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Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, Zero-Tolerance Discipline, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

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Abstract

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by

Lois Victoria Woods

MPhil, Walden University, 2020

MPSA, Columbus State University, 2015

BS, Adelphi University, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Zero-tolerance discipline policies led to the introduction of police on school campuses and has resulted in a disproportionate number of in-school arrests and referrals of Black middle-school students, subjecting them to the school-to-prison pipeline. An abundance of data suggest the negative effects of zero tolerance; however, less is known regarding alternative evidence-based strategies such as the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). Grounded in stage environment fit and labeling theoretical frameworks, the purpose of this study was to examine if JDAI status (pre-JDAI and post-JDAI) could predict arrests and referrals, while controlling for race, gender, and age. Secondary data were collected from a juvenile court in northwest Georgia on 1,303 middle-school students. The students who formed this purposive sample for the study were arrested or referred 2 years prior to the implementation of the JDAI School Referral Reduction Program, and 2 recent years post-JDAI. Binary logistic regressions were conducted for each the outcomes of arrests and referrals to ascertain the predictive relationships of JDAI, race, gender, and age. The results found only gender and age to be significant predictors of arrests and referrals. However, additional findings reported Black students were 89.4% of the students arrested or referred to the juvenile court, and 93.2% of those arrests and referrals occurred during the 2-year period pre-JDAI. This research is significant for stakeholders involved in education and juvenile justice reform who want to positively effect social change through the use of programs and policies that narrow the academic achievement gap and reduce the disproportionate number of Black students' contact with the criminal justice system.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Jack Melton and Victoria Woods, and my devoted sister Jacqueline Woods Alberts. You always believed in me and allowed me to dream. As my parents, you taught me the value of hard work and perseverance; as my sister, you encouraged and inspired me to turn those dreams into goals, and this dissertation is one of them. You have been and will always be the wind beneath my wings. I thank you. I love you. Rest in peace.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

School discipline is designed to control behavior, promote safety, and advance academic achievement within the school environment (Curran, 2016). The culture and nature of discipline in the United States' educational system have changed drastically over the past 25 years. Many public schools across the country have employed zero-tolerance policies as an approach to disciplining youth misbehavior. Zero-tolerance mandates were implemented by policymakers to thwart the surge in juvenile violence during the 1990s, and as a result, school discipline became more rigid and punishments more severe (Aull, 2012). Zero-tolerance discipline no longer allows principals and other administrators to address student misconduct on a case-by-case basis to consider the circumstances or students involved. Instead, zero-tolerance policies greatly limit discretion in individual cases, involve law enforcement personnel, and mandate the removal of the students from school (Kennedy-Lewis, 2013).

Currently, these zero-tolerance strategies remain in place in school districts throughout the United States, but the disparate and disproportionate impact is particularly pronounced in the South. A recent study conducted by Smith and Harper (2015) revealed that in 346 Southern U.S. school districts, Black students comprised 75% of those suspended. The study also reported that, in 181 districts, Black students were 100% of those expelled from public schools and that school districts in the South accounted for 50% of the expulsions of students of color nationwide.

This chapter begins with a background of zero-tolerance discipline, followed by a statement of the problem to demonstrate the need for this study and a statement of the study's purpose to explain how it will contribute to the current body of scholarly literature. The theoretical foundation section of the chapter will discuss how Eccles and Midgley's (1989) stage environment fit (SEF) theory and Becker's (1963) and Lemert's (1967) labeling theory are fundamental to the underpinning of this study. The nature of the study section will describe the procedures used to collect data, followed by sections outlining some operating definitions, as well as the study's assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations. Chapter 1 will conclude with an explanation of the study's significance and its intended impact on positive social change, along with a summary of the chapter's main points.

Background of Study

Since its inception two decades ago, zero-tolerance discipline has not produced its intended effect on school safety and students' academic success (American Psychological Association [APA] Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Zero-tolerance policies impose excessive sanctions on students and have unduly and negatively affected certain groups of students (Hoffman, 2014). Black students and those with disabilities have been disproportionately subjected to the exclusionary discipline of zero-tolerance policies, often for minor infractions (Black, 2016; Evans & Lester, 2012). These students are not only exposed to more instances of discipline, but the length and degree of punishment meted out by school administrators is often greater than that imposed on other students (Curran, 2016; Steinberg & Lacoe, 2017). This criminalization of misbehavior has

garnered a great deal of criticism over the years and is the subject of debate in the discussion on juvenile justice reform (Miguel & Gargano, 2017).

Zero-tolerance policies led to the introduction of police on school campuses, and although the U.S. juvenile crime rate is the lowest it has been in two decades, there is evidence of an increase in in-school arrests (Bracey et al., 2013; Merlo & Benekos, 2010). Research suggests the upsurge of in-school arrests is the direct result of the growth of police presence on school campuses and has given rise to an increase in student contact with the criminal justice system, thus creating the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) phenomenon (Brown, 2019; Fader, Lockwood, Schall, & Stokes, 2015; Mallett, 2016; Mitchell, 2014; Nelson & Lind, 2015).

Curtis (2014) also supported the notion that police officers' presence on school campuses only increased the trajectory of the STPP. When police were introduced to school campuses in Clayton County, Georgia, in 1994, the number of referrals from teachers and administrators to the school officers increased by an astounding 1,248% (Curtis, 2014). Nearly 90% of those referrals were the result of infractions and behavior previously handled by school administrators (Curtis, 2014).

Nationwide, Black students in Grades K–12 are nearly three times as likely to receive out of school suspensions and twice as likely to be expelled from school as White students (Osher, 2015). Similarly, Black students in Grades K–12 who are classified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are more than two times as likely to be suspended as students not labeled as disabled (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Exclusionary discipline adversely impacts students' life outcomes by interrupting

and stifling their educational growth. The criminalization of typical adolescent behavior exposes many of these students to the criminal justice system (Brown, 2019; Teske, 2011; The Sentencing Project, 2015; Wilson, 2013). Numerous students who are expelled from school often drop out altogether, which leads to greater risk factors associated with poor life outcomes, such as the inability to gain employment or criminal activity and behavior (Daly et al., 2016; Mitchell, 2014). Miguel and Gargano (2017) found a high correlation between students who have been suspended or expelled and future imprisonment. Similarly, Curtis (2014) argued school suspensions and expulsions lead to students committing more serious offenses and cycling through the criminal justice system as a result.

There are some 48,000 juvenile offenders being detained in secure facilities across the United States (Sawyer, 2019). Seventy-five percent of incarcerated youths have not completed a high school education (Cole & Cohen, 2013). This results in these youths having limited literacy skills, which impedes them from gaining employment upon their release. The juvenile justice facilities that confine these youths are federally mandated to provide educational services to them. Juvenile justice teachers are tasked with trying to educate students who suffer from psychological, behavioral, and physiological problems. Far too often, these educational programs are considered the last chance for these youths to prepare for successful reentry into society (Risler & O'Rourke, 2009).

Temporarily or permanently barring these students from the school system also perpetuates poor life outcomes and contributes to the disproportionate number of Black

people revolving through the criminal justice system (Mallett, 2016; Mitchell, 2014). Furthermore, exclusionary discipline aggravates and perpetuates the racial disparities that exist within the nation's criminal justice system. Research indicates that zero-tolerance referrals lead to students being expelled, detained, and confined and increase their potential to recidivate (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013; Mendel, 2011). There is an abundance of literature discussing the negative effects of zero tolerance; however, limited research has been presented on specific evidence-based approaches that mitigate or reverse these policies. This study aimed to contribute to the scholarly literature by examining the Annie E. Casey Foundation's (AECF) Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) and its effects, if any, on exclusionary discipline and student contact with the criminal justice system.

Problem Statement

Zero-tolerance policies have been harshly criticized, and despite a lack of evidence of their effectiveness, they are still used throughout U.S. school districts as a deterrent to student misbehavior (Daly et al., 2016). A common criticism of zero-tolerance policies is they have been used to disproportionately exclude certain populations of students from the school systems—namely, Black male students and students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (Fader et al., 2015; Harper, 2017; Miguel & Gargano, 2017). Many of these students are frequently suspended, expelled, and arrested for what critics consider minor in-school infractions (Fader et al., 2015). The specific problem is this criminalization of behavior has increased these students' contact with the criminal justice system (Bracey et al., 2013; Merlo & Benekos 2010; Nelson &

Lind, 2015). Furthermore, expulsions and arrests lead to the exclusion of these students from the educational process, thereby interrupting their ability and desire to continue their education (Kiema, 2015; Wilson, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of JDAI on zero-tolerance related student arrests and referrals. The goal of this research was to explore the efficacy and veracity of JDAI in reducing juvenile contact with the criminal justice system. The rationale for examining alternatives to zero-tolerance policies rests primarily on the fact that researchers and practitioners have noted these policies have not achieved the intended goal of making schools safer, nor have they improved academic achievement (Dunning-Lozano, 2018; Teske, 2011, Weingarten, 2015). To the contrary, empirical research has argued these strategies have been damaging to students, schools, families, and communities (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). The JDAI is being used in nearly 300 local jurisdictions across the country to reduce the number of student court referrals from school administrators and law enforcement (AECF, n.d.). In this study, I sought to explore the impact of JDAI on zero-tolerance discipline policies in the South by using a quantitative methodology to measure its efficacy in the state of Georgia.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research question was derived from the review of existing literature pertaining to zero tolerance and JDAI. This research question allowed me to develop a hypothesis that defines the research variables as well as a method of measurement for testing:

RQ1: Does JDAI status predict arrests and referrals while controlling for race, gender, and age?

H_0: JDAI status does not predict arrests and referrals while controlling for race, gender, and age.

H_1: JDAI status does predict arrests and referrals while controlling for race, gender, and age.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical frameworks supporting the need to study zero-tolerance discipline and JDAIs are rooted in Eccles and Midgley's (1989) SEF theory, and Becker's (1963) and Lemert's (1967) labeling theory. Both were chosen as the theoretical foundation for the development of this research because they provide a deeper understanding of adolescent behavior that is subject to these exclusionary discipline practices, as well as the social construct directed at students disproportionately impacted by zero-tolerance policies.

SEF theory posits middle-school-aged youth begin to experience the stress of adolescent development during the same time they are expected to transition to changes in their school environment. For many adolescents, the transition to middle school is highly stressful due to a lack of fit to the students' stage of development. For many students at this stage in their lives, this lack of fit results in low self-efficacy and difficulty making psychological and behavioral adjustments to their environment (Tseng & Seidman, 2007; Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007). Buehler, Fletcher, Johnston, and Weymouth (2015) used symbolic interaction and SEF theories to examine middle-school

students' perceptions of their experiences and found teacher support and school safety were important factors in them avoiding getting into trouble. Similarly, Kennedy-Lewis (2013) applied SEF theory to study the experiences of persistently disciplined middle-school students of color who were disproportionately subjected to exclusionary discipline.

Labeling theory posits that once a delinquency label is attached, adolescents will not only be treated differently but will behave differently. Labeling theory suggests that although deviant behavior can be caused by several factors, once an adolescent is labeled as deviant, they are likely subject to problems that arise from their reaction, as well as that from others to negative stereotypes associated with the deviant label (Kroska, Lee, & Carr, 2017). Zero-tolerance discipline has been criticized as perpetuating the STPP by subjecting students to arrests, court referrals, and confinements within the criminal justice system. Lee, Tajima, Herrenkohl, and Hong (2017) argued this contact with the criminal justice system may trigger both formal and informal labeling of these youths, which may result in an increased probability of future criminal behaviors. Both theories will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

A quantitative methodology was used to identify and understand the possible effect of JDAI on zero-tolerance in-school arrests and referrals. Quantitative research involves the numerical analysis of data that explains phenomena (Cox, 2016). Often it employs deductive logic, where the researcher begins with hypotheses, then gathers data which are then used to determine if empirical evidence exists to support the hypotheses

(Babbie, 2017). For this study, secondary data were retrieved from one judicial circuit in a southeastern state reported to be among those with a disproportionate number of students of color and disabilities subjected to exclusionary discipline (Smith & Harper, 2015).

Operational Definitions

Commitment: An order of the juvenile court that places youth in the custody of the Department of Juvenile Justice for supervision, treatment, and rehabilitation. Committed youths are those who have been adjudicated (convicted). The commitment order transfers legal responsibility of the youth over to the state for the period of their disposition (sentence). The Department of Juvenile Justice makes the placement determination of whether the youth should be placed in a youth detention center or an alternate setting (Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, n.d.).

Decision points: Examples of juvenile justice contact decision points are referral, arrest, court intake, disposition, probation, or confinement (Juvenile Justice Information Exchange, n.d.).

Disproportionate minority contact (DMC): The unequal representation of minority youth who encounter the juvenile justice system as a result of the decision points of arrest, referral, or commitment (Gonzales et al., 2018).

Exclusionary discipline: The suspension, expulsion, or other disciplinary action that results in a student's removal from an educational setting (Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010).

In-school arrests: An arrest of a student by law enforcement for any activity or behavior deemed in violation of the school's discipline policy, conducted on or off campus or during authorized school events, based on a referral by a school official (Kids Count Data Center, n.d.).

Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiatives (JDAIs): Initiatives developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in December 1992, as a nationwide effort of local and state juvenile justice agencies in response to the growing number of youths being held in secure detention across the United States for nonviolent acts. It currently operates in 40 states, including Georgia (AECF, 2014).

Referral: A formally written filing initiated by a school administrator (school referral) or law enforcement officer (citation) requesting a youth who has allegedly committed a criminal offense to appear before a probation officer or be admitted to a youth detention center (Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, n.d.).

School-to-prison pipeline (STPP): A construct of exclusionary discipline policies and practices that remove students from the educational system into the criminal justice system (Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014).

Zero-tolerance discipline: School discipline policies and practices that dictate predetermined punitive penalties (suspensions or expulsions) for specific student misconduct, regardless of the situation or rationale for the behavior (National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline, n.d.; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014b.

Assumptions

This study relied on the assumption there would be enough cooperation from participants to attain meaningful results. Another assumption was that the data retrieved from records maintained by juvenile courts and probation and law enforcement agencies were submitted in compliance with guidelines and regulations outlined by oversight and regulatory agencies such as the U.S. Department of Education, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). Next, it was assumed that the judicial circuit sampled operated according to applicable provisions set forth in Georgia's House Bill 242 enacted in 2014. This legislation drastically overhauled Georgia's juvenile justice system and mandated improvements in the areas of data collection and reporting. The statute also made sweeping changes in the referral and commitment process (AECF, 2013; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2017). All of which supports the assumption that the data were truthful, accurate, and complete.

Scope and Delimitations

Across the United States, zero-tolerance discipline policies have disproportionately impacted Black students and those with disabilities and have increased the likelihood of those students having contact with the criminal justice system (Nelson & Lind, 2015). However, research has indicated that these practices of exclusionary discipline are more prevalent in the nation's southern states (Smith & Harper, 2015). In this study, I examined data from Georgia, a southern state, to identify the likelihood of JDAI impacting zero-tolerance in-school arrests and referrals. The objective was to

provide school and juvenile justice administrators, law enforcement, health care practitioners, and policy makers with the information necessary to advance strategies that address this phenomenon.

Limitations

This study had a few limitations worth noting. One limitation was the study's design. Secondary data analysis does not allow for manipulation or control of how data are collected. The study was also limited in that the data were driven by information provided by a judicial circuit in one southern state. Therefore, how discipline is interpreted in school districts and how juveniles are processed within the judicial system could not be generalized for states in other regions of the country. Another limitation was that I am employed by the judicial circuit in the study and, as such, had personal and professional opinions about the study. However, I did not participate in or have any influence in any juvenile judicial proceedings nor any data input or collection. Thus, the choice to use secondary data was appropriate as it minimized the possibility of researcher bias.

Significance of the Study

Although school violence has decreased significantly, there is still evidence of an increase in the number of students arrested because of zero-tolerance policies (Bracey et al., 2013; Merlo & Benekos, 2010). While many jurisdictions concur that zero-tolerance policies increase youth contact with the criminal justice system, a significant number have not participated in these initiatives and support zero-tolerance policies for adolescent misbehavior (Slay, 2016).

Arrests and school expulsions prompted by zero-tolerance policies have negative impacts on the life outcome of affected students (Curtis, 2014; Miguel & Gargano, 2017; Wilson, 2013). Scholars and practitioners alike have concluded there is no evidence that zero-tolerance discipline policies have made schools safer and more academically productive (Curtis, 2014; Evans & Lester, 2012; Mallett, 2016; Miguel & Gargano, 2017; Mitchell, 2014; Wilson, 2013). During the 2011–2012 academic year, nearly 3.5 million students received out-of-school suspensions nationwide, resulting in nearly 18 million days of lost instruction for these students (Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, & Belway, 2015).

This study contributes to the current body of literature on zero-tolerance discipline and juvenile justice reform by demonstrating how SEF and labeling theories are at the core of the practice of exclusionary discipline. Also, by examining the efficacy of JDAIs, I aimed to explore best practices that may provide options for stakeholders to foster positive social change. The advancement of these strategies and policies is intended to reduce or eliminate the disproportionate discipline and academic achievement gaps that exist for many already marginalized youths.

Summary

I began this chapter with a brief description of the background of zero-tolerance discipline. I then demonstrated the need for the study by presenting the statement of the problem and then explained how the study would contribute to the current body of scholarly literature by providing a statement of the study's purpose. In the theoretical section of this chapter, I discussed how SEF and labeling theories are fundamental to the

development of the study, while in the nature of the study section, I described the procedures used to collect data. This chapter also provided the assumptions made necessary to move forward with the study, the scope and delimitations that addressed why I chose this subject and population to study, as well as the limitations, where I discussed confines and biases within the study. The chapter concluded with an explanation of the significance of the study and its projected impact on positive social change.

In Chapter 2, I present an exhaustive review of existing literature related to zero-tolerance discipline policies. The review includes literature that pertains to the evolution of zero-tolerance discipline over the past two decades. In the literature review, I also examine current research on the effect of disparate and disproportionate exclusionary discipline, as viewed through the lenses of both SEF and the labeling theory frameworks.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Zero-tolerance discipline policies have sparked much debate. Disproportionately exposing Black students and those with disabilities to excessive exclusionary discipline has rendered zero-tolerance policies ineffective and expensive (DeMitchell & Hambacher, 2016; Fader et al., 2015; Rafa, 2019). Students who are subjected to zero-tolerance discipline are often suspended and expelled from school for committing minor infractions. This criminalization of misbehavior has increased the number of students encountering the criminal justice system, contributing to the metaphorical STPP (Bell, 2015; Blad & Harwin, 2017; Bracey et al., 2013; Nance, 2016; Nelson & Lind, 2015; Rafa, 2019; Savage & Ross, 2016). This disparate treatment of Black students and those with disabilities is systemic.

In a study of an urban school district, researchers found evidence of a pattern of Black students subjectively and excessively being referred to school administrators and resource officers for infractions that appeared minor in nature (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Similarly, Valant (2018) noted findings from recent studies indicate disparate discipline has been attributed to discriminatory practices by school administrators, thereby contributing to the racial gaps in student academic achievement. School administrators, policymakers, law enforcement, and criminal justice practitioners have all recognized the need for alternatives to zero-tolerance discipline (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Boyd, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Recent research has also encouraged further study of alternatives to zero tolerance (Curran, 2019; Daley et al.,

2016; Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Schiff, 2018; Stucki, 2014) that support improvements in student performance, in-school retention rates, and less contact with the criminal justice system.

Recently, various practices have been introduced to replace zero-tolerance discipline; however, empirical support is needed to promote them as evidence-based alternatives (Daley et al., 2016). The purpose of this study was to augment the existing literature on zero-tolerance discipline by examining the effect JDAIs have on mitigating student arrests and court referrals.

Chapter 2 begins with an analysis of zero-tolerance discipline, followed by an explanation of the strategy used to search for literature on the subject. Next, I describe how both the SEF and labeling theories provide the foundation for the current study by offering a framework for understanding adolescent development and how their behavior is interpreted and labeled as it relates to zero-tolerance policies. The next section in this chapter provides an exhaustive review of current literature pertinent to concepts of zero tolerance. Literature relevant to the current study was explored and synthesized to explain why a quantitative approach is warranted to fill a gap in the literature. Chapter 2 concludes with a summary of the major themes pinpointed in the literature, as well as an explanation for enacting social change by expanding the knowledge on juvenile justice reform through alternatives to zero-tolerance discipline.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted a comprehensive literature search using the following databases available at Walden University's Library: SAGE, SAGE Research Methods, EBSCO,

Science Direct, ProQuest Criminal Justice, PsycINFO, Education Source, ERIC, Thoreau, Dissertations and Theses @ Walden University, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. I used key search terms: *exclusionary discipline, school suspensions and expulsions, zero tolerance discipline, deviance, juvenile delinquency, school resource officers, juvenile referrals and confinement, social stigma, school-to-prison pipeline, labeling theory, stage environment fit theory, academic achievement gap, juvenile recidivism,* and *juvenile detention alternatives.* My literature search strategy also included archival and secondary data from the National Criminal Justice Resource Service, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the U.S. Department of Education OCR, and the National Juvenile Court Data Archive. Additional search engines included Google Scholar, Research Gate, and the Social Science Research Network. I further explored any relevant articles found in the reference sections of peer-reviewed articles during my review of the literature. I sought to contribute to the current discussion on zero-tolerance discipline and therefore limited the review to studies published in 2015 or later. However, when I found seminal or extant works relating to theory or practice published prior to 2015, I included them to ensure a comprehensive review of the literature.

Theoretical Foundation

Stage Environment Fit Theory

The transition from elementary to middle school poses challenges for some adolescents. Adolescence is a critical stage in development, where teens wrestle with changes in their school environment, face challenges with fluctuations in pubescent and

cognitive development, as well as experience changes in family and peer relations (Gutman & Eccles, 2007; Phillips, 2017). In 1989, Eccles and Midgley formulated the SEF theory to explain many of these challenges experienced by adolescents during this transitional period. SEF is rooted in Hunt's (1975) person-environment theory that introduced the concept of matching to explain person-environment interactions, such as teacher influence and control and student academic ability, that yield desirable behavioral results such as academic achievement. SEF expounds on Hunt's notion by presenting the concept of chronology to explain the interactions between persons and environment, based on their age and stage of development (Yu, Li, Wang, & Zhang, 2016). Simons-Morton, Davis Crump, Haynie, and Saylor (1999) also posited youth are not properly prepared for the transition to middle school and are prone to antisocial influences. Thus, examining the impacts of such influences can add to the knowledge gained from this study.

According to SEF, the middle-school environment is not suitable for many adolescents because its fundamental structure does not provide a good fit for students' needs. SEF contends the transition from the elementary to middle-school environment may adversely affect adolescents' motivation due to the lack of fit between their stage of development and the intrinsic structure of middle school (Buehler et al., 2015; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993). SEF proclaims several factors contribute to this mismatch; foremost is that middle-school teachers tend to focus more on discipline rather than forging relationships with students.

Another contributing factor is the emphasis placed on the whole class approach instead of the one-on-one attention given by teachers at the elementary-school level. In addition, middle-school students are required to take multiple classes during the day, which are larger in size and shorter in time, and each class has a different teacher. Also, the middle-school curriculum is more task oriented with more importance placed on completing assignments and attaining higher grades rather than mastering the material (Midgley, Feldaufer, & Eccles, 1989; Eccles, et al., 1993). Midgley, Middleton, Gheen, and Kumar (2002) reported a correlation between emphasis on performance and decreased levels of student self-efficacy and self-regulation. The authors reasoned this type of environment weakens the relationships between students and their fellow classmates, as well as between students and teachers.

In the United States, there is mounting evidence that middle schools do not provide a good fit for adolescents. The evidence shows that the climates do not support positive academic environments for students (Symonds & Hargreaves, 2016; Phillips, 2017). Recent studies have used SEF as a theoretical foundation. Kennedy-Lewis (2013) applied SEF in a study of urban middle-school students and found changes in school discipline policies and peer relationships had an adverse effect on students. Drawing on SEF, Booth and Gerard (2014) conducted a mixed-method longitudinal study investigating students' perceptions of their school environment, self-efficacy, and academic achievement. The study's findings also supported SEF's assertion of a mismatch between students' stage of development and the middle-school environment. Similarly, Kellich's (2017) study of the developmental needs of middle-school students

was also grounded in SEF's prediction of a decline in student performance and motivation resulting from the lack of fit between the climate and their developmental needs. These findings are crucial to the current study by supporting the rationale for employing SEF as the theoretical foundation.

Labeling Theory

Zero-tolerance discipline has broadened the academic achievement gap by excluding an inordinate number of Black students and those with special needs from the school system (National Education Association, n.d.). Many of these students are subsequently exposed to the criminal justice system, resulting in them being labeled as *delinquent* and *deviant* (Chiricos, Barrick, Balles, & Bontrager, 2007; Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016; Kroska et al., 2017). Tannenbaum (1938) introduced labeling theory to explain delinquency and asserted individuals learn criminal behavior from their communities when criminal activity is present. However, once individuals are introduced into the criminal justice system and formally labeled as a *criminal*, the potential for criminal behavior increases (Noelle, 2019). Expounding on Tannenbaum's (1938) perspective on labeling and Mead's (1934) concept of social interaction, sociologist Edwin Lemert (1951) introduced two categories of deviance: primary and secondary.

Lemert identified primary deviance as the initial stage of deviance where an individual may violate a norm or rule but is not stigmatized or made to suffer long-term consequences for doing so. Lemert proclaimed secondary deviance as behavior that manifests after an official label of delinquency is applied to an individual who violates social norms (Cullen & Agnew, 2006). Howard Becker (1963) laid the responsibility of

deviant behavior on society instead of the individual. Becker argued the deviant label is created and applied by social groups to those whom they deem outsiders. Thus, labeling drives an individual toward deviant social groups because they share the common experience of being stigmatized and labeled as outsiders.

Labeling theory assumes the stigma associated with the label promotes a deviant self-identity within the individual. This self-identity fosters a comradery with others who are similarly labeled (Noelle, 2019; Rosenberg, 2010; Schrag, 1971; Schur, 1971). The alienation from society and defiance of being rejected advances delinquent behavior and increases delinquent recidivism (Adams, Robertson, Gray-Ray, & Ray, 2003). This supports my use of labeling theory as a framework for examining the impact of zero-tolerance discipline on educational and criminal justice systems.

Educational and correctional institutions use their authority to formally label juveniles as delinquent, and this contact reduces their educational and socioeconomic opportunities. Formal delinquent labeling increases youths' chances to recidivate by changing both their opportunity structure and their self-meaning (Blomberg, 1977; Kroska et al., 2017). Evidence has also indicated the labels placed on students by educators is often influenced by their implicit biases, which determines the type and degree of discipline exacted (Blake, Butler, Lewis & Darrensbourg, 2010; Gregory et al, 2010; Schrag, 1971; Skiba, Horner, Chung, & Rausch, 2011; Wellford, 1975). These biases result in exclusionary discipline that disproportionately affects Black middle-school students and those with educational disabilities who are repeatedly labeled and stigmatized.

The literature is robust on the disparate use of zero-tolerance discipline for Black students labeled with learning disabilities. Kennedy-Lewis and Murphy (2016) grounded their study in labeling theory as they examined middle-school students' perceptions of being labeled *frequent flyers* by their teachers and administrators. These students labeled as *bad* were repeatedly referred for disciplinary action. The succession and frequency of this disciplinary action reinforced the labeling, which subsequently led to them being suspended or expelled from school. The study's findings indicated that although these students rejected being labeled, their response and resistance to being labeled led them to exhibit negative behavior. Similarly, Algraigray and Boyle (2017) referenced the influence of Becker's (1963) labeling theory in their study on the impact of labeling students with special educational needs. The study's findings also indicated these students were subjected to exclusion, stigmas, and discrimination that broadened the academic achievement gap and worsened their potential life outcomes.

Rationale for Using Stage Environment Fit and Labeling Theories

Middle schools pose specific challenges to students based on the way they are structured. Eccles et. al (1993) theorized that secondary and middle schools are designed to be developmentally regressive environments in which an inordinate number of students become disinterested and unmotivated to achieve academically. SEF asserts that students who are characteristically lower achievers are more susceptible to negatively respond to this type of learning environment and will either misbehave or disengage from the educational process altogether (Sparks, 2018; Symonds & Hargreaves, 2016). For this study, I chose SEF theory to help explain why zero-tolerance discipline policies are

ineffective and only serve to further the divide between students and their teachers and administrators.

It is the duty and responsibility of educators to nurture child and adolescent development. However, the prevalence of zero-tolerance discipline indicates a basic misunderstanding of this process. It is normal for children and adolescents to challenge and question authority during this stage of development. During this stage they are also vulnerable to peer pressure and influence, and do not fully comprehend the consequences of their actions. Zero-tolerance discipline reinforces these developmentally regressive environments and in doing so, disproportionately impacts Black students and those with learning disabilities.

Black students with learning disabilities are often labeled as the lower achievers; thus, furthering the academic achievement gap (Abramson, 2018; National Education Association, n.d.; Shifrer, 2018). Labeling theory also serves as a foundation for the current study as it provides a framework to understand how labeling students impacts the degree and extent to which they are subjected to zero-tolerance discipline. Both theories support the study's premise that alternatives to zero-tolerance discipline are critical to thwart the expansion of academic and discipline gaps. Furthermore, reducing the negative effects of zero-tolerance discipline on this population will reduce the number of them subjected to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Zero-Tolerance Discipline

Zero-tolerance discipline are policies that mandate specific punitive penalties for a variety of behaviors. They are intended to be applied uniformly regardless of the

circumstance, context, or severity of the behavior (Mitchell, 2014; Noelle, 2019). The concept of zero-tolerance discipline was introduced during the early 1990s to thwart public anxiety regarding the rise in violent crimes across the country. Gun violence surged to record highs in the early 1990s (Friedman, Grawert, & Cullen, 2017; Yablon, 2018). Citizens demanded action from policy makers and law enforcement to restore a sense of security and order, particularly in schools. During the Clinton Administration, Congress enacted the Guns Free School Act of 1994 (GFSA) in response to growing concern about school violence. GFSA required states that received federal funding for public education to implement stringent policies that imposed stiff penalties for students who brought firearms on school property.

By shifting the responsibility to states, GFSA mandated state legislatures adopt laws that required school administrators to impose a penalty of one-year expulsion for students possessing a firearm on a school campus. GFSA further required schools to develop policies for referrals to the criminal justice system for students who violated policy (Losinski, Katsiyannis, Ryan, & Baughan, 2014; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Although GFSA was initially intended to restrict firearms on school property, as more states acquiesced, more policies were enacted to exclude a wide variety of weapons. By the end of the 1990s, nearly every school district in the country reported having a zero-tolerance policy for weapons.

The Fear Narrative

In the mid-1990s, political scientist Dr. John Dilulio and his colleagues fueled the flames of fear by labeling certain groups of youth as super-predators (Bennett, Dilulio, &

Walters, 1996; Drum, 2016). They instilled public panic by predicting that youth, particularly inner city, low income uneducated Black male students between the ages 14 and 17, were marauding gun-toting criminals who would wantonly deal drugs, rob, and murder without remorse (Becker, 2001; Bell, 2015; Lynch, Gainey & Chappell, 2016). According to the super-predator theorists, this population of juvenile deviants was responsible for the rise in violent crimes. Furthermore, they warned these youths were destined to create social disorder as violence would spill over to the so called decent suburban and rural communities (Berkowitz, 2015).

The super-predator narrative is consistent with labeling theory (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951; Matsueda, 1992, 2014; Plummer, 2011; Schur, 1971) particularly as it was created and applied to define a group considered outsiders (Becker, 1963). Schulman (2005) argued it is the social group that holds the power to impose deviant labels that dictates the narrative of how others will be perceived and treated. Further, he claimed being branded as deviant may be predicated on demographics instead of behavior. This notion supports the premise that racial profiling by those who enforce the rules may be an underlying factor in what is unacceptable behavior when defining the fear narrative.

The fear narrative escalated with the 1997 shootings at Heath High School in Kentucky and the 1998 shooting at Westside Middle School in Arkansas. However, the infamous 1999 school massacre at Columbine High School in Colorado brought public fear to a new height. These school shootings stoked the flames of public rage for law makers, school administrators, and law enforcement to do something to curb gun violence (Bell, 2015; Berkowitz, Gamino, Lu, Lindeman, & Uhrmacher, 2016; DeMitchell &

Hambacher 2016; Mitchell, 2014). Although Columbine has become synonymous with all that is wrong the nation's prevalence of mass school shootings; there is limited discourse on the impact of Columbine on the expansion of zero tolerance and increased school security measures (Stahl, 2016). According to Muschert, Henry, Bracey, and Peguero (2014) the media has played a pivotal role in perpetuating mass fear of school violence resulting in the *Columbine effect*. Muschert et al., (2014) further argued decisions to increase funding for school security are grounded in fear rather than fact, and on reaction to media images rather than evidence. The public's angst surrounding school shootings contributed to the justification for GFSA.

GFSA was touted as a potential cure to curb gun violence in America's schools. However, several decades later it is chillingly apparent that the fundamental premise of GFSA and the zero-tolerance policies it spawned, have not been effective in preventing gun violence in the nation's schools. According to Cox, Rich, Chiu, Muyskens, and Ulmanu (2018), over 200,000 children at some 226 schools nationwide have been exposed to guns at school since Columbine. At least 143 children and educators have been slain, and numerous others have been injured by school gun violence.

The year 2018 infamously holds the record for having the highest number of school shootings since 1999, at 25 for the year (Cox et al., 2018). While these numbers are alarming, these tragedies are still considered an aberration when compared with the number of schools that operate daily without incident (Berkowitz et al., 2016). Still, school gun violence shocks the senses not just because of what it is, but because of where it occurs (DeMitchell & Hambacher, 2016). School gun violence reinforces the narrative

for tighter security measures, stricter discipline policies, and the use of police to protect our nation's schools.

The Policing of Public Schools

The more public-school districts throughout the nation complied with GFSA guidelines to maintain federal funding, the more they were given latitude to use their discretion to develop punitive policies. Subsequently, many school districts adopted discipline policies that included numerous other offenses that gave rise to the criminalization of student misbehavior (Curran, 2019; DeMatthews, 2016; Evans & Lester, 2012; Mallett, 2016; Rivkin, 2009; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Coinciding with the rise of punitive discipline was an increase in the presence of police officers in public schools. This was done in response to the numerous mass shootings on school campuses, and the perceived rise in juvenile criminal activity (McKenna & White, 2018; Pigott, Stearns, & Khey, 2018). Spearheading this effort, the Department of Justice Office of Community Policing Services (COPS), established the Cops in Schools grant program in 1999 (U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), 2014). COPS was extremely instrumental in the influx of police on school campuses.

By the end of 2005, COPS had awarded over $750 million to local governments, law enforcement agencies, and school districts, to hire and train over 6,500 officers to police the nation's public schools (Na & Gottfredson, 2013). Since its inception in 1994, COPS has granted over $14 billion to state, local and tribal law enforcement agencies, and has funded over 130,000 new law enforcement officer positions nationwide (Community Policing Dispatch, 2018). Ironically, as the number of school police soared,

the number of school counselors drastically decreased (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2019). In 2013, shortly after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, the federal government allotted $46.5 million to fund school security initiatives, while only allocating $12.3 million school counseling initiatives (ACLU, 2017). An additional $25 million was allocated for fiscal year 2018, with an extra $33 million to be appropriated annually for the years 2019-2028 (Community Policing Dispatch, 2018). Allocating funding for increased school security continues to be a top priority for federal, state, and local agencies.

The current focus of funding for school security may be attributed to the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. The nation's fear and anger were once again escalated when a former student of the school gunned down 17 students, faculty, and administrators. Once again, to placate public outcry demanding viable solutions to end school violence, many local lawmakers increased their spending on school security (Weisburst, 2019). Dunklin and Pritchard (2018) reported after the Stoneman Douglas massacre, the security industry lobbied Congress to commit to spending $350 million over the next decade on security measures. They further reported several states and local school districts have reapportioned another $450 million and are modifying their budgets to find more money to advance security measures and add more school police to provide safer school environments.

Cox et al. (2018) reported the year 201 held the highest record in school shootings at 25; whereas Kupchik (2019) stated overall, school crime and violence have decreased over the past two decades. Regardless of the dichotomy in how school violence is

perceived, there has been a substantial increase in funding to place more metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and armed police officers in the nation's schools.

School police are contracted out to school districts by law enforcement agencies as school resource officers (SROs) or are employed directly by school districts with their own law enforcement division as school-based law enforcement officers (SBLEs; Denton, 2019). It has been reported there are some 43,000 SROs and SBLEs assigned to schools throughout the country (Gray & Lewis, 2015). However, the National Association of School Resource Officers (n.d.) acknowledged these figures are estimates because law enforcement agencies and school districts are not required to register the number of SROs they employ with any national database.

National Association of School Resource Officers also reported SROs are currently the fastest growing segment of law enforcement. A recent study found 42% of the nation's public schools reported having at least one SRO at their schools at least once a week (Education Week Research Center, 2018). The same study revealed 72% of the nation's middle schools reported having SROs. These statistics support this study's premise that middle school is where most students experience behavioral challenges. This study also assumed that school administrators may feel the need to utilize police more at the middle school level to help enforce zero-tolerance discipline. The steady growth in the presence of police in schools has also led to an increase in the responsibilities placed on SROs.

The primary responsibility of the SROs and SBLEs is the safety and security of the school's students, staff, and property. As with all certified sworn law enforcement

officers, school police maintain their powers to investigate, detain, and arrest. However, SROs are also tasked with the being mentors, educators, and counselors, epitomizing their title of SROs (COPS, n.d.; National Association of School Resource Officers, 2012). A recent national survey of SROs reported 41% responded their primary role is to enforce laws, while 17% identified their primary role is to mentor students (Education Week Research Center, 2018). The way SROs perceive their roles is significant in how students will perceive their presence.

Additional research on the use of police in public schools utilized role theory to examine how the role officers played influenced their reaction to student misbehavior using counseling, school-based punishment, referrals, and arrests as variables (McKenna & White, 2018). The study's findings contradicted previous research and noted officers who identified their role as the law enforcer reported when possible, they would attempt to de-escalate the situation without writing a citation for referral or making an arrest (McKenna & White, 2018). This body of literature has also suggested the role of SROs and SBLEs has evolved from one that primarily deters criminal and deviant behavior, to one that projects a positive role that serves as informal counselor and caretaker (COPS, n.d.; Green, 2018). However, a substantial amount of literature has been written on the negative aspects of police school presence.

There is an abundance of literature opposed to police on school campuses. Some have posited SROs who are assigned to school districts at the lower end of the socioeconomic and educational spectrums have a higher police presence and perform more law enforcement related duties (Hager, 2015; Kupchik, 2019; Lynch et al., 2016;

Weisburst, 2019). The ACLU (2017) argued the combination of zero-tolerance policies and school police exacerbates student misbehavior and the racial disparities in how discipline is dispensed is glaringly evident.

A recent study of Texas middle and high schools that were awarded federal Cops in Schools grants saw an increase of 6% in discipline for middle school students for minor infractions, as well as a decrease of 2.5% in high school graduation rates, and a decrease of 4% in college enrollment, with a noticeable impact on Black students (Weisburst, 2019). The study further corroborated similar literature which suggested a police presence and increased disciplinary measures may promote an adversarial climate in schools by stigmatizing disciplined students and subjecting them to suspension or expulsion (Algraigray & Boyle, 2017; Sparks, 2018). This body of literature supports this study's application of SEF and labeling theories in contributing to the debate on the impact of school police and zero-tolerance policies.

The scholarly debate over the use of police on school campuses remains robust. Theriot (2009), Jennings, Khey, Maskaly, & Donner (2011), and Na and Gottfredson (2013), argued there is a lack of evidence to support the assertion that SROs contribute to a higher rate of student arrests, namely those students of color. A recent quantitative study conducted by Pigott et al. (2018) substantiated this argument when they stated they concurred with the findings of Na and Gottfredson (2013). These authors submitted their study's findings indicated there is zero evidence that the presence of police officers on school campuses increased the likelihood of student contact with the criminal justice system (Pigott et al., 2018). What is evident from a review of the literature on the formal

and informal roles played by school police, is that their presence is influential in determining the overall school climate.

School Climate

School climate reflects the quality of the school environment and includes the relationship between students and teachers, the organizational structure, safety, and teaching practices. A good school climate is one that fosters positive student engagement, respectful behavior, and academic achievement. One body of research contended the use of authoritative discipline through zero-tolerance policies are necessary to maintain a safe and productive school climate. It is also suggested the removal of unruly and disruptive students serves to discourage similar behavior by other students (Daly et al., 2014; Na & Gottfredson, 2013; Skiba, 2014).

This same body of literature also asserted zero-tolerance discipline policies are impartial because the rules apply without exception. Moreover, it is suggested these policies prepare children for the real world, as it teaches them the reality of suffering the consequences when they violate the rules (Morin, 2020). Furthermore, Curran (2016) argued zero-tolerance discipline is based on deterrence theory which promotes the notion that punishment is a deterrent for criminal behavior, and the more severe the punishment, the less likely one is willing to commit an offense. Zero-tolerance discipline promotes an authoritarian school climate.

An alternate body of literature on school climate suggested that instead of the authoritarian heavy handed and rigid discipline imposed by zero tolerance; the combination of structure, support and flexibility, referred to as authoritative school

climate, has proven beneficial to adolescents in developing a healthy respect for authority (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Heilburn, Cornell, & Konold, 2018; National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline, n.d.). Authoritative school climate theory is rooted in Baumrind's (1968) authoritative parental control theory. This theory suggests there are two levels of school climate; disciplinary structure, where rules are strict, yet applied fairly and consistently; and student support, where the students' perception is teachers and school administrators support and respect them (Eccles, 2013; Greer, 2018; Gregory et al., 2010; Heilburn et al., 2018). Across the country educators, school administrators, and school law enforcement personnel are experimenting with authoritative school climate to deter adolescent misbehavior and promote academic achievement.

One study conducted a survey based on authoritative school climate theory to examine academic engagement, grades, and aspirations of middle and high school students in Virginia (Cornell, Shukla, & Konold, 2016). The researchers utilized a multivariate multilevel path model to analyze student engagement, grades, and academic aspirations based on factors of race, sex, school size, percentage of minority students, school support, and school structure. The study's findings supported its hypothesis that authoritative school climate was associated with higher student engagement, grades, and academic aspirations. The generality of the study was strengthened as findings indicated results were similar for both middle and high schools.

However, the study was limited in that the authors chose to exclude students who were not proficient in English as well as those with mental and physical disabilities. The

exclusion of these students revealed a bias of the study as students with special educational needs are more likely to be subjected to discipline for behavioral issues. Several scholars have contended zero-tolerance discipline often overlooks the underlying root of the behavior exhibited by students labeled with special learning needs (Alnaim, 2018; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Teske, 2011). The present study is grounded in labeling theory and asserts punitive discipline is harmful to students who are labeled or stigmatized as learning or mentally disabled.

The current study also drew the assumption that students labeled with learning and mental disabilities are unduly subjected to excessive suspensions and expulsions as a result of their conditions. Imposing harsh discipline sanctions against students with special needs places them further down the rungs on the academic achievement ladder. Extending the academic achievement gap for marginalized students does not reflect a positive and productive school environment and continued study is needed to examine these students' perception of their school climate.

Further review of the current literature on zero tolerance and school climate revealed another study conducted in Virginia that utilized the authoritative school climate survey. However, in this instance, the authors explored the correlation between student and teacher perceptions of school climate and suspension rates and focused solely on middle schools (Heilburn, et al., 2018). The study employed regression analyses, controlling for school size and school-level poverty. The findings indicated that schools with greater levels of student–teacher structure had lower suspension rates. Most notably, the study found the disciplinary racial gap, particularly suspension rates between Black

and White students, was lower (Heilburn et al., 2018). This is relevant to the current study as I chose to focus on middle school students through the lens of SEF which stresses the importance of the mismatch between school climate and student development.

Scholars have argued this mismatch is responsible for the precipitous and inevitable decline in student achievement when they transition to middle school (Eccles, 2013; Phillips, 2017). SEF further stipulates the relationship between students and those in authority at this stage of development is critical to the successful outcome for students (Eccles et al., 1993). Booth and Gerard (2014) supported this notion in a mixed method longitudinal study on school climate grounded in SEF. The study examined the correlation between students' perception of their school and their self-efficacy. The findings of the quantitative study revealed an association between students' sense of 'school connectedness' and their self-esteem and self-efficacy. This study contributed to the body of literature that contended a good school climate which promotes a balance of support and discipline, improves student outcome, and reduces suspension rates.

Similarly, a robust amount of research has asserted that zero-tolerance discipline fosters poor school climates. Poor school climate has led to the disproportionate number of suspension and expulsions of students of color, particularly Black male students, and students with disabilities (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Dunning-Lozano, 2018; Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016; Losinski et al., 2014). Skiba, Arredondo, and Rausch's (2014) study of school discipline concluded that with each successive suspension, the students' odds of completing high school were reduced by 20%. Skiba,

Arredondo, and Rausch (2014) also asserted there is a lack of empirical evidence to show that suspensions and expulsions reduce student misbehavior or improve school climate.

The literature exists to support the assertion that excessive suspensions and the removal of students from the education system contribute to the high school and post-secondary achievement gaps. A growing body of literature has suggested that negative academic achievement prospects and disparate discipline systematically pushes youth into the criminal justice system (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Leadership for Educational Equity, n.d.; Porter, 2015). The same literature has claimed that because of the criminalization of some student misbehavior, our nation's schools have become microcosms of penal institutions.

Simmons (2017) explored the transition from education to criminalization of marginalized youth in Louisiana in a case study of The Prison School, an alternative public school located within the Orleans Parish Prison compound. Supporting this study's labeling theoretical framework, Simmons posited that suspending and expelling students does the opposite of correcting behavior, instead, it isolates and pushes them into the criminal justice system. This body of literature supports this study's use of SEF and labeling theories in examining zero-tolerance discipline and the contention that the presence of SROs and SBLEs in public schools serves to further criminalize student misbehavior.

Exclusionary Discipline and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Suspension and expulsions. Exclusionary discipline is punishment imposed on students in the form of suspension or expulsion from the learning environment.

Exclusionary discipline can have devastating and long-lasting effects on a student's educational, economic, and social trajectory. The literature suggested the adverse effects of exclusionary discipline are more pronounced for Black students and students with disabilities (Curran, 2016; Losen, 2015a; Rafa, 2019; Shifrer, 2018). Students subjected to exclusionary discipline are more likely to experience poor academic self-efficacy, tend to drop out of school altogether, and are at a higher risk of entering the criminal justice system (Advancement Project, 2010; Fabelo et al., 2011; Rafa, 2019; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014). One study found that of 49 million students enrolled during the 2011-2012 school year, 3.5 million received in-school detention, 1.6 million were suspended more than once, 130,000 were expelled from school, and Black male students were 3.5 times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their peers (U.S. Department of Education OCR, 2014a).

Similar research conducted during the 2015-2016 school year found 290,600 students were arrested or received referrals, 2.7 million K-12 students were issued one or more out of school suspensions, while over 120,000 students were expelled nationwide (U.S. Department of Education OCR, 2019). The NAACP Legal Defense Fund (2017) reported 35% of Black middle and high school students have experienced suspension or expulsion. The literature is congruent that exclusionary discipline negatively impacts the nations' social, educational, familial, economic, and criminal justice systems.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2018) conducted a study during the 2013-2014 school year examining patterns of discipline employed in public schools, and the challenges educators and criminal justice practitioners faced in

addressing school misbehavior. Data was collected from schools in California, Georgia, Massachusetts, North Dakota, and Texas. These states were identified as having high levels of suspensions of Black, male, and disabled students. The study's findings reported that although Blacks represented 15.5% of public-school students, they accounted for 39% of students subjected to exclusionary discipline. Also, boys accounted for over 51% of K-12 students yet represented nearly 75% of students expelled during the 2013-2014 school year (GAO, 2018).

Similarly, the study found students with disabilities represented nearly 12% of the K-12 student population, however, they accounted for over 25% of students who were excluded from the educational process by either suspension, expulsion, or arrests (GAO, 2018). These findings support this study's assertion that there is a blatant over representation of Black male students and students with disabilities exposed to exclusionary discipline. This research is also relevant as it provides current data from the state of Georgia, which is the geographic focal point of this study.

Further review of recent literature on zero tolerance and exclusionary discipline offered a meta-analysis that measured the association between school suspensions, academic achievement, and school dropout rates, with student characteristics as the moderating variable (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). Data were retrieved from 53 cases of 34 studies conducted between 1986 and 2012. The study's findings indicated a noteworthy inverse relationship existed between suspensions and achievement, as well as a substantial positive relationship between suspension and dropout rates (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). This information is valuable to the current study as these statistics reveal the need

for evidenced-based alternatives to zero tolerance and the exclusionary discipline that feeds the STPP.

The school-to-prison pipeline. A review of the literature on the contribution school police play in the STPP is mixed. A recent quantitative study on STPP and school police utilized secondary data from the 2009-2010 School Survey on Crime and Safety (Pigott et al., 2018). The study's purpose was to examine the perception of an increase in expulsions and criminal justice referrals based on police presence and how this contributed to the STPP. The study's findings indicated the presence of police on school campuses did not contribute to an increase in the reporting of incidents. The authors further asserted they concurred with Na and Gottfredson (2013) that there was zero evidence that a police presence increased the likelihood of expulsion or student contact with criminal justice system. However, an abundance of literature has touted the perils and pitfalls of the STPP, and the roles school police play in maintaining it.

A large body of research has argued STPP is exacerbated by zero-tolerance discipline and the prevalence of police in schools (Barnes & Motz, 2018; Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Mallet, 2017; Osher, 2015; Skiba & Losen, 2015). Critics of STPP proclaimed these excessive and aggressive policies have forced students out of schools and into the criminal justice system (ACLU, 2017; Johnson and Muhammad, 2018; Kang-Brown, Trone, Fratello, & Daftary-Kapur, 2013). The educational and criminal justice systems were developed to enrich and improve the lives of children and were not intended to work in conjunction with one another. However, over the past few decades, schools and courts have developed a paradoxical relationship that has been detrimental to students of

color, especially those who are Black, and those with special educational needs who are subjected to zero-tolerance discipline.

An exhaustive review of the literature has indicated marginalized students are predominately affected by STPP. Unfortunately, many middle and high school Black students get trapped in the school to prison pipeline due to arrests, suspensions, and expulsions (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox 2014; Osher, 2015; Steinberg & Lacoe, 2017). McCurdy (2014) reported during the 2009-2010 academic year, 96,000 students were arrested on school campuses, and over 240,000 received referrals to juvenile courts. Furthermore, it has been reported the presence of police on school campuses has exponentially increased student arrests between 300 and 500% annually (Javdani, 2019; Theriot, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2014a). Many of those arrests and referrals were for acts of disobedience or status offenses, which are noncriminal offenses considered violations only because of the student's status as a minor (Pigott et al., 2018). Barnes and Motz (2018) asserted tacit racial biases of some teachers may contribute to the negative labeling of Black students. They further noted these biases likely contributed to the inordinate number of referrals for minor infractions that subsequently lead to the STPP.

The criminalization of student misbehavior is the gateway to the school to prison pipeline. Several studies proclaimed suspensions or expulsions doubled students' risk of dropping out of school and entering the criminal justice system (Bell, 2015; Kang-Brown et al., 2013; Rich-Shae and Fox, 2014; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014). A 2011 longitudinal study of six million students in Texas also found that discretionary offenses

that did not involve a weapon, were three times more likely to be referred to juvenile courts (Fabelo et al., 2011). Similarly, Losen, Hewitt, and Toldson (2014) found that although Black students comprised 18% of the student population nationally, they represented 39% of expulsions and 42% of in-school law enforcement referrals. The disproportionate representation of Black students in the STPP process is a major focus of the present study.

Black youth are disproportionately overrepresented in every aspect of the school to prison pipeline. DMC is evident as Black youth are referred to juvenile courts for delinquent acts at a rate of 40% more than Whites (Puzzanchera & Robson, 2014). Although Black and Hispanic youth make up one third of the nation's adolescent population, they comprise two thirds of those incarcerated in juvenile detention facilities (Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2018). The Sentencing Project (2015) also reported nationwide, Black youth were over four times as likely to be confined in secure facilities as were White youth. They further noted in some states the disparity was more evident as Black youth were more than 10 times as likely as White youth to be committed to secure facilities.

Recently researchers conducted a mixed methods longitudinal study to determine several factors relating to DMC in Georgia's juvenile justice system (Gonzales et al., 2018). The study examined all 159 counties in the state to determine which had the highest rates of DMC, what if any differences existed across racial lines, and which referral stage accounted for DMC in Georgia. The instrument of measure for the authors' study was the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (2009) Relative Rate

Index. The Relative Rate Index compares the rates of all stages of juvenile justice contact for minority youth and White youth and delivers a single index number indicative of the extent of DMC. The authors' findings indicated punitive school discipline was a significant factor in the referral decision point (Gonzales et al., 2018). These findings lay the foundation for this study to build upon for further examination of Georgia's exclusionary discipline policies in relation to the STPP. Students labeled with special educational needs or who are emotionally or mentally disturbed (EMD) are also disproportionately represented in the STPP.

Many students classified as having special educational needs or EMD come from marginalized communities impacted by poverty, substandard nutrition and health care, violence, and underemployment. These students lack the support and resources needed to help them cope with these stressors that manifest as behavioral issues (Schiff, 2018). Yang et al. (2018) reported EMD students are 13 times more likely to be arrested for behavioral infractions than non EMD students. This body of literature supports the present study's notion that zero-tolerance discipline policies enforced by school police, factor heavily in the overrepresentation of these students in the STPP. The review of the literature also justifies this study's argument for the need to examine evidence-based alternatives to zero-tolerance discipline and juvenile detention.

Alternatives to Zero Tolerance

Juvenile diversion programs. Over 20 years ago policy makers reacted to the public's concern over school safety with policies that laid the foundation for zero-tolerance discipline. Recently the tables have turned, and empirical evidence has

prodigiously posited these policies have been ineffective in improving school climate, safety, and academic achievement (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Goldstein et al., 2019; Mallet, 2017; Rocque & Snellings, 2018). The momentum is gaining for the dismantling of exclusionary discipline practices, and for the creation of evidence-based diversion alternatives to zero tolerance and the STPP.

Nationwide, many school districts are gradually moving away from the use of exclusionary discipline. During the 2015–2016 school year, 25% of the nation's hundred largest school districts implemented nonpunitive discipline reform policies to reduce suspensions and expulsions (Steinberg & Lacoe, 2017). Several diversion alternatives have been found effective in refining school discipline, thus improving school climate (Ablamsky, 2017; Goldstein et al., 2019; Skiba & Losen, 2015). Numerous school districts have developed holistic approaches with an emphasis on the underlying factors of misbehavior, to improve overall school climate (Blad, 2019).

A recent meta-analysis examined the effects of alternative approaches on disparate discipline practices (Welsh & Little, 2018). The study's findings revealed that although some of the emerging programs showed decreases in suspensions and referrals across all groups; the interventions did not appear to substantially reduce suspensions and referrals for Black students (Welsh & Little, 2018). These findings affirmed the present study's assumption that teacher racial bias may be an underlying factor in how discipline is dispensed to Black students.

The racial disparity and human costs of exclusionary discipline are a major concern of education and criminal justice stakeholders. The budgetary costs of

incarceration are another salient downside of exclusionary discipline driving the need for reform. The literature revealed since the inception of zero-tolerance discipline, juvenile court dockets have risen exponentially from school referrals (Feirman et al., 2013; Justice Center, 2015; MacArthur Foundation, 2015; Teske & Huff, 2011). These referrals lead to commitment and contribute to the burgeoning number of youth in detention.

Thousands of these youth are incarcerated before being classified as delinquent, and in most cases for non-violent or low-level status offenses (Lahey, 2016; Sawyer, 2018). The annual cost of housing these youthful offenders is reported to range between $149,000 to $188,000 (Children and Family Justice Center, 2018; Sawyer, 2018; Teske, 2013). States are burdened with most of these costs and many have been seeking reform through diversion alternatives to reduce expenditures associated with court proceedings and incarceration.

Juvenile diversion programs are designed to hold juveniles accountable for their actions without the formalities of court proceedings and the stigma associated with being labeled an offender. Juvenile diversion is grounded in both labeling (Becker, 1963) and SEF (Eccles & Midgley, 1989) theories. The underlying concept for the development of juvenile diversion is adolescents who are formally labeled and stigmatized as offenders are likely to identify as deviant and become more entrenched in the behavior (Akers, 1994; Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016; Kroska et al., 2017; Schur, 1971). Adolescence is the stage of development where youth are most susceptible to risk taking behavior, social influences, and peer pressure (Eccles et al., 1993; Phillips, 2017; Yu et al., 2016).

Adolescence is also the stage of development where children often question and challenge authority.

Most adolescents outgrow this stage once they establish a sense of self-efficacy, and only a small percentage of youth continue this behavior into adulthood (Moffitt, 1993). Therefore, the goal of juvenile diversion is to impose minimal intervention to assist adolescents to develop positive social behaviors, reduce stigma, recidivism, and costs; while still holding them accountable (Bonnie, Johnson, Chemers, & Schuck, 2013; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, n.d.). Criminologist and public policy scholar Thomas Blomberg (1977) posited the courts play an important role in the effectiveness of any juvenile diversion program as they have the organizational resources to affect social control. This study examined the relationship between the juvenile diversion program JDAI, and in-school arrests and referrals.

Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiatives. JDAI was developed by the AECF in 1992 to address the rise in the number of youths confined in secure facilities nationwide for status offenses and non-violent acts (Voices for Georgia's Children, 2017). The objectives of JDAI are to eradicate inappropriate secure detention, reduce technical violations and delinquent behavior, improve facility conditions, appropriate funding for effective alternative strategies, and to decrease gender and racial inequalities (Voices for Georgia's Children, 2017). The purpose of JDAI is to reduce jurisdictions' reliance on the predisposition detention of juveniles in secure facilities. Its goal is to create more effective and sustainable policies and procedures that will enhance public

safety, benefit youth and the community, reduce racial and ethnic disparities, and generate significant savings for taxpayers (AECF, 2017).

JDAI is guided by eight strategic principles: Collaboration; use of accurate data; objective admissions decisions; alternatives to confinement; accelerated case processing; specialized detention cases; improve conditions of confinement; and the reduction of racial and ethnic disparities (Poirier, 2019). Since its launch in 1992, JDAI has been implemented at 197 sites in 300 counties within 40 states, as well as the District of Columbia (AECF, 2017). JDAI has emerged as a juvenile diversion program that has gained national attention as an approach to dismantle the zero-tolerance structure and phase out the STPP.

Maggard (2015) conducted a controlled study to examine the impact of JDAI on one juvenile court jurisdiction in Virginia. The study compiled data on juveniles over a seven-year period and analyzed detention and length of stay before and after the implementation of JDAI. Maggard's findings indicated after the implementation of JDAI, more emphasis was placed on whether the youth had a prior delinquent or criminal history and the seriousness of the offense. However, he also noted the results indicated this emphasis was greater for minority male youth, who were more likely to be committed to secure detention than White youth, and minority female youth. Maggard's study suggested even after the implementation of JDAI, race and gender disparities still exist for male youth who meet the criminal justice system. The current study will expound upon Maggard's (2015) research by examining JDAI in the state of Georgia.

JDAI in Georgia. In 2001, AECF launched its first attempt at a state-wide replication of JDAI in Georgia but it was not successful on such a large scale (Slay, 2019). However, in 2003 Clayton County Chief Juvenile Court Judge Steven C. Teske observed a staggering increase in cases from school related offenses and partnered with AECF to implement JDAI on a county level. According to Teske (2011), the dramatic rise in school referrals began after police were placed in the county's middle and high schools in 1996, and numerous students were arrested and referred for low level offenses resulting from zero-tolerance discipline policies. By 2003, Clayton County's public-school graduation rate reached a record low of 58%. Of equal importance is the number of school referrals to the county's juvenile court increased by an alarming 1000%, and 80% of those students referred were Black (Teske, 2015). This study investigated the efficacy of JDAI within this jurisdiction in Georgia.

Summary

After years of controversy and criticism, zero-tolerance discipline appears to be on the decline. Recent literature indicated explicit zero-tolerance discipline policies currently appear in one in seven states or districts nationwide, yet mandatory expulsion laws and policies have proliferated and are more common (Curran, 2016). Zero-tolerance discipline has evolved into the present-day exclusionary discipline practices, which are manifested through suspensions and expulsions. The question of the effect of teacher implicit racial bias and the presence of police in our nation's schools on the number of students funneled into the STPP remains troublesome and requires further study. Although the literature is mixed on the benefit of police on school climate, evidence

indicated in-school arrests and referrals resulting from zero-tolerance and exclusionary discipline are a major source of disproportionate minority contact with the criminal justice system.

The literature is replete with studies on the negative social and economic impact of zero-tolerance and exclusionary discipline. Many discussed the negative outcomes associated with the removal of students from the educational process, their poor employment prospects, and the devastation on families and communities. However, little has been presented on evidence-based juvenile detention diversion solutions to mitigate these problems. This study intended to fill this gap in the literature and contribute to the knowledge on solutions to alleviate the effects of zero-tolerance and exclusionary discipline that contribute to the STPP. Chapter 3 will provide an overview of the methodology for this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the effect of JDAIs on student arrests and referrals. Quantitative methodology allows the researcher to test objective theories to examine the associations or relationships between variables that can be measured and statistically analyzed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Regression is a statistical measurement used by researchers to predict or explain a numerical response between variables. Logistic regression is used to describe data and to explain the relationship between one dependent binary variable and one or more nominal, ordinal, or interval independent variables (Gallo, 2015; Salkind, 2010). Regression is a method of mathematically separating those variables that actually have an impact on the dependent variable and analyzing how they interact with one another (Egerton, 2018). Binary logistic regression is used in studies where the outcome variables are dichotomous and the purpose of the study is to predict membership in a target group based on scores from one or more predictor variables (Warner, 2013).

In this study, I evaluated the efficacy and veracity of JDAI in reducing student contact with the criminal justice system. Babbie (2017) asserted evaluation research is appropriate in determining whether a social intervention has achieved its intended outcome in solving a social problem. The current study referenced earlier studies (Fabelo et al., 2011; Gonzales et al., 2018; Smith & Harper, 2015) and expounded on the research of Maggard (2015) by examining if JDAI affects student arrests and referrals in a judicial circuit in the state of Georgia. Chapter 3 will include information on this study's research

design and rationale, research questions, methodology, data analysis plan, ethical concerns, and threats to validity.

Research Design and Rationale

A binary logistic regression design was chosen for this study because it allowed me to explain the relationship between a binary dependent variable and one or more nominal or ordinal independent variables. According to Salkind (2017), researchers use a binary logistic regression design to evaluate the relationship between various predictor variables (either categorical or continuous) and an outcome that is binary (dichotomous). Binary logistic regression was conducted to predict JDAI's influence on arrests and referrals, while controlling for race, gender, and age. This study's independent or predictor variable was JDAI status (pre-JDAI and post-JDAI). The binary dependent variables were arrests and referrals. The study's control variables were race, gender, and age. Binary logistic regression was also appropriate for this study because its non-experimental design did not require random placement of subjects into control groups, nor did it allow for the manipulation of the independent variable (Brewer & Kubin, 2010; Salkind, 2017).

The current study gathered data regarding arrests and referrals of middle-school students subjected to zero-tolerance discipline in a judicial circuit in the state of Georgia. There were no significant time or budgetary constraints by employing this design, as data came from secondary sources. Secondary data are often readily available and are collected over a period which helps identify change over the course of time (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, n.d.). The choice to use a regression design for this

study aimed to further advance the knowledge on JDAI by illuminating the effects, if any, on decision point outcomes after the application of JDAI.

Population

The sample was drawn from middle-school students in a northwest jurisdiction in Georgia who were subjected to school discipline that resulted in contact with the criminal justice system. This population of students was of interest because empirical studies have posited middle schoolers are at a vulnerable stage in their development (Eccles, 2013; Midgley et al., 1989). Research has also found that, at this stage, children are prone to higher incidents of discipline (Fabelo et al., 2011; Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014). I used this population to expand on two of Maggard's (2015) suggestions for future research on JDAI.

First, Maggard suggested future evaluation of JDAI examine more decision points for youth entering the juvenile justice system. In this study, I examined two of those decision points: arrests and referrals. Maggard also indicated further analysis of data on arrests and intake referrals by school police and administrators could prove useful in understanding the disproportionate and disparate contact of minority youth with the criminal justice system. I examined the decision points arrests and referrals as a result of in-school discipline.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

The process of sampling allows the researcher to generalize or make inferences about the population of study (Frankfort-Nachmias & Leon-Guerrero, 2015). This research contributed to the literature on the disproportionate impact of exclusionary

discipline in the South by employing purposive sampling for a juvenile court jurisdiction in the state of Georgia. According to Babbie (2017), purposive sampling is a nonprobability technique appropriate when the researcher seeks to select a sample based on the knowledge and elements of a population related to the purpose of the study.

I chose to use homogeneous sampling as the type of purposive sampling for the study because it focused on candidates who shared similar characteristics. The goal of homogenous sampling is to focus on a specific similarity and how it relates to the topic being studied (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Although time, cost, and convenience are a few of the benefits of nonprobability sampling, generalizability is minimized due to its subjective nature. The sample for the study was based on the jurisdiction being located in a state with a documented practice of disproportionate exclusionary discipline (Smith & Harper, 2015). Also, the jurisdiction selected for the study had a total of 18 middle schools and the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the sample helped to ensure a thorough assessment of a fully operational JDAI site.

Secondary Data

Initially, I intended to collect secondary data through formal written requests from county juvenile court administrators, county juvenile probation agencies, county or school district police departments, the public-school district, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. However, due to the collaboration fostered between the above listed agencies, I was able to request the data from one source: the County Juvenile Court. Many of the previously mentioned departments and agencies were the appropriate sources of data for the study because they are directly involved in the constructs of the

research. The data gathered from these sources was assumed accurate, timely, and reputable as they are mandated to comply with state and federal regulations for the compilation, reporting, confidentiality, and storage of data.

A formal written request in the form of a data use agreement was submitted to the Juvenile Court Director of Operations. An unsigned copy of the agreement is included in the Appendix. Open record requests per the Georgia statute, Official Code of Georgia Annotated (OCGA) 50-18-70 were not required as the information was public record. The requests for data followed Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) ethical standards as well as all applicable federal, state, and local laws pertaining to security and confidentiality. The request also stated the educational purpose for the data and did not commence until the I received IRB approval for the study. The IRB approval number for this study is 02-07-20-0658307.

Data Analysis Plan

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS software. The effect JDAI has on reducing the negative impact of zero-tolerance exclusionary discipline was of interest; as well as whether race, age, and gender played a role as covariates in the effect of JDAI on the outcomes of arrests and referrals. Quantitative research questions ask about the association between the variables the researcher seeks to understand (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The following research questions and hypotheses served to examine these variables and aligned with the problem statement and purpose of the study:

RQ1: Does JDAI status predict arrests and referrals while controlling for race, age, and gender?

H_0: JDAI status does not predict arrests and referrals while controlling for race, age, and gender race.

H_1: JDAI status does predict arrests and referrals while controlling for race, age, and gender.

Based on this study's research questions and hypotheses, two binary logistic regression analyses were employed to analyze the data. Binary logistic regression is appropriate when the dependent variable is measured on a nominal scale of measurement and has two levels (e.g. Yes or No); (Salkind, 2017). As applied to this study, the two dependent variables, arrests and referrals are nominal variables with two levels, yes or no.

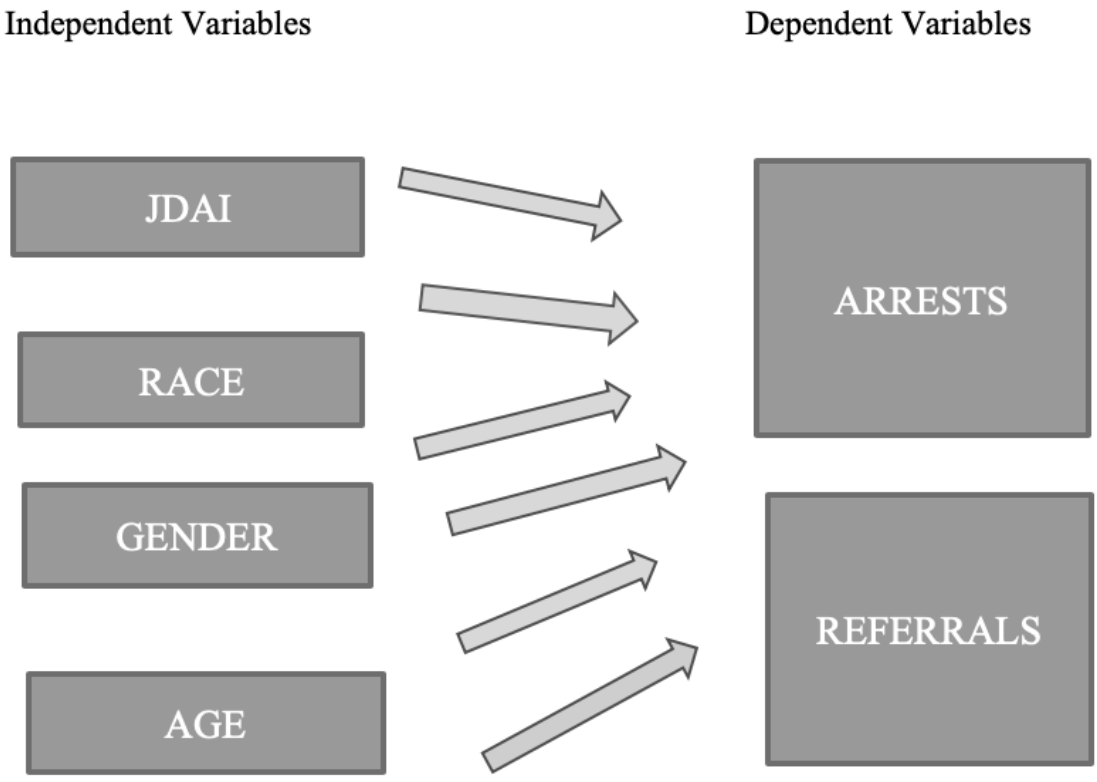

Figure 1. Conceptual map

Threats to Validity

External, Internal, and Construct Validity

Validity addresses the quality of research. In quantitative research, validity refers to whether the data and the inferences made from the findings reflect the phenomena; rather than having occurred by a chance relationship, researcher bias, or study design limitations (Stewart & Hitchcock, 2016). A researcher must use the appropriate type and method of data collection, and a sufficient sample that answers the study's research questions to ensure validity. This study's method of data collection, type of data and sample all aligned with the research questions.

In quantitative research, external validity refers to the degree to which an experimental study's findings of a treatment are generalizable based on the sample (Crawford, 2016). According to Salkind (2017), threats to external validity occur when researchers draw erroneous inferences from the sample data and apply them to other people or situations. This study's use of secondary data posed minimal threats to external validity because of the inobtrusive way the data was obtained. The non-experimental approach used did not pose any threats of testing reactivity, multi-treatment interference, or interaction effects of selection bias, which are potential factors of concern in experimental cause and effect research (O'Sullivan, Rassel, Berner, & Taliaferro, 2017).

Internal validity in quantitative research refers to the estimate of truth regarding causal relationships. Internal validity alludes to a researcher's level of confidence to make a causal inference based on the findings of a study (Salkind, 2010). This study will not be affected by common factors of internal validity such as history, maturation,

statistical regression, or experimental mortality because of how data will be retrieved (O'Sullivan et al., 2017). The study did not pose any significant threats to internal validity because of its nonexperimental design which did not call for any causal inferences from experiments or treatments on participants.

Construct validity assesses whether the measurement instrument accurately reflects the concept of interest it is measuring. Construct validity occurs when the researcher utilizes the appropriate operational definitions and levels of measurement (Salkind, 2017). This study did not constitute threats of construct validity such as mono-operation bias because it sampled data from a jurisdiction over a period of time. Further this study did not pose the threat of interaction of different treatments because it was not an experimental design where subjects received treatment. Nor was there the potential for the threat of hypotheses guessing or evaluation apprehension because once again, there was not any live experimental treatment of active participants (O'Sullivan et al., 2017).

Ethical Procedures

Ethical considerations are a critical component of scholarly research. Ethics provide the standards of conduct that prescribe what is and is not acceptable in social research. Reliability, integrity, and validity all rely on how ethically a study is conducted. To address these concerns, this study was subjected to the review and approval of Walden University's IRB of the Office of Research Ethics and Compliance. The purpose of the IRB is to determine to what extent the research may potentially place participants at risk during the study (Creswell, 2014).

The appropriate documents from IRB were completed before data were collected. All policies and procedures set by Walden University's IRB board were adhered to, as well as APA's Ethics Code. This study analyzed secondary data that has been subjected to state and federal controls and regulations. Data did not include any identifying information on participants that would pose a risk of harm. The collection of data did not commence until the I received official approval from Walden's IRB.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of this study was to examine the likelihood of JDAI status predicting in-school arrests and referrals, while controlling for race, gender, and age. The study's research questions served to guide the secondary data collection method, as well as the use of a binary logistic regression design. Based on the nature of the study, there were minimal threats to validity. The study's non-experimental design also minimized ethical concerns. Chapter 4 will include an analysis of the descriptive statistics.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this non-experimental quantitative study was to examine the relationships between JDAI status, arrests, and referrals. The dependent variables were arrests and referrals. The independent variables were JDAI status, race, gender, and age. All data were analyzed with binary logistic regression to test the hypotheses, using SPSS software. Researchers use binary logistic regression to analyze data where the outcome variable is dichotomous and the goal of the study is to predict membership in a target group, from scores on one or more predictor variables (Warner, 2013). The research question and the associated hypotheses that guided this study are presented below:

RQ1: Does JDAI status predict arrests and referrals while controlling for race, gender, and age?

H_0: JDAI status does not predict arrests and referrals, while controlling for race, gender, and age.

H_1: JDAI status does predict arrests and referrals while controlling for race, gender, and age.

In Chapter 4, I present the data collection process, the results of the data analysis, and a summary and transition to chapter 5.

Data Collection

Data were collected on middle-school students from a juvenile court in northwest Georgia where zero-tolerance and exclusionary discipline was a common practice. Purposive sampling was applied. I was able to obtain aggregate data for a 2-year period

(2001–2002) prior to the implementation of the JDAI School Reduction Referral Program and the most recent 2-year period (2017–2018) post-JDAI. Walden University's IRB granted approval for secondary data research. The Director of Juvenile Court Operations approved the request for data, and it was provided in Excel Spreadsheet files, which I manually entered into SPSS.

The data received from the Juvenile Court consisted of 1,364 cases. However, 61 cases (n = 61; 4.4%) were omitted based on the students' race. Cases where students were listed as either Hispanic, Asian, or Other/Unknown were removed from the data to conform with the purpose and direction of the study. After removing the aforementioned cases, the sample size resulted in 1,303 (N = 1,303) cases. These cases reflected male and female middle-school students who were Black or White and who were either arrested or referred to the juvenile justice system. The demographic descriptive statistics are summarized in Table 1.

Demographic Data

Table 1 revealed substantially more cases for Black students (n = 1165; 89.4%), compared to White students (n = 138; 10.6%). The data for gender showed a larger number of cases were male students (n = 893; 68.5%) than female students (n = 410; 31.5%). As for the age of the middle-school students who were arrested or referred , the range was 12–14 years old; 29.2% were age 12 (n = 381). As students' age increased, so did the number of arrests and referrals with 13-year-old students at 36.5% (n = 476), and students who were 14 years of age at 34.2% (n = 446). Lastly, in terms JDAI status, 92.5% (n = 1,205) of the cases were pre-JDAI, while 7.25% (n = 98) were post-JDAI.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage Summaries of Demographic Information (N = 1,303)

Variables	Category	n	%
Race	Black	1165	89.4
	White	138	10.6
Gender	Male	893	68.5
	Female	410	31.5
Age	12 years old	381	29.2
	13 years old	476	36.5
	14 years old	446	34.2
JDAI			
Pre	No	1205	92.5
Post	Yes	98	7.5

Results

In this section, I present the descriptive statistics that appropriately characterized the sample. Two binary logistic regression equations were constructed to determine the likelihood of JDAI (independent variable) status on arrests and referrals (dependent variables), while controlling for race, age, and gender. The overall objective was to determine the impact of JDAI on the likelihood of arrests (yes or no) and referrals (yes or no). Two primary objectives of binary logistic regression are to: (a) to determine which of the independent variables (if any) have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variables and (b) to determine how well the binary logistic regression model predicts the dependent variables (Laerd Statistics, 2017; Wagner, 2017). These objectives are answered in the following subsections.

Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiatives and Arrests

Two binary logistic regressions were conducted to determine the impact of JDAI. This first binary logistic regression was conducted to determine if JDAI status (pre-JDAI

and post-JDAI) could significantly distinguish between students with and without arrests, while controlling for race, age, and gender. The predictor variable was JDAI status. The control variables were race, age gender. The arrest status was the dependent variable, with two levels: yes and no. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $X^2(2) = 21.091$, $p < .0005$. The model explained 3% Nagelkerke R^2 of variance in arrest and correctly classified 89% of the cases. Sensitivity was 0%, specificity was 100%, positive predictive value was 0%, and negative predictive value was 112.5%. Of the four predictor variables, only gender and age were significant contributors to the model (as shown in Table 2). Race did not add any significant contribution to the model. When adding the predictor variable JDAI status, the model remained significant, $X^2(2) = 21.091$, with gender ($p = .001$, $B = -.478$) and age ($p = .015$, $B = 1.327$). However, the predictor variable, JDAI, did not add any additional contribution to the model. Male students had 2.09 times higher odds of being arrested than female students. For each unit reduction in age, the odds of being arrested increased by a factor of 1.38. Table 2 shows the regression summary for arrests.

Table 2

Variables in the Equation Arrests Regression Summary

		B	SE	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1	JDAI (1)	.147	.303	.235	1	.628	1.159
	Students' race	–.425	.330	1.655	1	.198	.654
	Students' gender	–.739	.221	11.157	1	.001	.478
	Middle school-aged students between 12 and 14 years old	.283	.116	5.893	1	.015	1.327
	Constant	–2.178	.171	161.807	1	.000	.113

Note. Variable(s) entered on Step 1: JDAI , students' race, students' gender, middle-school-aged students between 12–14 years old.

Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiatives and Referrals

The second binary logistic regression was conducted to determine if JDAI status (pre JDAI and post JDAI) could significantly distinguish between students with and without referrals, while controlling for race, age, and gender. The predictor variable was JDAI status. The control variables were race, age gender. The referral status was the dependent variable, with two levels, yes and no. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $X^2(2) = 21.091$, $p < .0005$. The model explained 3% Nagelkerke R^2 of variance in referrals, and correctly classified 89% of the cases. Sensitivity was 100%, specificity was 0%, positive predictive value was 112.5%, and negative predictive value was 0%. Of the four predictor variables only gender and age were significant contributors to the model (as shown in Table 3). Race did not add any significant contribution to the model. When adding the predictor variable JDAI status, the model remained significant, $X^2(2) = 21.091$, with gender ($p = .001$, $B = 2.093$) and age ($p = .015$, $B = .754$). However, the predictor variable, JDAI, did not add any additional contribution

to the model. Table 3 depicts the regression summary. Based on the Wald statistic, female students had 2.09 times higher odds of being referred than male students. For each unit decrease in age, the odds of being referred were increased by a factor of 1.33. Table 3 provided a summary of the regression analysis for referrals. Table 4 depicted the descriptive frequency cumulative analysis of arrests and referrals pre and post JDAI.

Table 3

Variables in the Equation Referrals Regression Summary

		B	SE	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1	JDAI (1)	–.147	.303	.235	1	.628	.863
	Students' race	.425	.330	1.655	1	.198	1.530
	Students' gender	.739	.221	11.157	1	.001	2.093
	Middle school-aged students between 12 and 14 years old	–.283	.116	5.893	1	.015	.754
	Constant	–2.178	.171	161.807	1	.000	8.826

Note. Variable(s) entered on Step 1: JDAI , students' race, students' gender, middle-school-aged students between 12–14 years old.

Table 4

Frequency and Percentage Summaries of Pre/Post JDAI (N = 1,303)

Year	Frequency	Percent	Valid %	Valid cumulative %
2001	561	43.1	43.1	43.1
2002	646	50.1	50.1	93.2
2017	72	5.0	5.0	98.2
2018	24	1.8	1.8	100.0
Total	1303	100.0	100.0	

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine if JDAI status (pre JDAI and post JDAI) could significantly distinguish between students with and without arrests and referrals, while controlling for race, gender, and age. Binary logistic regressions were conducted for each of the dependent variables arrests and referrals, to ascertain the predictive relationship of the independent variables of JDAI, race, gender, and age. The results of the study found JDAI status and race had no significant impact on arrests and referrals. However, findings did indicate that gender and age did significantly predict arrests and referrals, therefore, the null hypothesis for the research question was rejected.

The demographic description for this sample revealed Black students made up 89.4% of the students who were either arrested or referred to the juvenile justice system, while 10.6% were White. Male students were arrested and referred at 68.5%, while female students were 31.5%. The age of the students who were arrested or referred revealed 29.2% were 12 years old; 36.5% were 12 years old, and 34.2% were 14 years of age. As for JDAI status, the findings revealed a cumulative value of 93.2% of arrests and referrals occurred during the 2-year period pre JDAI, while 6.8% occurred post JDAI.

In Chapter 4, I presented the introduction, data collection, results, and the summary. Chapter 5 will begin with an introduction, followed by an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, implications for social change, and will conclude with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The abundance of literature depicting how zero-tolerance discipline serves as the impetus for the STPP was the motivation for this study. Student contact with the criminal justice system has increased exponentially as law enforcement replaced discipline to address student misbehavior (Owens, 2017). Prior research indicated these exclusionary discipline strategies have been particularly damaging to Black male students (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Curran, 2016) who are suspended and expelled three times more than White students are (Berwick, 2015). Furthermore, these suspensions and expulsions decrease the educational and employment opportunities for Black male youth, while increasing their likelihood of incarceration (Hanson & Stipek, 2014; Hattar, 2018). Nearly 70% of the U.S. imprisoned population did not complete high school, and a substantial portion of that percentage can be attributed to years of zero-tolerance discipline policies (Passero, 2020). JDAI was developed as a program to confront the rise in the number of youths confined in secure facilities nationwide for status offenses and nonviolent acts such as those associated with zero-tolerance discipline (Teske, 2015).

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the effect of JDAI on zero-tolerance-related arrests and referrals of middle-school students. The research question that directed this study examined the effectiveness of JDAI in predicting arrests and referrals, while controlling for race, gender, and age. Participants in the study included middle-school students from a jurisdiction in northwest Georgia. These students had contact with the juvenile justice system as a result of an arrest or referral based on zero-

tolerance discipline. The findings of the study indicate that only gender and age predicted the arrests and referrals of these students.

This chapter provides an overview of the purpose and rationale for the study. A discussion and summary of the findings regarding the research question are provided. Also, limitations of the study, recommendations for practitioners, implications for social change, and suggestions for future research are presented in this chapter.

Interpretation of the Findings

Participants in the study included 1,303 Black and White middle-school students from a jurisdiction in northwest Georgia who were arrested or referred and subsequently detained by the juvenile justice system. Although the study revealed race was not a significant predictor of arrests and referrals, findings demonstrated that Black students were 89.4% of those arrested or referred, compared to White students accounting for 10.6%. These results support previous researchers who found that Black middle-school children are disproportionately subjected to zero-tolerance discipline and the STPP (Dunning-Lozano, 2018; Fader et al., 2015; Green, 2018; Goldstein et al., 2019; Owens, 2017).

The results in this study indicated that gender was a significant predictor for arrests and referrals, and these findings also coincided with the literature discussed in Chapter 2. The results for gender showed 68.5% of students arrested or referred as a result of zero-tolerance discipline were male, while female students accounted for 31.5% of the cases of arrests and referrals. These findings are similar to prior studies that

reported male students, as a group, are overrepresented when it comes to school discipline (Barnes & Motz, 2018; GAO, 2018).

The findings for age, which were also determined to predict arrests and referrals, paralleled the literature as data from this study found 29% of the students arrested or referred to the juvenile court were 12 years of age. However, as students' age increased, so did the number of arrests and referrals. Thirteen-year-old students represented 36.5% of arrests and referrals, while 34.2% of the students arrested and referred were 14 years of age. These results also support and extend the knowledge of looking at juvenile justice reform through the lenses of SEF (Eccles & Midgley, 1983) and labeling theories (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951).

SEF theory asserted middle school poses a mismatch between students' stage of development and the middle school environment; and this lack of fit can cause students to become detached and unmotivated (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Kellich, 2017). This study sampled middle school students aged 12 to 14 years old, who according to SEF, are at the most vulnerable stage of their development and are prone to challenge authority. These findings are also similar to the literature that found the majority of students arrested at school were under the age of 15 years old (Owens, 2017).

These same findings also affirmed the rationale of examining middle school students' arrests and referrals through labeling theory (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951; and Schur, 1971). Labeling theorists contended the label of deviance is applied to individuals who allegedly violate social norms, and the alienation from society and defiance of being rejected advances delinquent behavior. Thus, students who are labeled as lower achievers

and deviant, or those who have special educational needs; are prone to negatively respond to this type of learning environment and will either misbehave or disengage from the educational process altogether (Chiricos et al., 2007; Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016; Kroska et al., 2017; Sparks et al., 2018). Relative to labeling theory, this study found that of the 1,303 students who were arrested and referred to the juvenile court, 1,165 of those students were Black. These findings further support the literature that proposed labels placed on students by educators may be influenced by their implicit biases and is reflected in how they administer discipline (DeMatthews, 2016; GAO, 2018; Gregory et al., 2010; Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016; U.S. Department of Education OCR, 2014b; Rudd, 2014; Skiba et al., 2011).

The overall objective of this study was to determine the impact of JDAI status (pre JDAI and post JDAI) on the likelihood of arrests and referrals. This study examined (N = 1,303) cases of students who were arrested and referred to the juvenile justice system in the years 2001 and 2002, before the implementation of the JDAI School Referral Reduction Program; and the two most recent years of data post JDAI, 2017 and 2018. Like race, JDAI was not a significant predictor of arrests or referrals in this study, however the data indicated the following: The 2 years prior to JDAI, 2001 and 2002, had a total of 1,205 arrests and referrals to the juvenile justice system, 92.5% of the total number of cases sampled. The two most recent years of data post the implementation of JDAI, 2017 and 2018, reported 98 arrests and referrals to the juvenile court, which was 7.5% of the cases in the study.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations of this study worth noting. The study was limited geographically to one region in Georgia. Given that most educational and criminal justice policies are local, what applies to the study population may not be applicable to other regions, or states or national policies. Also, the study's non-experimental quantitative design may not have explicitly reflected underlying elements in the evaluation of the JDAI program's effect on student arrests and referrals. Additionally, the manner in which the data was requested may have limited the scope of the study. Data was requested for the 2 years prior to the implementation of JDAI, and the 2 most recent years of data after the program's implementation. Perhaps the study could have contained more depth if all the years of the data for the program in between those 4 years were collected and examined as well. Finally, the study was limited in that the data were driven by information provided by discretionary school policies that may change from year to year in terms of how they are applied. There was not a standard framework how and when they were applied and what were the accountability measures in applying these policies. These limitations taken collectively on generalizing how discipline is interpreted and meted out in other school districts, or how juveniles are processed within the judicial system for states in other regions of the country.

Recommendations

Based on this study's findings, it is recommended a longitudinal study be conducted on school districts in those southern states where a disproportionate number of Black students are subjected to exclusionary discipline (Smith & Harper, 2015). It is

recommended such a study explore the efficacy of detention alternatives in these jurisdictions to determine if any systemic changes have been implemented to curb Black student contact with the criminal justice system. Also, further research of a qualitative nature on JDAI's School Reduction Referral Program is needed to determine the perception of its efficacy by teachers, administrators, and SROs. The findings of this type of study may offer insight into whether or not factors such as teacher and officer implicit biases are being addressed.

Finally, this study, like so many others indicated Black male students are overrepresented in the STPP. However, Black female students are often overlooked in discussions of zero-tolerance discipline and the STPP, even though it has been reported they are six times more likely to be suspended than White female students, and one and a half times more likely to be suspended than White male students (Kaba, 2017). Black female students are subjected to the disparate and disproportionate zero-tolerance discipline policies and are also being funneled through the STPP (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Kaba, 2017). More research is recommended to examine the long-term psychological and socioeconomic impact of these practices on this under reported population.

Implications

The theoretical findings of this study contributed to the literature on zero-tolerance discipline and juvenile justice by explaining how SEF and labeling theories are intrinsic to reforming the practice of zero-tolerance discipline and the STPP. This information is necessary for stakeholders involved in education and juvenile justice

reform and can serve to guide decisions on policies and programs that promote positive social change that will improve the life outcomes of marginalized students. Furthermore, this information is meant to encourage honest conversations about the biases that are at the root of the subjective and disparate disciplinary practices that funnel Black students through the STPP. The effects of positive social change will be reflected in students' success and can be measured by an increase in graduation rates, the narrowing of the academic achievement gap, and the decrease in the number of Black students' coming in contact with the criminal justice system.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the efficacy of JDAI on zero tolerance related arrests and referrals. Several of this study's findings supported the need for policy and decision makers to take a look at the merits of JDAI or similar programs that promote alternatives to juvenile detention, are cost effective, and allows all children the opportunity to achieve a quality education, thereby improving their chances for positive life outcomes. Although Georgia's legislators implemented sweeping juvenile justice reform in 2013 with the passing of House Bill 242 (AECF, 2013), which required all judicial circuits to implement juvenile detention alternatives; more effort and more research are needed to address the systemic socioeconomic and racial biases that exist in in our schools and criminal justice system that are at the core of zero tolerance and the criminalization of youth misbehavior.

Change must begin in our schools, which can no longer be an extension of our criminal justice system. However, to get there, changes must also be made in the training and hiring practices of school administrators, teachers, counselors, and school resource officers, that requires racial implicit bias training and education. It is only then that honest conversations can take place to positively effect change that will dismantle zero-tolerance and exclusionary discipline practices and derail the STPP.

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Appendix

This Data Use Agreement ("Agreement"), effective as of **November 1, 2019** ("Effective Date"), is entered into by and between **Lois V. Woods** ("Data Recipient") and the [redacted] ("Data Provider"). The purpose of this Agreement is to provide Data Recipient with access to a Limited Data Set ("LDS") for use in research in accord with FERPA Regulations, as well as the Data Provider's policies and procedures for the release of data.

1. Preparation of the LDS. Data Provider shall prepare and furnish to Data Recipient a LDS in accord with any applicable agency and FERPA Regulations.

Data Fields in the LDS. **No direct identifiers such as names may be included in the Limited Data Set (LDS).** The researcher will also not name the organization in the doctoral project report that is published in ProQuest. In preparing the LDS, Data Provider or designee shall include the **data fields specified as follows**, which are the minimum necessary to accomplish the research:

Middle school-aged children primarily between the ages of 12 -14 years old for one to two years prior to the introduction of JDAI/School-Justice Partnership, and one to two years after the implementation of JDAI/School-Justice Partnership on the following data points:

1. **In-school arrests pre- and post JDAI/School-Justice Partnership**
2. **Referrals pre- and post JDAI/School Justice**
3. **Commitments pre- and post JDAI/School Justice Partnership**
4. **Race and gender**

2. Responsibilities of Data Recipient. Data Recipient agrees to:
   a. Use or disclose the LDS only as permitted by this Agreement or as required by law;
   b. Use appropriate safeguards to prevent use or disclosure of the LDS other than as permitted by this Agreement or required by law;
   c. Report to Data Provider any use or disclosure of the LDS of which it becomes aware that is not permitted by this Agreement or required by law;
   d. Require any of its subcontractors or agents that receive or have access to the LDS to agree to the same restrictions and conditions on the use and/or disclosure of the LDS that apply to Data Recipient under this Agreement; and
   e. Not use the information in the LDS to identify or contact the individuals who are data subjects.
3. Permitted Uses and Disclosures of the LDS. Data Recipient may use and/or disclose the LDS for its research activities only.
4. Term and Termination.

   Term. The term of this Agreement shall commence as of the Effective Date and shall continue for so long as Data Recipient retains the LDS, unless sooner terminated as set forth in this Agreement.

   a. Termination by Data Recipient. Data Recipient may terminate this agreement at any time by notifying the Data Provider and returning or destroying the LDS.
   b. Termination by Data Provider. Data Provider may terminate this agreement at any time by providing thirty (30) days prior written notice to Data Recipient.

   c. For Breach. Data Provider shall provide written notice to Data Recipient within ten (10) days of any determination that Data Recipient has breached a material term of

this Agreement. Data Provider shall afford Data Recipient an opportunity to cure said alleged material breach upon mutually agreeable terms. Failure to agree on mutually agreeable terms for cure within thirty (30) days shall be grounds for the immediate termination of this Agreement by Data Provider.

5. Miscellaneous.

a. Change in Law. The parties agree to negotiate in good faith to amend this Agreement to comport with changes in local, state or federal law that materially alter either or both parties' obligations under this Agreement. Provided however, that if the parties are unable to agree to mutually acceptable amendment(s) by the compliance date of the change in applicable law or regulations, either Party may terminate this Agreement as provided in section 4.

b. Construction of Terms. The terms of this Agreement shall be construed to give effect to applicable federal interpretative guidance regarding the FERPA Regulations.

c. No Third Party Beneficiaries. Nothing in this Agreement shall confer upon any person other than the parties and their respective successors or assigns, any rights, remedies, obligations, or liabilities whatsoever.

d. Counterparts. This Agreement may be executed in one or more counterparts, each of which shall be deemed an original, but all of which together shall constitute one and the same instrument.

e. Headings. The headings and other captions in this Agreement are for convenience and reference only and shall not be used in interpreting, construing or enforcing any of the provisions of this Agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, each of the undersigned has caused this Agreement to be duly executed in its name and on its behalf.

DATA PROVIDER	**DATA RECIPIENT**
Signed: _____	Signed: _____
Print Name: _____	Print Name: _____
Print Title: _____	Print Title: _____