are still viewed in a negative light and this causes them to have recurrent issues. I believe staff needs more training on sensitivity and actually meeting the student where they are to help them make changes for the

better. The students know when a teacher or staff member has given up on them or counted them out and they act accordingly.

Another participant mentioned, ‘Some students feel RPP is a safe place. Teachers feel that because students enjoy going, they will act out to be able to go to the RPP room.’

In addition, ‘Everyone is working together to go from hurt to heal. It is a team process. We are looking through the trauma lens knowing that most often these children are dysregulated awhile they must have "consequences", these consequences must have meaning.’

Moreover, a participant explained, ‘Rather than a punishment, the RPP is presented as an opportunity for students to learn new skills that will help them in the classroom and in the community.’ Another participant, outlined, ‘Takes all parties from hurt to heal.’ **‘**If used school wide it would help immensely.’ Another participant expressed,

> It does foster positive relationships due to the fact the students understand that they are not being suspended but going to an area that will help them and care for them. The teachers see that the program helps the student learn and use problem solving skills and techniques, something they would not receive if they were suspended.

Quality and Effectiveness of the Restorative Practice Program

Participants were asked how they judged the quality and effectiveness of the RPP in their school. The themes expressed were examining the out-of-school suspension and in-school suspensions of discipline referrals in IC were decreasing would show the

quality and effectiveness in the RPP. In addition, one participant expressed 'that it is not effective as it has some missing pieces due to not enough staff to support the room.' Lastly, the last theme that emerged from one participant, 'It is not effective as it has some missing pieces due to not enough staff to support the room.' Table 14 illustrates the participants themes regarding the quality and effectiveness of the program.

Table 14

Restorative Practice Program: Quality and Effectiveness

Decrease Discipline data (OSS/ISS)	Not effective
80%	20%

Note. Percentages of participants' responses

As noted in Table 14, 80% of the participants explained that RPP, quality and effectiveness, was measured by looking at IC, a school wide system used to track student discipline for out-of-school and in-school suspension in relation to it decreasing. One participant explained,

> The quality by running reports in IC to see how many students have repeat instances where they end up with ISS or OSS. This helps get an idea of who has actually attempted to follow their Empowerment plan and has been using the skills that are taught both school wide and in the empowerment center. When I look at the building as a whole, it makes be believe that we have a lot of work to do in order to truly provide a Restorative Justice program that works.

Another participant expressed, 'Reduction in office discipline referrals, Application of wellness techniques by these students.'

Restorative Practice Program Implementation Reasons

Participants were asked the reason, or why, their school district decided to utilize Restorative Practices. Common themes that emerged for reasons regarded their school districts implementing Restorative Practices were to decrease the number of out-of-school suspensions. Also, to address childhood trauma with a technique that built community, forgiveness, and righting the wrong. Nine out of the 10 participants acknowledged the purpose of using Restorative Practices by their district in order to address the school's population high number of office referrals and suspensions. One participant stated,

> The program was initiated before my arrival but I do know that as a district initiative the hope is to move towards keeping children in school and trying to figure out what happened to the student to cause them to act and not why. When we get to the root of the problems then the restorative piece is more meaningful.

Another participant expressed, 'ISS and traditional discipline practices were not working.' Moreover, one of the participants of the administrative team acknowledged the following:

> Research shows ISS/OSS are not effective ways to decrease behavioral issues. I think this program was designed as a mechanism to avoid suspending students. The logic was that if we can get down to the root of the problem, help the student feel empowered, and demonstrate we are invested in the student's success, the student would choose a different behavior and avoid suspension.

Lastly, a participant expounded on the reason for implementing restorative practices;

> That as a district we had to realize that we have a large number of students impacted by trauma; this was a method to support them. In addition, high number

of office discipline referrals/high number of OSS, Population with high number of ACEs (trauma) are the main reasons needed to try a different approach than most skills, who use suspensions as their means to deal with behavior issues.

Likert Scale Survey Results

The researcher also administered a survey to the participants to obtain data on the Restorative Justice program. The participants included in this research were from the schools administrative team, which comprised of principals, assistant principals, deans, school counselors and social workers. The Likert scale survey allowed this researcher to obtain the opinions of the participants regarding their feedback on the RPP. Utilizing a Likert scale, participants were to answer with whether they agree, strongly disagree, disagree, or strongly agree.

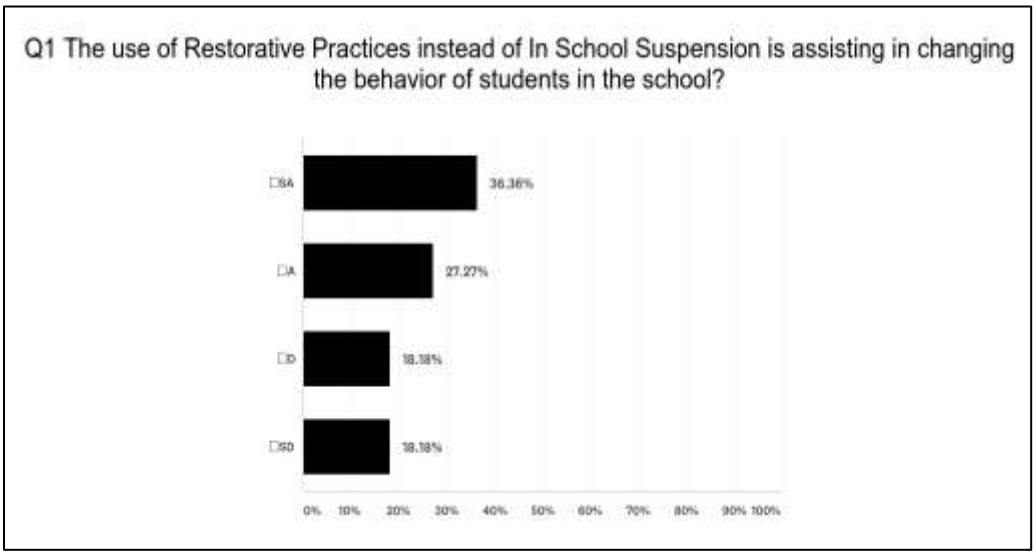


Figure 8. Percentage of participants who felt the use of RPP is more effective with changing student behavior than in school suspension.

Figure 8 shows 36% of the participants strongly agreed the use of Restorative Practices could assist in changing students' behaviors instead of in-school suspension. In

addition, 64% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that Restorative Practices could assist in changing students' behaviors instead of in-school suspension.

Figure 9 indicates that 55% of the participants in this study responded that they agreed that Restorative Practices in schools were more effective than out-of-school suspension. In retrospect, a marginal number of the participants, approximately 11%, disagreed. This marginal percentage indicated in Figure 9 that some of the administrators disagreed that restorative practices were more effective than out-of-school suspension. Although, there was a discriminative difference between participants that disagreed versus agreed in reviewing Figure 9, 88% of the participants either strongly agreed or agreed that Restorative Practices could assist in changing student's behavior.

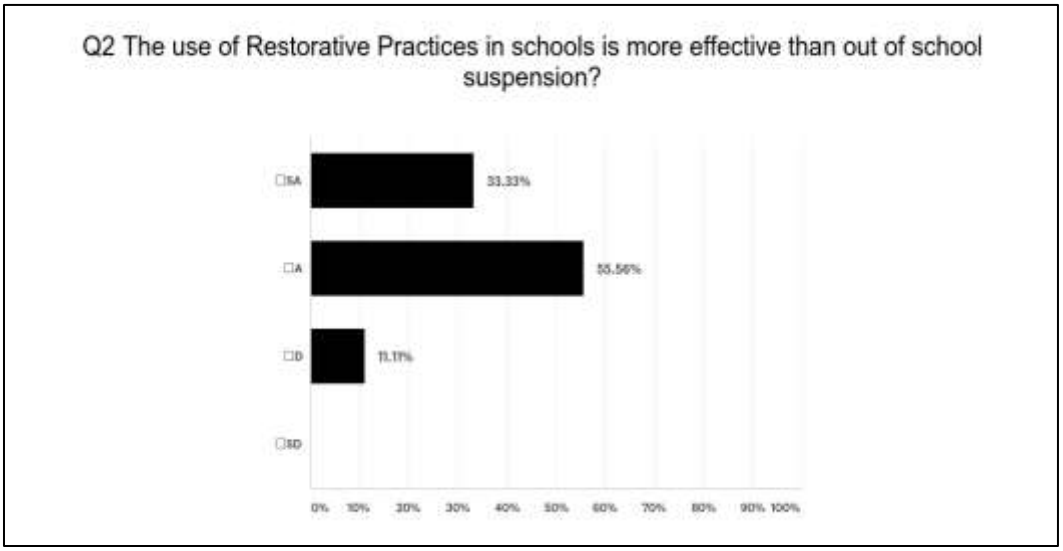


Figure 9. Percentage of participants who believe RPP in schools is more effective than out-of-school suspension.

Figure 10 reports that 78% responded that Restorative Practices in schools were more effective than in-school suspension. That means 78% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that Restorative Practices were more effective than providing discipline

that involved in-school suspension. However, 22% responded that they disagreed that Restorative Practices in school were more effective than in-school suspension.

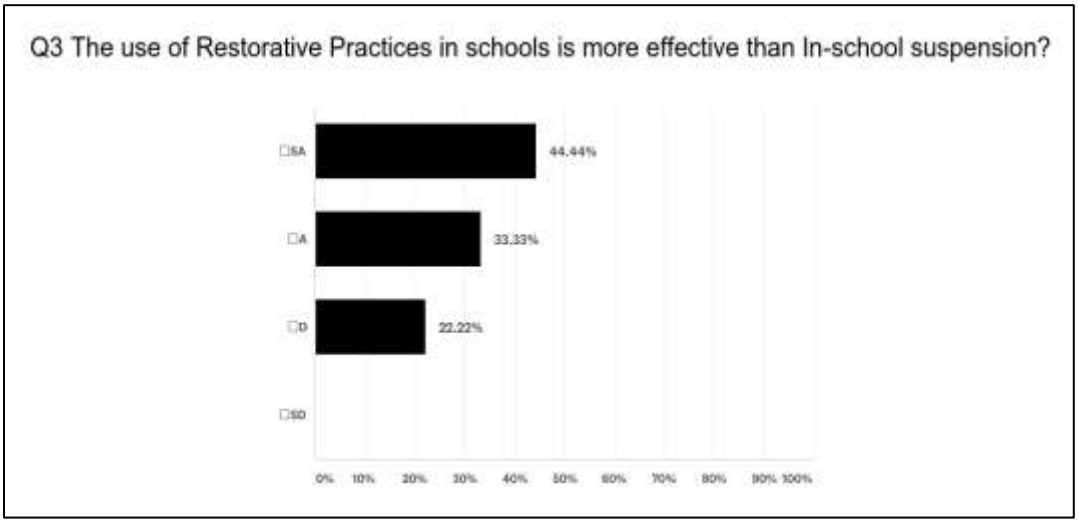


Figure 10. Percentage of participants who believe RPP in schools is more effective than in-school suspension. *Note. Q4 was similar to Q2 and to avoid repetition, results were not shown.*

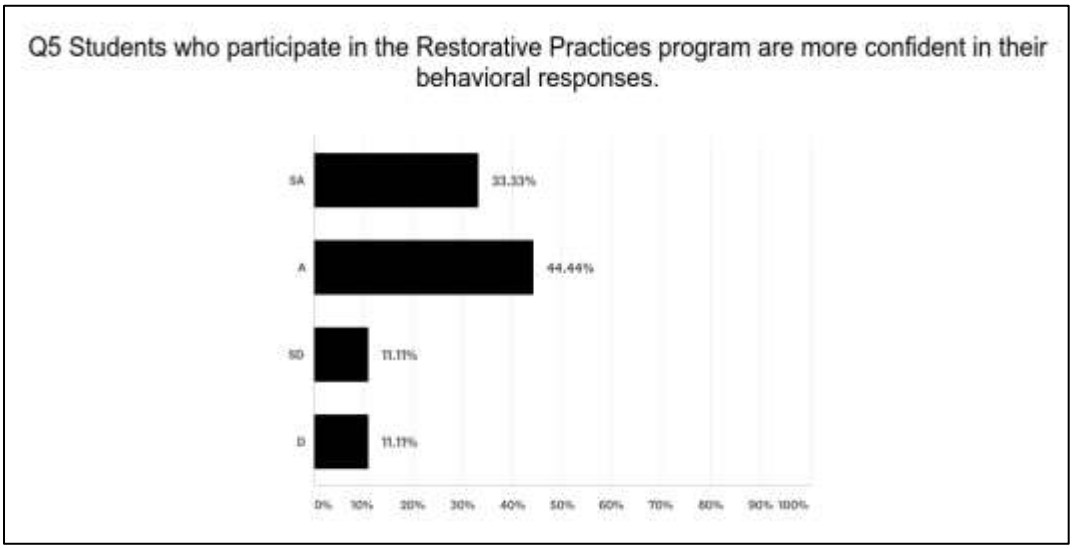


Figure 11. Percentage of participants who believe students who participate in RPP are more confident in their behavioral responses.

Figure 11 indicates 78% of the participants feedback represent they either agreed or strongly agreed that students who participated in the Restorative Practices program were more confident in their behavioral responses. The other 33% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed whether students who participated in the Restorative Practices program were more confident in their behavioral responses.

Figure 12 indicates the percentage of participants who agreed or strongly agreed that students who participated in the Restorative Practices program decreased their behavioral referrals. Of those participants, 67% agreed or strongly agreed that student who participated in the Restorative Practices program decreased their behavioral referrals. Another 33% disagreed or strongly disagreed that students who participated in the Restorative Practices program decreased their behavioral referrals.

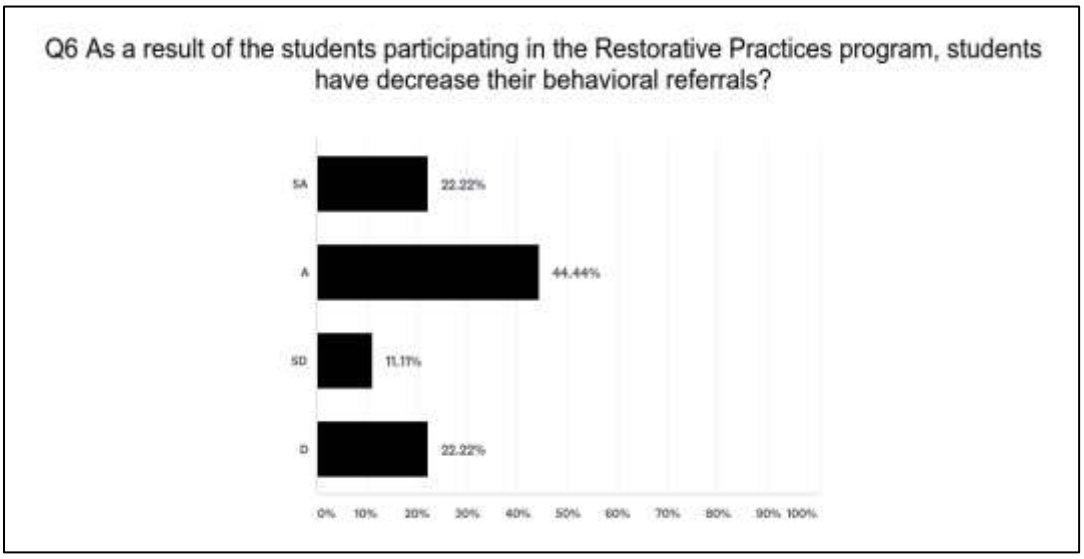


Figure 12. Percentage of participants who believe students discipline referrals have decreased.

Figure 13 reported that 89% were in favor of utilizing Restorative Practices in schools. A very small margin of 11% reported that they think Restorative Practices were not favored in schools.

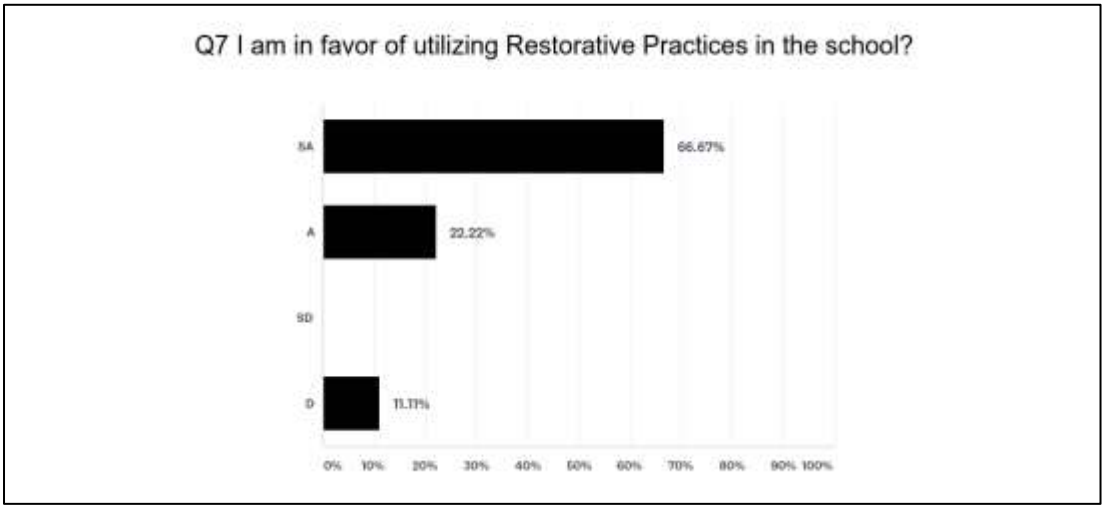


Figure 13. Percentage of participants who are in favor of utilizing RPP in school.

Figure 14 illustrates 89% of the participants from the survey agreed or strongly disagreed that they would suggest that other schools use Restorative Practices. Only 11% of the participants disagreed that they would not suggest another school to utilize Restorative Practices.

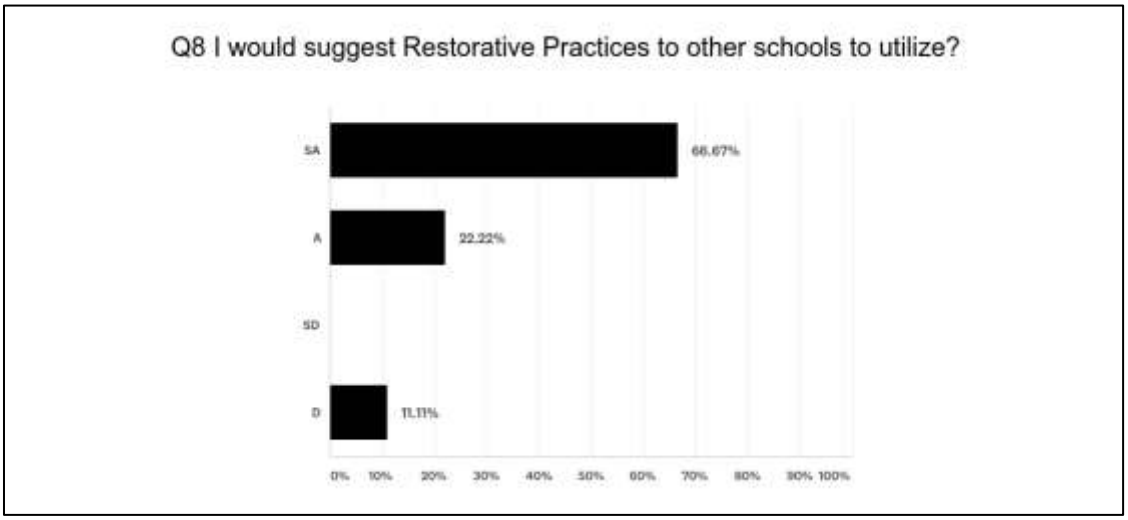


Figure 14. Percentage of participants who would suggest RPP to other schools.

Suggestions of Participants on Restorative Practices

During the interview process this researcher wanted to ascertain what suggestions, would the participants make if any regarding the Restorative practices? There were common themes from the participants. Those common themes were that restorative practices should be universal in all schools. Another common theme that was suggested regarding restorative practices was that professional development is needed to be given to all staff. Staff should participate in professional development regarding Restorative Practices. There was one participant with a neutral response in that, 'restorative practice is not the only practice. That we continue to offer those practices as ONE of many tools in our toolbox, and to realize that NOTHING is exactly the right answer all the time.'

On the contrary two of the 10participants felt, 'the restorative practice program should be a universal program whereby all students are participate in restorative practice program in order to minimize current student challenges and future student challenges as well.' 'That all schools should try Restorative Practices. Everyone must be on board.'

Common Theme: Professional Development

Eight out of 10 of the participants addressed that there suggestion for the RPP would be to increase the professional development for staff to employ the RPP programing effectively.

One of the eight of ten participants stated,

> To be honest, I was skeptical when we first started. I believed that we were negating students' responsibility to their actions. Somewhat coddling students. However, as I observed the impact closely, I quickly became a fan. Students were empowered, teacher/student relationships were stronger, and

most importantly students grew academically, emotionally and socially. All stakeholders must be have buy-in and be WELL informed about the process and plan.

Another stated, 'training school wide as well as district wide in more detail is needed.' 'Classroom use of Restorative practice is needed along with continued PD. It takes a while for some people to believe their effectiveness.' 'Training, training, training! Don't leave anyone out. If an adult comes in contact, they need to be trained.' Moreover, another participant commented on the professional development of staff in that, 'Because teacher buy-in is such an important component, I recommend professional development prior to implementation.'

Lastly, a participant mentioned, 'I would like to see restorative practices exist in both a short term and a long term option. Some students need a day or two of removal and restoration to work on behaviors. Some students need to practice getting it right for weeks (maybe months), before their behavior has effectively undergone a restoration.'

Summary

Utilizing a mixed-methods study to investigate Restorative Practice and Mindful Activities possible relationship to the decreased number of suspension in African American boys in third grade, this chapter presented the findings from the qualitative and quantitative data. This researcher reviewed and analyzed the surveys, interview responses, and questionnaires that were completed by the participants. The participants included in this research were from the schools administrative team, which comprised of Principals, Assistant Principals, Deans, School Counselors and Social Workers.

Moreover, the findings regarding Null Hypothesis 1 failed to reject and that there is no difference between the two schools. Therefore, despite providing alternative discipline methods, Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities, there was no difference between School B and School C suspensions for third grade African Boys.

Regarding the results of Null Hypothesis 2, due to the small sample size of other ethnicities in that grade level, there was a lack of data to support running the z-test. School B only had one student who was of another ethnicity, who was White. This student had no suspensions reported in third grade for the reporting year of this study.

Moreover, for Null Hypothesis 3 there was no difference between third grade African American boys' and non-African American boys' suspension rates in a school with Restorative Justice discipline methods, the researcher rejected the null. There was a difference between the Black and Hispanic suspension rates in third grade boys at School C in which Restorative Justice discipline methods were employed. Overall, the participants appeared to report that the Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities decreased the suspension rates of African American boys in the third grade.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Reflection, Recommendations

Introduction

Chapter Five provides a discussion of the study results, personal reflections, and recommendations. In this study, the researcher explored the alternative discipline method, Restorative Justice, and investigated if it contributed to a decrease in the suspension of African American boys in third grade in a Midwestern elementary school, utilizing a mixed-methods study. While evaluating the effectiveness of alternative discipline methods on restorative practices and mindfulness, the researcher wanted to discover what methods, if any, were working to decrease suspension in schools. The researcher focused on third grade African American boys, due to prior research support that third grade retention and suspension was named the school-to-prison pipeline. This precipitated the researcher's interest in solving or decreasing suspension in the then-current school district that the researcher was employed in, as the number of suspensions were high in this particular grade level. In addition, the researcher observed, during previous experience working in the penal system as a counselor, that the vicious cycle began with inmates when they were as young as elementary school.

In addition, the purpose of this study was to evaluate if Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities decreased suspensions; and, if so, the intent to use the practices and activities in other schools in the district. The researcher also conducted a mixed-methods study that included interviews, surveys, and questionnaires to ascertain the effects of Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities. The researcher analyzed the then-current discipline suspension data of African American boys in third grade via the district program SWISS data, which indicated the suspension's purpose, as well as quantity.

This data were used to verify if African American boys' suspensions decreased or increased based on the application of alternative interventions, Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

This researcher examined the following Hypotheses and Research Questions.

H1: Third grade African American boys in a school with traditional discipline methods have more suspensions compared to the third grade African American boys in a school with Restorative Justice discipline methods.

H2: There is a difference between third grade African American boys' and non-African American boys' suspension rates in a school with traditional discipline methods.

H3: There is a difference between third grade African American boys' and non-African American boys' suspension rates in a school with Restorative Justice discipline methods.

RQ1: What alternative discipline methods or interventions could decrease the number of suspensions in African American boys in third grade?

RQ2: What association do Restorative Practices and Mindfulness Activities have in decreasing the number of suspensions in African American boys?

Discussion

Hypothesis 1*:* Subsequently, after running a z-test for difference in proportions for third grade African American boys' suspensions in a school with traditional discipline methods compared to the third grade African American boys in a school with Restorative Justice discipline methods, there was no difference in the suspension rates (see Table 11).

Therefore, the researcher failed to support Hypothesis 1, that there is a difference between the two schools.

However, research showed there was a significant difference across America that supported the suspensions of African American boys at a higher rate. The USDOE (2016) noted that African American boys' suspensions represented a higher number of suspensions, which was in disproportionate numbers. African American boys were suspended nationwide at a significantly higher rate than other ethnicities (Hoffman et al., 2003). The data in this research study failed to support the alternate hypothesis regardless of other alternative methods applied, such as Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities. African American boys in third grade had more suspensions. Despite the fact that there were more African American boys suspended in overall in School District Achieve, the results did not support this finding. The participants in this study noted that in their responses that the interventions they were implementing were decreasing the number of suspensions. In the researcher's summation, the study failed to support the hypothesis, because this study needed to broaden the participant numbers and include additional schools in the district, as well as grade levels. Moreover, the researcher also contributed the study failing to support the hypothesis, due to limitations of the interventions being provided by the school in its implementation of year one. The suspensions in both schools for third grade African American males were high per capita, or overall student enrollment, in that grade level. Therefore, the suspension for Black boys were higher no matter the discipline method. Subsequently, there is a need to address what methods or approaches that could be supported in the school environment that would address this dichotomy. Wright, Morgan, Coyne, Beaver, and Barnes (2014)

noted there was a large body of empirical research found a significant racial gap in the use of exclusionary school discipline with Black students punished at rates disproportionate to Whites. Furthermore, no variable, or set of variables, had yet to account for this discrepancy, inviting speculation that this association was caused by racial bias or racial antipathy (Wright, Morgan, Coyne, Beaver, & Barnes, 2014).

Hypothesis 2: The researcher evaluated the secondary data for third grade boys' suspensions utilizing data from the school information systems called SWISS and IC. It was identified through IC data that there were not enough students' discipline from other ethnicities in the researched school to allow analysis. The student whom was of an ethnicity other than Black was not suspended for the academic school year that the researcher was conducting the study. Therefore, there was no way to conclude if there was a difference between third grade African American boys' and non-African American boys' suspension rates in a school with traditional discipline methods. Table 12 noted the data of enrolled African American boys in third grade in contrast to other ethnicities.

Studies, however, showed that there was an alarming rate of African American boys and other minority ethnicities suspended for minor offenses compared to their counterparts. As Skiba and Losen (2015) stated, "Numerous policymakers responded to concerns about school safety and disruption with a 'get tough' philosophy relying upon zero-tolerance policies and frequent out-of-school suspensions and expulsions" (p. 4). Hence, African American boys in third grade led in high suspensions.

High suspensions of minority students had not changed since the 1970s, as noted by Skiba and Losen (2015). Minority suspension rates, especially for Black students, began to rise in the 1970s, prompting concerns from civil rights groups (Skiba & Losen,

2015). The high rates continued in the 21st century for African American boys. African American students were consistently suspended two to three times as often as other students, and similarly overrepresented in office referrals, corporal punishment, and school explosion (Skiba, 2010, p. 1). Although, the null hypothesis could not be tested in contrast to school B, the data did however report there were more African American boys suspended overall (see Table 11). School B showed that out of 58 African American third grade boys, 27 African American boys were suspended. In comparison to the total number of African American third grade boys, 47% of third grade, the number of African American boys being suspended was a high number of African American boys in one school.

The administrative team observed their suspension rates were extremely high and needed to be addressed with alternative discipline methods. The alternative method deployed was Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities. The results to the effectiveness of these interventions are reported in the discussion of Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 3: There is a difference between third grade African American boys' and non-African American boys' suspension rates in a school with Restorative Justice discipline methods. After running a *z*-test for difference in proportions, it was ascertained that there was a difference between African American third grade boys and third grade Hispanic suspension rates at School C. The researcher supported Hypothesis 3 (see Table 12). School C was 45% Hispanic, a little less than half of the population.

Moreover, in third grade only one Hispanic student was suspended in contrast to the 30 African American boys in third grade, which was a significant difference. Although school discipline rates decreased over time for most ethnic groups, among

Black students school discipline rates increased between 1991 and 2005 (Wallace et al., 2008, p. 1). In school C there was a noted disparity in the discipline between African American boys in third grade versus Non African American boys, specifically Hispanic boys. The suspension rates for third grade Hispanic boys was minute compared to the other African American boys enrolled. Out of 16 Hispanic boys, there was only one Hispanic boy who was suspended. According to the qualitative data collected from the participants, participants would contribute that to the use of other alternative practices, Restorative practices, and mindfulness that were completed with the students. Furthermore, to have a clear understanding of why there was a difference between the African American suspensions and the Hispanic students at School C, further research is needed to explain why such a significant difference existed. Cultural relevancy may play a part in those who are completing the referrals and or assigning the discipline to students in School C.

Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, and Bachman (2008) reported that a substantial number of studies found that Black youth disproportionately experienced school discipline, "However, fewer investigations have explored disciplinary disproportionality among students of other ethnic backgrounds, and those studies have yielded inconsistent results" (p. 1). Therefore, a higher number of studies were completed on the disparity of suspension among African American students and White versus Hispanics and African Americans. Although, this study concluded Hispanic students had less suspensions than their African American counterparts, more studies have to be conducted to explore reasons for this discrepancy. Wallace et al.'s (2008) study reported that Hispanic students were more likely than White students to be suspended but less likely than Blacks

to be suspended. Additionally, some research reported by Wallace et al. (2008) noted that White, Black, and Hispanic students from 142 schools from a school district in west central Florida found there was a difference in the number of suspensions of African American students and Hispanic students (para.8). The study reported that Hispanic students were more likely than White students to be suspended, but less likely than Blacks to be suspended (Wallace et al., 2008).

This disparity in suspension regarding African American and Hispanics may be associated due to cultural differences. These cultural differences alluded to why there was a higher suspension rate among minorities. This researcher's experience has been that some of the differences between the suspensions and African American boys could be the differences in the social economics status. Although Skiba (2010) stated, "The over representation has not been found to be due to poverty, nor is there evidence that African American receive more suspensions due to increased rate or intensity of misbehavior" (p. 1). Others suggested that young African American males were often portrayed in the media as criminals who should be feared and avoided (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010). Consciously or unconsciously, teachers may react to African American males in the classroom in ways that are consistent with these stereotypes (Darensbourg et al., 2010). This would include but not be limited to the teachers and administrative personal biases that may contribute to a higher number of referrals and suspension of African American boys than Hispanics or other ethnicities.

Research Question 1: What alternative discipline methods or interventions could decrease the number of suspensions in African American boys in third grade? The researcher discovered participants felt mindfulness activities and restorative practices

were a successful intervention and alternative to discipline. The participants also provided credence that mindfulness and restorative practices decreased the number of suspensions of African American third grade boys. The participants' perceptions were that mindfulness and restorative practices were helping reduce the number of referrals. In addition, they expressed they saw an overall difference with the student responses to issues and their behaviors, after participating in Restorative practices and mindfulness, changed. However, the participants' perceptions did not match the data conclusions. This researcher acknowledged that the study's qualitative data provided a construct regarding this innovative intervention.

Participants believed that Restorative Practices allowed them to keep more students in school and in a safe environment. Mindfulness and restorative practices gave an opportunity to have deep conversations with students about their behaviors and re-teach school expectations. 'More students are learning to understand how their behavior effect the class and school as a whole.' Additionally, 'students are able to understand why consequences may be given.'

While conducting the research, the researcher noted, when obtaining feedback from the participants, what alternative discipline methods or interventions decreased the number of suspensions in African American boys in third grade. None of the participants discussed any other alternative methods. No participants discussed PBIS, although this intervention was utilized in the district since 2007. The administrators did not expound on other alternatives than the method that the district put in place, which was mindfulness and restorative practices. This led the researcher to believe that more alternative discipline methods were needed to address the high suspensions; however, no other

methods were discussed. This researcher would like to explore if teachers had participated in this study what their feedback would have been in terms of alternative discipline methods or interventions which could decrease the number of suspensions in African American boys in third grade. Teachers were the first line of implementation in classroom interventions, as well as making sure the milieu supported a productive and safe environment in schools. Teachers also overwhelmingly referred students for discipline issues in the school. Therefore, feedback in future research regarding alternative discipline would provide another viewpoint.

Research Question 2: What association do Restorative Practices and Mindfulness Activities have in decreasing the number of suspensions in African American boys? The researcher concluded from the qualitative data that there was an association between Restorative Practices and Mindfulness Activities in decreasing the number of suspensions. The researcher discovered that the participants' perceptions overall felt as if the Restorative Practices and Mindfulness Activities decreased the number of referrals and suspensions in the school. The interviews, surveys, and questionnaires yielded that the administrative team supported the initiative and noted that it was needed to assist with the suspensions in their school. Participants overwhelming expressed that in their perspective Restorative Practices and Mindfulness Activities decreased the number of suspensions in African American boys. Participants exclaimed 'that mindful activities and restorative practices give students the opportunity to change their behavior while promoting appropriate student social behavior.' Further, that 'Mindful activities are relaxing and allow students to self-regulate'

However, the study also showed that statically there was no association that Restorative Practices and Mindfulness Activities decrease the number of suspensions in African American boys. Therefore, despite the fact that qualitative research presented in Chapter Four overwhelmingly supported that Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities did have a direct association in decreasing the number of suspensions in their school, the quantitative data did not support the alternative intervention. This researcher identified the implementation of this intervention in the school was still new. The fidelity of providing restorative practices and mindful activities in the school setting appeared too premature to assess the effects of the interventions.

Further, observation and continual assessment needed to take place, such as, assessing the decrease in the number of school discipline referrals, out-of-school suspensions, and the decrease of the number of students referred for in school suspension. In addition, there will need to be further assessment on whether the student feedback validated that they saw a difference in the discipline assigned for the infraction he or she committed in the school setting versus out-of-school suspension.

Limitations

This researcher identified there were several limitations in this study. One of the limitations was some of the participants did not answer some parts of the questionnaire. This left some of their feedback blank and did not allow their perspectives to be taken in consideration. Another limitation was there was a significant role change in school leadership during the course of the year. This affected the fidelity of the program implementation during the school year. The existing administrator had to stabilize the school milieu and balance the staff after staff changes.

In addition, there was great turnover in the third grade teaching staff. Towards the middle of the school year, the school had to provide for temporary teachers in the classroom. Two of the teachers who were teaching were provisionally certified. However, their teaching pedagogy was subpar. They could not keep the attention of the students due to non-engaging lessons and low rigor. The researcher observed both provisional teachers had ineffective classroom management, which could have played a part in the high number of suspensions in third grade African American boys. The two particular teachers had not received the initial trainings in trauma-informed practices. This may have affected their response and understanding of deploying and following the district's initiative in trauma-informed practices. This initiative included restorative practices as an alternative to discipline, as well as utilizing mindful activities to assist with students being able to be in the here and now and not overreacting to outside stimuli, which caused students to be overwhelmed and have negative behavioral responses. This lack of training did not allow all third grade boys to get the interventions that could provide them with support to be successful and reduce suspensions. Moreover, it was identified that the number of participants could have been increased to encompass the population in the researched school. This would have allowed for a larger sample size.

A new intervention implementation all at one time could have caused a limitation in this study. This researcher observed that the study district had an initiative to provide Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities for students within the building. In addition to the district's new programming, the school building itself also had building initiatives that may have caused some interference with providing Restorative Practices and Mindful Activities with fidelity. Therefore, it may have caused some inconsistencies in

the practices of the staff in the school deciding to choose when it would employ specific interventions.

Professional Development Training was observed by this researcher to have been a limitation in this study. New staff hired during the year did not receive an adequate amount of training, in comparison to the staff hired at the beginning of the year. This caused a lack of consistency in the use of mindful activities and restorative practices. It allowed staff to resort back to old habits and practices. Noted in Chapter Four, a need for additional training developed as a common theme, as evidenced by comments from participant surveys. For example, training school wide, as well as district wide, in more detail was needed. Classroom use of restorative practice is needed along with continued PD. It takes a while for some people to believe their effectiveness. Training, training, training! Do not leave anyone out. If an adult comes in contact, they need to be trained.

Recommendations: Restorative Practice & Mindfulness

This researcher observed the Restorative Practice center helping students maintain school expectations concerning both academic achievement and social-emotional functioning through intensive interventions. The restorative center utilized a trauma-informed approach to support students who would traditionally receive in-school or out-of-school suspensions for behavioral indicators.

Moreover, this systematic approach provided mindful activities in the schools and assisted students, while in the Restorative Practice Center, to utilize other ways to self-regulate themselves. This provides additional support for students who are experiencing trauma-related social-emotional issues, as well as students who have sensory input needs (over/under stimulated, sensitive to noise/movement, etc.) that may affect classroom

behavior or disrupt learning for self and others. The researcher recommends staff receive ongoing training throughout the year, with the retention of staff and teachers that are present from the previous year to sustain rapport for the programing of the interventions.

Furthermore, as examined by this researcher informing the parents and stakeholders regarding restorative practices and mindfulness appeared to support the ongoing implementation of this intervention. However, this researcher ascertained from one participant that having information for parents on how they could utilize mindfulness and restorative practices at home could help with the student behaviors. It is recommended that parents receive additional training in mindfulness and restorative practices. Schools should also provide parents annual outcomes on how mindfulness and restorative practices assisted the school in decreasing discipline, as well as providing the statistical data to support their findings.

Recommendations for Future Reasearch

Benefits could be gained from increased studies in the area of restorative justice and mindfulness activities. This study should be replicated with an increased number of schools and participants. This would allow for the ability to triangulate the data through multiple schools' suspension rates and intervention implementation.

Moreover, in completing research on this topic, it is apparent there needs to be more research regarding alternatives to suspension in schools. There are limited ideas regarding alternatives to discipline. Postive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBS) seems to be the most renowned systematic interventions that have been utilized consistently. Other methods need to expound on traditional discipline methods. Especially methods of discipline utilized for African American males and minorities. Moreover, further research

is needed in this area to conclude if cultural differences are a contributing factor in this phenomenon of higher suspensions. Future research and practice efforts should seek to better understand and eliminate racial, ethnic, and gender disproportionality in school discipline (Wallace et al., 2008, p. 1).

More research in trauma-informed practices needs to occur on a national level with schools. Mindfulness was noted as an excellent way to be in the here and now and was an ancient practice that was able to provide a way to self-regulate. The findings from the study show 33% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed whether students who participated in the Restorative Practices program were more confident in their behavioral responses. Hence, it was recommended that students independently need to be given a questionnaire, interviewed, and provided a survey to receive feedback regarding their preceptions of the Restorative Practices program and Mindful Activities. This would enable those who are evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of the intervention to take into consideration the impact that mindfulness and restorative practices are having on student discipline.

Summary

In conclusion, the evidence provided in this study would suggest that there is racial disparity regarding students and discipline. There are significant amounts of African American boys suspended at an alarming rate. In particular, in third grade which was documented as the school-to-prison pipeline. This evidence further emphasizes the importance of schools addressing behaviors overall, while not negating that zero-tolerance policies may cause students to have large amounts of suspensions.

Former research eluded to several different explanations regarding the racial bias and inequality. The key debate, as stated by Rocque (2010), "is whether disproportionate minority discipline is a function of differential behavior (Do minorities offend more frequently?) or a function of differential treatment (Are officials acting in a biased fashion when enforcing laws/rules?)" (p. 557).

Training for all areas of staff must take precedent to address the reaction and interactions with students. Teacher and staff-student rapport must be established, in particular, referring to racial disparity that takes place with teacher referrals and how the infractions are addressed based on a student's ethnicity. Teachers have to be able to understand differences in student cultures. Students affected by trauma may need an alternative method to address their behavioral concerns that are evidencing differently in the classroom. Those students' responses may not be just disorderly behavior; trauma presents itself masked by signs of depression, anger, self-harm, and rage.

It is not only critical for schools to address behaviors that interfere with progress, but it is equally important for schools to ascertain why students are misbehaving (Quinlan, 2016). It is clear there is an over whelming number of African American boys that are being suspended. It causes great alarm to the researcher as a former school counselor and administrator. As the researcher continues her career in education it is very valuable to provide supports and systems that garner successful scholars. The researcher witnessed working in a prison first hand. Many of the inmates suffered childhood trauma or events, whereas if restorative practices and or mindfulness could have been taught earlier in childhood, perhaps this could have been avoided. Many students have severe trauma in their lives or poor supports that cause them to behave

inordinately. These behavioral concerns in school later lead to what we know as the school-to-prison pipeline. It is imperative as educators, therapist, and counselors that we come together and provide innovative interventions that disrupt the business as usual in schools when it comes to addressing behavior.

As the researcher's mentor Jim Walters would say, 'We must keep in mind how cultural relevance/sensitivity plays a major role and determinant to student violations.' It is imperative that we educate teachers regarding students of all races in which they teach.

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Appendix A

Permission to use the Study Site

February 27, 2017

To: Dr. Carter-Oliver

From: Leslie Muhammad

Re: Research Permission

I am a doctoral student at Lindenwood University and for the past year and half I have been completing my doctoral studies. I am nearing the research phase of my dissertation program. The university requires that I obtain permission before conducting research. I am writing to request permission to conduct research in our schools on third graders at two elementary schools. No students' names will be included in the research.

The administrator and dean of students as participants will remain anonymous, as well as students' data. My research topic is Restorative Practices in Schools and its Possible Relationship to Decreasing Discipline Infractions in African American Males. My hope in completing this project is that it will provide current information on alternative student discipline in urban elementary schools. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Leslie Muhammad

I, Candice Carter-Oliver, give Leslie Muhammad permission to conduct educational research at two elementary schools in the LEA upon IRB approval.

Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Carter-Oliver

CEO's signature 

Appendix B

Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

"Restorative Practices in Schools and its Possible Relationship to Decreasing Discipline Infractions in African American Males."

Principal Investigator: Leslie Muhammad Telephone: 314-574-7118 E-mail: LAM910@lindenwood.edu

Participant _____ Contact info _____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Leslie Muhammad under the guidance of Dr. Robyn Elder. The purpose of this research is to study restorative practices and to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative discipline methods such as restorative practices and mindful activities in a Midwestern urban inner city elementary school of African American male students, in third grade.
2. a) Your participation will involve
   - **The researcher will administer survey to the participants via email in the form of a link to a Google Form survey. This will be submitted electronically and anonymously to the administrative staff members that service 3rd grade boys.**
   - **The researcher will administer questionnaire to the participants via email in the form of a link to a Google Form survey. This will be submitted electronically and anonymously to the administrative staff members that service 3rd grade boys).**
   - **The researcher will interview the Principals, Assistant Principals, Deans of Students, School Counselors and School Social Workers that service third grade boys. Each interviewed administrative staff member will be referred to as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6 etc. The researcher will explore emerging themes in questionnaire, surveys, as well as from the interview responses.**
   - Subjects will participate one time in the location of their choice either at the resource office or a neutral location of their choice.

   b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately sixty minutes and you will receive a $5.00 card for your time.

   Approximately [15 participants] will be involved in this research. There will be a total of two research sites (two elementary schools).
3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.
4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about Restorative Practices in schools and its possible relationship to decreasing discipline infractions in African American males and its possibilities to help society.
5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.
6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.
7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Leslie Muhammad 314-574-7118 or the Supervising Faculty, Robyn Elder 636-949-2000. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Marilyn Abbott, Interim Provost at mabbott@lindenwood.edu or 636-949-4912.

   I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____ Participant's Printed Name

Participant's Signature Date

Signature of Principal Investigator Date Investigator Printed Name

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. **What is your position in the organization?**
2. **Do you think the Restorative Practices are helping students that would otherwise be suspended? If so how & or why?**
3. **Do you find utilizing Mindful Activities decrease the number of referrals? If so how?**
4. **What suggestions would you make if any regarding the Restorative practices?**
5. **How would you compare using the former ways of discipline to utilizing Restorative practices?**

Appendix D

Administrative Survey

The following survey is voluntarily and will be utilized to gather data to assist with obtaining information regarding the use of restorative practices in your school and if it is effectiveness. Please note the enclosed rubric below and indicate by marking an X in the box that best fits your answer to the below questions.

SA = Strongly Agree **A** = Agree **D** = Disagree **SD** = Strongly Disagree

1. The use of Restorative Practices instead of In School Suspension is assisting in changing the behavior of students in the school?

   ☐SA ☐A ☐D ☐SD

2. The use of Restorative Practices in schools is more effective than out of school suspension?

   ☐SA ☐A ☐D ☐SD

3. The use of Restorative Practices in schools is more effective than In-school suspension?

   ☐SA ☐A ☐D ☐SD

4. The use of Restorative Practices in schools is more effective than out of school suspension?

   ☐SA ☐A ☐D ☐SD

5. Students who participate in the Restorative Practices program are more confident in their behavioral responses.

   ☐SA ☐A ☐D ☐SD

6. As a result of the students participating in the Restorative Practices program, students have decrease their behavioral referrals?

   ☐SA ☐A ☐D ☐SD

7. I am in favor of utilizing Restorative Practices in the school?

   ☐SA ☐A ☐D ☐SD

8. I would suggest Restorative Practices to other schools to utilize?

   ☐SA ☐A ☐D ☐SD

Appendix E

Administrative Questionnaire

1. Please explain your schools practices in referring students to the Restorative Practice Program?

2. Describe your experience with the Restorative Practice Program.

3. How do you structure the Restorative Practice Program?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Restorative Practice Program in your school?
5. Is the Restorative Practice Program suitable to the needs of the school?

6. Please explain the process of Restorative Practice Program in in your school?

7. How does or does not the Restorative Practice Program foster positive and supportive relationships with students and teachers in your school?

8. How do judge the quality and effectiveness of the Restorative Practice Program in your school?

9. Why did you schools LEA decide upon utilizing this program at your school?

10. Explain how your personal initiative and its effects on the success of the Restorative Practice Program in your role in the school?

11. Do you think this initiative is effective for the school culture?

Vitae

Leslie Vanderford-Muhammad

EDUCATION

Professional Experience

Student Service Coordinator, Confluence Charter Schools District Office 2016-present
Principal, Confluence Academy Walnut Park/ Aspire Academy 2014-2016
Assistant Principal, Confluence Academy-Walnut Park 2011-2015
Administrative Intern, Confluence Academy-Walnut Park 2007-2011
School Counselor, Confluence Academy-Walnut Park 2006-2011
Counselor, Community Counseling Center 2002-2006
Lead Counselor, New Beginnings C-STAR 1998-2002
Senior Counselor and Clinical Coordinator, Illinois Depart. Corrections 1995-1998

Education

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY
Doctorate in Instructional Leadership May 2018
Maters in Educational Leadership and Administration Aug 2012
Masters in Professional Counseling May 2006
Masters in Guidance Counseling May 2006
Graduated with Honors (Chi Sigma Iota)
SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY
Bachelor of Arts in Psychology May 2000
FLORRISANT VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Associates Arts Degree May 1992

Certifications

School Counseling Certification- Primary and Secondary Education K-12 (April 2006)
School Leadership (Educational Leadership and Administration) Primary and Secondary Education K-12 Praxis- exam passed
Certified Registered Alcohol Drug Counselor (CRADC)