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## Urban Administrators Perspectives of Exclusionary Discipline Techniques and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Sabrina Enid Johnson  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Sabrina Johnson

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## Review Committee

Dr. Felicia Blacher-Wilson, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty  
Dr. Mary Hallums, Committee Member, Education Faculty  
Dr. Christina Dawson, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Urban Administrator Perspectives of Exclusionary Discipline Techniques and the School-  
to-Prison Pipeline

by

Sabrina Johnson

MPA, Long Island University, 2016

BA, The State University of New York at Canton, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Walden University

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## Abstract

There is an overrepresentation of elementary-age, Black boys being suspended across the United States. Researchers have found that if these boys are disconnected from school at an early age, they are at risk of becoming part of the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP). Educators, particularly those in urban settings, need to understand more about the use of exclusionary discipline policies and practices. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand how urban educators consider the consequences of exclusionary discipline practices and the overrepresentation of elementary-age, Black boys who receive them compared to others. Critical race theory informed this study. Ten administrators who had 2-20 years' experience as administrators working with an urban school demographic were interviewed; all were from one school district in the western United States. Open and in vivo coding were used to support thematic analyses. The urban administrators described struggling to dismantle racist systems in their school cultures. Participants agreed that antiracist approaches, professional development, exposing injustices, and checking bias are important in schools, and they emphasized new ways of thinking and new systems that promote equity for all students. These leaders wanted a better future for students than their communities and society anticipate. The study findings add to the field of research in educational leadership and provide information that administrators of urban institutions can use to develop and implement their strategic goals to address disparities in school discipline by race and reason, which will lead to more racially equitable responses in disciplining Black students, resulting in positive social change.

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## Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my Grandparents, Norris and Perleen, and my Great Aunt Enid. I did it! God has directed my footsteps. I failed, I won, and I failed again. Thank you for setting the bar for what success should look and feel like spiritually. I love you all. This paper is also dedicated to every Black person in this world. I do what I do for us. I am doing my best to set a standard of excellence; I am embodying vulnerability and depth to not hide from the traumatic experiences that I used to once feel ashamed of in my Black skin. The unworthiness I used to feel. I'm using all of those thoughts, feelings, and emotions as my superpower to radically change a system that oppresses us at a disproportionate rate than others. And lastly, I want to dedicate this thesis to the family that I am co-creating with my husband and my children. This one is for you!

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand how urban educators consider the consequences of exclusionary discipline practices and the overrepresentation of elementary-age, Black boys who receive them compared to others. This study was necessary to conduct because as early as prekindergarten (pre-K), young Black boys are identified as receiving more exclusionary discipline policies, like suspension and expulsion, compared to other races. Research solidified that this frequent removal from the classroom increases their ability to become a candidate for the prison pipeline (Bottiani et al., 2017; Gilliam et al., 2016; Girvan et al., 2017). Exclusionary discipline policies, such as suspension and expulsion, can negatively affect students. Allen and White-Smith (2014) described the ways that these exclusionary discipline protocols have unequal consequences for White and Black students. Stringent school discipline codes like exclusionary discipline policies adversely affect people of color (Carter et al., 2017). Racial inequalities have negatively impacted best practice alternatives to suspensions and expulsions like behavior contracts, counseling, or in-school suspensions.

Consequently, various exclusionary discipline practices and policies continue to disproportionately affect Black students compared to their White peers, and these experiences are described as a significant racial equity issue in U.S. education (LaForett & De Marco, 2020). I conducted this study were to contribute knowledge to the discipline of education policy regarding the effects of exclusionary discipline practices. Chapter 1

includes discussions of the background literature, problem statement, purpose of the study, conceptual framework, nature of the study, assumptions and limitations, and significance of the study.

### **Background**

Exclusionary discipline policies, like suspension and expulsion, often result in the placement of juveniles in the criminal justice system, which shows patterns of institutional racism (Berlowitz et al., 2017; LaForett & De Marco, 2020; Skiba & Losen, 2016). According to Yoon et al. (2021), institutional racism is a form of racism conveyed in the practice of social and political institutions. These practices are often reflected in disparities related to income, education, and housing, among other factors. Girvan et al. (2017) noted how excessive suspensions and expulsions funnel Black students into the criminal justice system, referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP). According to research from the Children's Defense Fund (2021), some additional factors that have increased the likelihood of young Black boys being at risk of entering the STPP include low socioeconomic status, homelessness, poor parenting, absent father figures, inadequate mentoring, and a lack of support in community neighborhoods.

The definition of zero tolerance in an education context is a response to violence in schools (Kodelja, 2019). However, for this study, the specific type of policies researched were exclusionary discipline practices. Some examples of exclusionary discipline include in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion. Many researchers have described the approach to solving school safety through exclusionary

discipline as ineffective and increasing the risk of negative academic and social outcomes for historically disadvantaged groups (Berlowitz et al., 2017; LaForett & De Marco, 2020; Skiba & Losen, 2016). Black boys consistently receive harsher discipline consequences for the same infractions as their peers as early as pre-K (LaForett & De Marco, 2020). Research has suggested that exclusionary discipline increases the likelihood of a child contributing to the STPP (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Use of this type of discipline has systemically impacted young Black boys compared to other races. There was a gap in the research and literature about education leaders' understanding of the link between this overrepresentation and discrimination of Black boys and the long-term outcomes such as the STPP.

There are several perspectives of how Black students are groomed for the STPP (Carter et al., 2017; Loveless, 2017; Mallett, 2016; Skiba, 2014). This study was necessary because it contributed to the existing literature by expanding current knowledge about the challenges associated with frequently and harshly applying exclusionary discipline policies to elementary-aged, Black boys. The findings also add to the existing literature on educational leadership traits that may influence how elementary-aged, Black boys are disciplined in schools. As society aims to achieve racial equity for all students, it was necessary to conduct this study on the imminent risk caused by Black students being disciplined differently from their peers, which significantly increases their risk of contributing to the STPP.

### **Problem Statement**

The issue undergirding this study was that there is an overrepresentation of elementary-aged, Black boys being suspended from school. Researchers have found that this practice places them at risk of being victims of the STPP (Carter et al., 2017; Flannery et al., 2014; Girvan et al., 2017; Skiba, 2014). Currently, there is a limited body of literature addressing the perspectives of urban administrators regarding how exclusionary discipline policies and the STPP might connect. Researchers have identified an essential link between exclusionary discipline practices and students at risk of contributing to the STPP, and according to LaForett and De Marco (2020), it is a significant racial issue in U.S education that begins as early as pre-K, where Black students receive exclusionary discipline consequences at a disproportionate rate compared to their peers for committing the same disciplinary infractions. As early as elementary school, Black students are 4 times as likely to be referred to administrators for the same problematic behavior that their White counterparts commit (Bottiani et al., 2017; Kaufman et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2002). Camacho and Krezmien (2020) also addressed the concern that Black students have the highest suspension and expulsion rates. Musu-Gillette et al. (2016) reported that the lifetime suspension rates for Black students were 48%, whereas Latinx students were 23% and White students were 21%.

The removal of Black male students from the classroom may result in unintended consequences, such as increases in dropout rates, disengagement from school, the STPP, and diminished academic opportunities (Carter et al., 2017; Mallett, 2016; Rocque, 2018;

Skiba, 2014). According to the American Civil Liberties Union (2019), if exclusionary discipline practices disproportionately discriminate against a group of students, it excludes their constitutional right to free public education.

The disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions that Black students experience may lead them to participate in criminal activity because of being removed from classrooms more frequently and harshly (Barrett et al., 2017). Morris and Howard (2006) described how ineffective discipline practices had become; and how exclusionary discipline practices influenced an increase in school suspension, detention, and mass incarceration.

Research also described the effects of suspension and expulsion by race and reason. For example, Yang et al. (2018), stated that a relationship exists between the achievement gap and Black males who encounter the STPP. Mallett (2016) indicated educational institutions are responsible for implementing alternative practices that minimize suspensions and expulsions. Research suggests that there are stricter punishments and racial and ethnic disparities associated with consequences for discipline infractions in predominantly low socioeconomic schools, all of which hinder academic progress (Peguero et al., 2018). Rainbolt et al. (2019) also established that Black males are 2 to 3 times more likely to receive punitive punishments like suspension and expulsion than their White peers.

This research study was needed because it addressed a literature gap for an underresearched area of elementary education. Researchers have described the various



suspension and expulsion alternatives, such as restorative justice programs and increasing wraparound services (CDF, 2021). Researchers have also gathered various stakeholder perspectives from criminal justice advocates, education advocates, and administrators revealing their perspectives on Black students' overrepresentation for student discipline and how these occurrences promote access to the STPP. However, previous studies have not explored how urban school administrators describe their understanding of the STPP and elementary-aged Black boys.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand how urban educators consider the consequences of exclusionary discipline practices and the overrepresentation of elementary-age, Black boys who receive them compared to others. Lindsay and Hart (2017) identified that administrators' positions require them to enforce exclusionary discipline techniques, such as suspension and expulsion. Camacho and Krezmien (2020) identified the need to examine school discipline policies and how their impact disproportionately affected pupils. According to Camacho and Krezmien (2020), current discipline policies disproportionately affect Black boys. This study is significant because it includes practical contributions to research on the topic, practice in the field, and social change and racial equity in education for elementary-aged, Black students.

A summary of the literature regarding the effects of exclusionary discipline policies demonstrates the negative consequences resulting from the disparate rate that U.S. students of color are disciplined. Rocque (2018) suggested that because Black males

in low-income communities are being targeted in educational institutions, learning about the overrepresentation of Black males contributing to the STPP is important.

### **Research Questions**

I developed the following research questions to explore how exclusionary discipline policies work in an urban school community:

RQ1: How do urban administrators describe their understanding of school/district policies that define and implement exclusionary discipline practices that overidentify elementary-age, Black boys?

RQ2: How do urban administrators describe the consequences of the overidentification of elementary-age, Black boys and the link to the STPP?

### **Conceptual Framework**

When exploring the disparate rate that exclusionary discipline policies have on a specific group, researchers have suggested using critical race theory (CRT), particularly when examining inequality and oppression of people of color. Seamster and Ray (2019) identified that CRT is essential for unearthing topics centered around racism, White supremacy, and resistance. The term CRT emerged in the late 70s from noted researcher Derrick Bell, according to Stefancic (2014). Initially, the concept of this theory focused on critical legal studies. In 1995, Ladson-Billings (1998) proposed that CRT was relative to measuring educational inequalities and curriculum design; access to educational opportunities such as rigor was exclusively for White students. This belief system says

that White privilege and institutional racism exist and contribute to the steady decline of educational equity for all student learners (Warmington et al., 2018).

The most modern perspective of CRT in education demonstrates that there are boundaries to the theory. According to Dixson and Anderson (2018), the three boundaries are (a) racial education inequality, which is also described as the most logical outcome of a system of achievement controlled by the opposition; (b) the role of education policy and educational practices in the structure of racial inequality and the preservation of normative Whiteness; and (c) rejection of the dominant description of people of color's innate inferiority to White people's normative superiority. In CRT, gender, class, sexuality, and linguistic backgrounds are also recognized.

Grace and Nelson (2019) described the use of CRT in education as meaningful and recommended that CRT is an appropriate framework for exploring and describing people of color's lived experiences. For example, CRT can address the Black experience in an educational setting that other frameworks cannot. This theory provides a framework for understanding and conceptualizing how institutionalized racism operates in education systems. In this study, I needed to look at the impact of exclusionary discipline policies and the STPP through a critical race lens because "policies and practices may not specifically target members of a given race, but if policies and practices disproportionately impact members of a given race, they are functions of institutionalized racism" (Nelson, 2016, p. 298).

Therefore, applying CRT as the conceptual framework of this study was relevant, appropriate, and ensured that I operated objectively (see Dixson and Anderson, 2018). Using CRT helped me examine the role of education policy and educational practices in the structure of racial inequality and the preservation of normative Whiteness embedded in school discipline practices. CRT focuses directly on the disparities in education systems and the stigmas Black students face from unequal treatment in United States (Warmington et al., 2018).

### **Nature of the Study**

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand how urban educators consider the consequences of exclusionary discipline practices and the overrepresentation of elementary-age, Black boys who receive them compared to others. Because this approach is descriptive and analytic, as the researcher, I was able to learn, describe, and analyze ambiguous issues related to the lived experience of others (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This method was selected for this study because it aligns with the purpose statement and the developed research questions.

The participants in this study were 10 urban school administrators from a West Coast region who were all familiar with exclusionary discipline practices and the STPP. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), data collection and analysis add quality standards and validity to support criteria for reducing misunderstandings during the interviews.

## Definitions

*Administrator:* A supervisory role in a school community where their schools' zero-tolerance policies mandate their next disciplinary step to be suspension or expulsion. (Grace & Nelson, 2019, p. 678).

*Differential treatment:* Treating a person differently because of their racial identity, or perhaps perceived racial identity (Matthew, 2017, p. 885).

*Institutional racism:* Patterns, procedures, practices, and policies that operate within social institutions to consistently penalize, disadvantage, and exploit individuals who are members of a racial minority group (Grace & Nelson, 2019, p. 664).

*Racial equity:* Racially equitable systems in which racially diverse perspectives are equally embedded in power structures, policy-making processes, and the cultural fabric of institutions (Grace & Nelson, 2019).

*STPP:* Zero-tolerance policies that tend to push students out of public schools into the criminal justice system in a pattern of institutional racism (Berlowitz et al., 2017).

*Suspension rate (SR):* The annual percentage of the total number of enrolled students suspended in either a single (unduplicated) out-of-school suspension or the percentage of the total number of enrolled students who have been suspended multiple times (duplicated), divided by the total number of students enrolled in the district (Kodelja, 2019).

*Suspension*: The removal or exclusion of students from an educational setting as a consequence for one's behavior or actions (Berlowitz et al., 2017).

*Urban educator*: An educator working in a school with high poverty demographics, where the population reflects an extremely diverse atmosphere (Berlowitz et al., 2017).

### **Assumptions**

Detailed assumptions about this study were essential during the research process. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research first begins with assumptions. The first assumption was that the participants who were recruited for this study would provide truthful information during all interviews that took place. I also assumed that this study's research design would help obtain relevant, interview-based data from the research participants. Additionally, I made every effort in this study to achieve this by ensuring that the interview guide was adequately grounded in comprehensive literature.

An additional assumption was that recruiting participants familiar with this topic would provide a more detailed and unique perspective of the issue. By sampling purposeful participants, their interview responses were raw, authentic, and in-depth (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The research problem addressed in the study was the overrepresentation of elementary-age, Black boys receiving exclusionary discipline policies and the possible link to the STPP. I aimed to understand the challenges that facilitate Black male students

being harshly disciplined compared to their peers because these disparities are seen as early as pre-K. Additionally, I explored the perspectives of urban administrators about this topic. It was essential to look at the administrators' perspectives objectively to understand the challenges associated with Black students receiving exclusionary discipline consequences more severely than others and learn the best practices in place to prevent these students from contributing to the STPP.

The delimitations of this study included participants comprised solely of urban administrators from a West Coast region; therefore, it may be difficult to project the results to a more generalized stakeholder group (i.e., teachers, superintendents, charter school leaders, etc.). The study sample was relatively small. The documents used in the data collection process were consent forms, a demographic screening tool, and the participants' interview question responses. I was the sole researcher in this study. The study's rationale and scope focused on the challenges that facilitate the STPP for elementary-aged Black boys.

Other delimitations in this study were related to resources and time. This study took place during the 2021–2022 school year and the months during which the leadership team was available. Although the interviews were conducted virtually, the participants were all identified to be an administrator in an urban school setting. In addition, I recruited the participants from a nearby location because this study was only focused on the experiences from a large, urban school district on the West Coast.

### **Limitations**

There were several potential barriers, challenges, and limitations that may have occurred while conducting this research. First, the selected participants may have provided superficial responses for fear of exposing their own or other administrators' positions regarding state and local policies that may negatively impact the STPP for Black, elementary-aged boys. However, I assured all participants that their responses would remain confidential and emphasized the importance of receiving honest perspectives. There was a solid expectation that all administrators had familiarity with exclusionary discipline practices and the STPP.

Second, participants may have had preconceived notions and attitudes toward exclusionary discipline practices and the overrepresentation of Black students, creating their own biases. Additionally, researcher bias may have occurred because of my previous involvement working with low-income high schools over the past 3 years as a program manager for 25 schools within a school district with which I was formerly employed on the West Coast. One of the ways that I controlled my biases was through bracketing. There are further details about researcher bias and the mitigation steps taken in Chapter 3.

### **Significance**

This study is significant because it advances knowledge in the discipline of school administration. In particular, it may amplify administrators' voices on how systems can be utilized to influence policies that disrupt the STPP for Black, elementary-aged, male



students. The STPP is a phenomenon that affects many urban communities. Peguero et al. (2018) reported that an increasingly large number of Black students are at risk of coming in contact with the criminal justice system due to exclusionary discipline. This study can lead to positive social change by adding to the research in the field of educational leadership and providing information that administrators in urban elementary learning institutions can use to develop and implement strategic goals to address disparities in school discipline by race and reason.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I explored the need to understand how urban administrators' roles in school communities work. As described throughout the chapter, the disparate rate that elementary-age, Black boys receive exclusionary discipline consequences places them at risk of entering the STPP. The results of this study adds to the available knowledge regarding the underresearched topic of how Black, elementary-aged students are severely disciplined and at risk of contributing to the STPP. In Chapter 2, I provide a review of the literature relevant to this study, in particular the history of exclusionary disciplinary policies, racism in school discipline, and the imminent risk young Black students face of entering the STPP.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand how urban educators consider the consequences of exclusionary discipline practices and the overrepresentation of elementary-age, Black boys who receive them compared to others. The problem is that researchers have found that this places them at risk of being a victim of the STPP (Barrett et al., 2017). At the time of this study, there was a limited body of literature addressing the perspectives of urban administrators' roles in contributing to exclusionary discipline policies. According to LaForett and De Marco (2020), the use of exclusionary discipline policies with Black boys is a significant racial issue in U.S education and that as early as pre-K, Black students receive exclusionary discipline consequences at a disproportionate rate to their peers for committing the same disciplinary infractions.

In an overview of the extant literature, I describe the consequences of exclusionary discipline practices and the disproportionate rate at which Black males contribute to the STPP. Research that has shown that Black male students are suspended and expelled at an exponentially higher rate than non-Black male students, and these disparities emerge as early as elementary school (Barrett et al., 2017; Bottiani et al., 2017). Consequently, these practices that disproportionately remove Black students from the classroom increase the probability of Black male students dropping out of school and contributing to the STPP (Carter et al., 2017; Mallett, 2016; Peguero et al., 2018; Rocque, 2018; Skiba, 2014). U.S educational institutions continuously institutionalize racial

stereotypes through quick-fix policies, which in return negatively impact Black males starting in elementary school and increase their contact with the criminal justice system (Carter et al., 2017; Rocque, 2018). Through exclusionary discipline practices, all of which affect Black students, educational institutions increase access to the STPP (Carter et al., 2017).

In this study it was crucial to look at the problem using the CRT because acknowledging race and exclusionary discipline as a predictor in Black male's educational experience will allow urban administrators to continue to move toward a more transparent conversation about labeling and the ways that Black, elementary-aged students are harshly disciplined. This chapter includes a review of literature examining the consequences of the high number of suspensions and expulsions for Black, elementary-aged boys.

In this chapter, I explore dynamic research regarding the high suspension rates among Black male students and the unfavorable consequences of zero-tolerance policies, like exclusionary discipline, and its relationship to the STPP. The chapter's introduction contains a discussion of the history of racial inequalities in the United States and how those practices are reflected in learning institutions. According to Grace and Nelson (2019), historically, the educational policies negatively impact Black students. The chapter also contains discussion of the history of zero-tolerance policies in the United States and its entrance into U.S. school systems. Mendoza et al. (2020) has addressed racial inequalities between Blacks and their White counterparts in modern-day education,

exposing that racism is the root of racial disparities. Griffin (2016) also provided evidence that cites school resource officers actively disciplining students in low-income schools to predict the criminal pathway. Next, I describe the STPP, how it affects Black male students at a disproportionate rate compared to other races, and the impact. This chapter also contains an in-depth discussion regarding racism in education and its effects on Black students' suspension and expulsion rates. Lastly, I investigate elementary-aged, Black male students' accessibility to the STPP.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

My literature search strategy included using the Walden Center Quality Dissertations tab located under academic guides as a primary source for research. I conducted an exhaustive literature search of databases accessible through the Walden University Library to validate the literature gap specific to the study's purpose. The following educational databases were used: Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, and ERIC. I then filtered my searches by selecting peer-reviewed articles written or published within the last 5 years. Reviewing research on this topic published within the last 5 years was critical to minimize outdated research, and any source published more than 5 years ago was identified as a seminal work.

In efforts to uphold scholarly research, I used the following keyword search terms and phrases: *racial inequalities, school discipline, disproportionate suspension rates, social justice, school-to-prison pipeline, socioeconomic status, expulsion, zero-tolerance, willful defiance, representation, public policy, educational attainment, social equity*

*racial/ethnic stereotypes, and policy feedback.*

### **Conceptual Framework**

The critical statements and definitions inherent in the CRT framework include scholars having to use palatable language and tone in their work, such as replacing the term racism with “racial inequality or disparities” (Teasley et al., 2018). In the United States, Black students continue to be harshly and disproportionately disciplined under zero-tolerance policies for the same behaviors as their peers starting as early as elementary school (Barrett et al., 2017). The unintended consequence of excessively disciplining Black students, which removes them from the classroom as early as pre-K, increases their likelihood of contributing to the STPP (Peguero et al., 2018). Many researchers have argued that racism is embedded in both the education and criminal justice system (Peguero et al., 2018). Christian et al. (2019) used CRT as a conceptual framework to emphasize narrative storytelling and understand racial oppression and the experiences of the marginalized while also enhancing core sociological questions.

When exploring the disparate effects that exclusionary discipline policies have on a specific group, researchers have suggested it is best to conduct the research using CRT, particularly when examining inequality and the oppression of people of color. Seamster and Ray (2019) stated that CRT is essential for unearthing topics around racism, White supremacy, and resistance to engaging in dialogue around this topic by those who benefit from White supremacy. In addition to CRT scholarship, capturing stories that center the voices of communities of color challenges racism and validates its reality (Christian et

al., 2019). The current study benefits from this framework because CRT has been shown to recognize the knowledge developed by communities of color as having a more detailed understanding of their perspectives, experiences, and realities (see Kraehe, 2015). Furthermore, CRT is also grounded in “racial realism,” and this perspective provides a realistic view “for those who struggle against racism in academia, the streets, or the legal system” (Christian et al., 2019, p. 1731).

The elements of CRT are racial education inequality; the role of education policy and educational practices; and recognizing gender, class, sexuality, and linguistic backgrounds. I discuss CRT throughout the rest of the chapter, and the theory was used to inform the overall research study overall. Use of this framework also included a technique to learn about experiences in urban settings from those that have experienced oppression.

### **Racial Inequalities**

Racial inequalities are deeply rooted in U.S. history and have affected how people of color are more harshly disciplined than White peers (Horsford, 2017). Researchers in this discipline of racial bias and racial inequality have conveyed various stereotypes about Black, male, elementary-aged students that are untrue. According to Teasley et al. (2018), the false narratives include Black male youths are dangerous, violent, and aloof. The most common stereotype is often the “dangerous Black male” (Carter et al., 2017, p. 207). Reviewing the relationship between race, socioeconomic status, and school discipline, Carter et al. (2017) defined racism as a result of slavery and conquest and

stated that racial inequalities began with manipulation, violence, slavery, and the displacement of indigenous people. Kohli et al. (2017) suggested that institutional racism is a consistent barrier in U.S. racial progression because it protects and serves White interests solely.

Using an example of how racial discrimination and inequalities have cultivated a negative cycle of discrimination demonstrates that Blacks never had rights to begin with, and the lack of these rights has negatively influenced racial inequalities. Although the court case *Brown v. Board of Education* was a steppingstone to provide Black students with equity in education in the 90s, multiple court cases affected the court-ordered desegregation across U.S. districts (Honey & Smrekar, 2020). Additionally, LaForett and De Marco (2020) explained that differential treatment of racial and ethnic groups in educational structures enacts racism at the institutional level. School discipline can also be considered a metric for institutionalized racism. According to Matthew (2017), the distinct features of racial discrimination are differential treatment, discriminating between and against people because of their race or identity, and mainly the discrimination where there are no limitations or consequences affecting Whites.

Hirsch and Jack (2012) wrote that the Black community's common obstacles are racism, solidarity, family, economics, youth, opportunity, incarceration, and crime. They showed that racism was ranked the most critical obstacle for Blacks and is a primary example of how racial inequality is experienced in Black life. According to Hughey (2012), because the Black experience has been groomed to adhere to White masculinity,

this has taught Blacks to feel less than. Furthermore, the behaviors of administrators with powerful positions have reinforced inequitable systems (LaForett & De Marco, 2020).

### **Discipline Policies**

School district policies that warrant extreme outcomes, such as exclusionary discipline, need to be curtailed (LaForett & De Marco, 2020). According to K. P. Anderson and Ritter (2020), although school leaders are mandated to maintain the school's safety, the growing concern about using exclusionary discipline policies directly correlates with lower academic achievement that disproportionately affects Black students compared to their White peers. School discipline policies like zero tolerance in a school setting often have objectives to enhance learning effectiveness and rehabilitation as well as avoid criminological behaviors among communities (Mallett, 2016). One of the primary components of zero-tolerance policies include "school suspension and expulsions as well as abandoning juveniles to the criminal justice system for offenses such as truancy and incorrigibility, are frequently implemented in a pattern of institutional racism" (Berlowitz et al., 2017, p. 7). However, there are evident challenges when balancing education and discipline policies. An increase in the utilization of zero-tolerance policies in school systems has increased the number of arrests and referrals to the juvenile courts (Mallett, 2016).

Zero-tolerance policies applied in excess are a gateway to the juvenile justice system because the lines often become a blur (Spence, 2020). The role of race and racism is evident in zero-tolerance policies that contribute to the STPP (Grace & Nelson, 2019).



When zero-tolerance policies were introduced in schools, the intent was to curb school violence and sustain law and order in U.S. educational institutions funded by the government. Congress enacted the Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990, a subsection of the original Crime Control Act to prohibit the possession and use of guns in or around educational institutions. In 1994, when the Clinton administration endorsed the Gun-Free Schools Act, the consequences for a student in possession of a firearm on campus mandated that school leaders enforced a 1-year expulsion to the offending student; doing so created the pipeline between the Department of Corrections and the K–12 system (Bell, 2015). Years after implementing the Gun-Free Schools Act, K–12 learning institutions expanded to include a list of undesirable behaviors, such as tobacco, illegal drugs, and violent behaviors, that would not be tolerated in schools. The Gun-Free Schools Act (1994) asserted that schools funded by the government were mandated to expel all students who possessed a weapon on school grounds; nonetheless, the loophole to this act was that the administration could remove learners on a case-by-case basis.

According to Mendoza et al. (2020), for well over 20 years, Black learners have been criminalized through exclusionary discipline policies in their schools. For example, Skiba (2014) found that exclusionary discipline practices like zero-tolerance that result in suspension and expulsion do not reduce disruptions or improve the school climate. Additionally, Camacho and Krezmien (2020) noted that students of color particularly Black students were being suspended and expelled for misbehavior at a disproportionate rate compared to their White counterparts for the same infractions. Skiba stated that the

Reagan Administration first coined the phrase “no-nonsense” and even instituted legislation for this policy to be adapted in U.S. schools. This was done with the ideology of no-nonsense cultures through policy efforts for drugs that then transitioned into classroom language to describe how children should conduct themselves in a school setting. In support of promoting safer schools under the Guns Free Schools Act, educational institutions were forced to adopt zero-tolerance policies that called for a learner to be automatically suspended for a year if a firearm was brought to the schools (Losinski et al., 2014). However, policies like these held students accountable for minor infractions, such as truancy, willful defiance, disrespect, dress code, and swearing (Skiba et al., 2000).

The examination of the literature surrounding zero-tolerance by Mendoza et al. (2020) implied that these regulations became the standard to excessively punish non-White students. Furthermore, supporting the achievement of Black male students, Muhammad (2018), in an infamous study, argued that zero-tolerance policies are ineffective at redirecting Black youth and that schools would instead criminalize these students before providing them with a second chance. Berlowitz et al. (2017) identified that both teachers and administrators see no alternative to their implementation of zero-tolerance policies because they believe that ferocious manners manifested by racial minority students are grounded in cultural norms beyond the control of educators.

For over 30 years, Black students in the United States have been removed from classrooms 2-3 more often than their peers. According to Curran (2019) Black students

are overrepresented in expulsions, office referrals, and corporal punishment. Heilbrun et al. (2015) showed that higher suspension rates directly reflected the principal's attitude. In their research, Heilbrun et al., (2015) discovered that principals who endorsed preventive programs did not believe that removing learners from the schools improved a student's school climate and sustained order on campus. This study also determined that the preventive group of principals had fewer out-of-school suspensions than the principals who believed suspension and expulsion under a zero-tolerance practicum was an effective method for supporting a healthy school climate. Additionally, Flannery et al. (2014) asserted that zero-tolerance policies negatively affected the STPP. Heilbrun et al., (2015) also suggested that zero-tolerance policies have caused Blacks' students harm, resulting in their dismissal from the classroom, excessive out-of-school suspension recommendations, and other distasteful methods to educate this group.

### **Racial Disparities in U.S. Education Centers**

Racism was defined by Ohito (2020) as the combination of values, beliefs, and actions that uphold White superiority. Racism is also defined as the "creation or maintenance of a racial hierarchy, supported through institutional power" (Kohli et al., 2017 p.2). Additionally, Harris et al., (2016) discussed that racism in the U.S. education system had been known to affect Black students creating barriers to equitable resources. Quite often, conversations about the racial component and its impact on Black students are explicitly ignored. The history of racism in education stems from Black Americans not having the privilege to read or write. Slavery timelines show that Black slaves' civil

duties as servants to Whites for hundreds of years, and nothing else equitable opportunities, especially for an overall improvement of quality like educational resources, were not available to slaves. During the Jim Crow era, Black educators working in segregated schools educated their students about the cause of their oppression and their oppressors as it was necessary to provide Black students with an emancipatory education, according to Duncan (2020). Subsequently, these harmful effects have transitioned into modern-day education silently, all of which have caused Black students to be the most discriminated against in the classrooms.

Studies also illustrate that Black American children are positioned as the problem in U.S. education centers, as Duncan (2020) stated that the U.S. Department of Justice renewed attention to the school discipline policies in their Dear Colleague letter on January 8, 2014. The letter raised apprehensions about school suspension policies and the bias that existed within those practices, consequently impacting Black male students. Further investigation determined that Black learners were disciplined more harshly than their White counterparts. Martin et al. (2016) stated two distinct factors that influence differential treatment are racial discrimination and language barriers.

There are times that conversations about racism in schools are brought to light. Research such as, Lac and Baxley (2019) believed that there are often professionals who become defensive, making this discussion challenging to tackle. They must know that race is actual and understand the influence that their privilege can have. Whether positively or negatively, implicit bias affects Black learners both consciously and

subconsciously. In the United States, education is continually being reshaped by cultural diversity. Although no race is superior, the reality is that misperceptions of race perpetuate racism or U.S. educational institutions. Consequently, "race and racism inform every facet of American life for K-12 students" (Lac & Baxley, 2019 p. 2). Research suggested that more significant action was needed to reshape U.S. education systems, and these steps would first include breaking down barriers of Whiteness and privilege in schools.

As referenced by Bimper (2017), Leonardo initially stated that there are three concepts to whiteness: the first is notion is that whiteness (a) enables Whites to accept the forms of racism that exist unwillingly, (b) offers a safe embracing superpower to people of another race and provide avoidance of identifying with a racial experience or group other than their own, and (c) provides the minimization of bigoted self-fulfilling prophecy. All of these condone historic racial atrocities, which have adverse effects and implications in the lives of people of color in the present day. Those components illustrating whiteness are critical in correcting Black Americans' disparities in society and U.S. education centers.

### **Suspension and Expulsion by Race and Reason**

Compelling studies like that of Costenbader and Markson (1998) highlighted early on that the most common school discipline violation in schools that lead to suspension are the following: physical aggression, talking back, obscene language, and weapons violations. Current literature such as that of Camacho and Krezmien (2020)

indicated that suspension and expulsion for these offenses are still prevalent. Morningstar et al. (2017) stated two types of academic engagement: cognitive and behavior.

Unfortunately, minority students struggle in both areas. School discipline policies stemming from the federal, state, and district governments have played a significant role in the disparate suspension and expulsion rates for minority students compared to White students states Mizel et al. (2016). Updated literature on this subject matter written by Camacho and Krezmien (2020) illustrates how harmful these school discipline policies have been to Black students. Not much has changed as it relates to excessive suspension and expulsion rates.

The disproportionate rate at which Black students are removed from the classroom compared to their White counterparts is frightful. Camacho and Krezmien (2020) indicate that some of the reasons students of color are reprimanded more frequently include disrespect and excessive noise. According to Lacoé and Steinberg (2019), in Maryland, although discipline rates had declined for all subgroups of pupils over the past decade, Black students still received harsher and frequent citations showing. This still results in Black students still being more severely disciplined and obtaining a more significant number of out-of-school suspensions for violating discipline codes.

Another example of this topic, illustrated by Lacoé and Steinberg (2019), examined if excessive suspension and expulsion rates impact student outcomes. The results of the study confirmed that not only does suspending students in excess for minor disciplinary infractions lower their morale and academic achievement, but excessive

suspensions decrease academic achievement on math and English standardized testing. These disproportionate suspensions tend to affect young Black males at a more significant rate than their White counterparts. Evidence found by Camacho and Krezmien (2020) suggested that far too often, male students were suspended for failing to complete assignments and for obscene language. These disciplinary action responses cause harmful consequences, such as high school dropout rates, long term because students are less engaged. Studies such as, Lacoé and Steinberg (2019) also advised that although these long-term consequences impact the STPP, more research is needed on excessive suspensions and expulsions and the connection to young Black students entering the STPP. Furthermore, some research shows evident racial disparities in the number of Black students receiving in-school suspension and that stricter school suspension policies are frequently and harshly applied among Black students, states Rosenbaum (2018).

### **STPP**

The STPP is a causal link between educational exclusion and the criminalization of youth. Rather than taking a rehabilitative approach toward student discipline, the STPP perpetuates criminalization through policy efforts, reinforcing Black students as troublemakers (Mallett, 2016). Miguel and Gargano (2017) stated, “Focusing on the damage of the public education system has caused the ways that policies and practices have essentially made the school-to-prison pipeline a very likely trajectory for minority students” p.6. A disproportionate number of minority males encounter the STPP compared to their White counterparts, argued Mendoza et al. (2020). Shigeoka (2018)

validated this claim asserting that criminalization of Black males is at the heart of the STPP, which is an alarming phenomenon of pushing students, particularly Black and Latino males, out of school and toward the juvenile and criminal justice system.

Studies continually demonstrated the increase in the number of referrals to the juvenile justice system from schools predominately in urban areas, all of which disproportionately affect Black students (Peguero et al., 2018). Although, exclusionary discipline policies increase the likelihood of contributing to the STPP other factors increase students' chances of entering the STPP. According to the CDF (2021) some of these factors include homelessness, low socioeconomic status, and poor parenting. Expanding on the conversation about the relationship that school discipline and the STPP, Barnes and Motz (2018) described how Black citizens are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. According to Goings et al. (2018), because Black students have been suspended at a higher rate than their White counterparts, policymakers, administrators, activists, and parents have forced national attention to disrupt the STPP. Numerous studies model how Black students were overrepresented in receiving exclusionary discipline policies. The aim of the study conducted by Goings et al., (2018) was to illustrate the relationship between policymakers and school district leaders and their contributions to the STPP and their roles in dismantling it because of the harmful effects it has on Black males.

Moreover, Flannery et al., (2014) acknowledged that district officials are vital stakeholders in dismantling the STPP. Additionally, the literature reviews the local, state,



and federal policies regarding why the STPP is problematic. Still, it does not provide stakeholders with a clear direction and resources to positively influence the pipeline (Flannery et al., 2014).

Black school districts and district leaders are typically kept out of the loop for best practices related to how they may rise above the pipeline because the content on how they can positively impact is not easily accessible (Goings et al., 2018). Consequently, zero-tolerance policies that lead to suspension and expulsion for minor infractions have been causally linked to stereotyping Black and Brown students and causing harmful effects by pushing them toward the criminal justice system (Barnes & Motz, 2018; Flannery et al., 2014; Goings et al., 2018; Skiba, 2014). There is much research that illustrates the dangerous effects of the STPP. Studies such as Miguel and Gargano (2017) asserted that Black boys are criminalized for minor infringements with detention, suspensions, and expulsions through zero-tolerance policies. Furthermore, Skiba (2014) believed that this unequal divide stems from a historical context. These unequal policies and practices in schools oppress Blacks, but it also increases their likelihood of contributing to the STPP.

### **School Resource Officers in Schools**

In urban school communities the role of school resource officers continues to have competing perspectives. Studies such suggest that law enforcement in U.S. schools backdates to Flint, Michigan, in 1950 (McKenna et al., 2016). And in the 1994 when Clinton administration endorsed the Gun-Free Schools Act. Doing so created the pipeline

between the Department of Corrections and the K-12 system (Bell, 2015). Years after implementing the Gun-Free Schools Act, K-12 learning institutions expanded to include a list of undesirable behaviors that would not be tolerated in schools and leaned into law enforcement for support. These policies directly introduced U.S. urban schools' transformation into places that resembled prisons (Bell, 2015). In 1994, Congress passed the Safe Schools Act, which required schools to report high crime rates and extreme disorderly conduct; Spence (2020) found that schools that complied with this mandate were issued a federal grant then used to hire police officers in schools. According to Jones (2019), school resource officers have been assigned to discipline students as opposed to school principals or administrators. Consequently, these interactions have created systems in the school environment that feel like prisons.

Furthermore, school resource officers are sworn police officers assigned to school districts whose prominent roles and responsibilities are to maintain physical safety in the school (Devlin & Fisher, 2021). Consistent opinions by McKenna et al. (2016) acknowledged that law enforcement in schools is robust. Furthermore, Mallett (2016) highlighted that when school resource officers discipline students through punitive punishments, there may be continued distrust between pupils and law enforcement. Nelson (2016) also highlighted that there need to be more positive interactions between minority students and the disciplinarians on school campuses, especially those with law enforcement on site.

Furthermore, qualitative studies have examined the role of race and negative interactions with law enforcement in schools. For example, M. B. Anderson (2018) gathered evidence from Black students of the K-12 system, which showed distrust in authority; this was attributed to roughly 37% of Black students receiving exclusionary discipline and being removed from the classroom. Nevertheless, Mallett (2016) indicated that the fear of Black presence perpetuates a false narrative of the actual problem of a history of trauma and fear passed down from slavery that has yet to honestly and authentically be addressed in the present day. Nelson (2016) refined this problem by writing a narrative on school discipline and law enforcement contact in California. The study revealed that school districts give staff complete discretion to call law enforcement and that 30% of school districts do not require staff to identify those individuals who purport to be law enforcement. Nelson found that 70.9% of school districts statewide allow police officers to interview students immediately upon request because staff believes they should not interfere. Less than 1% of schools require that an adult not a police officer be present during an interrogation to ensure that a student's civil rights are not violated.

The inability for vulnerable students to thrive in educational institutions because of police contact impedes their faith in the K-12 education system resulting in higher dropout rates than their White counterparts. According to Jones (2019), Black students' likelihood will survive in these environments is relatively low. Although there have been incidents where schools have refused to renew contracts with school resource officers as

nationally, there has been evidence of Black students being slammed on the floor. Studies such as Devlin and Fisher (2021) implicate that implementing SROs is a common and expensive intervention in schools nationwide. They implemented SROs that do not engage in the schools or have active campus activities, increasing crime. If SROs are a part of a school safety response, they must build a positive and trusting relationship with the school community.

### **Oppression and Access to Opportunity**

Historical systems have contributed to the systemic oppression that directly impacts students of color. A growing body of literature emphasized the need to consistently explore historical systems of oppression that have been detrimental to the communities' well-being (Kohli et al., 2017; Kohli et al., 2021). The literature described that to address systemic oppression and expand on this topic, White peers must critically examine and understand the history of oppression. There is a system that perpetuates unfavorable consequences for non-White students states House-Niamke and Sato (2019). Additional studies describe the link between educational policies and access to the prison pipeline. Although equitable opportunities do not exist in low-income communities, families address the need for diversity in schools to prepare their children for the workforce as these experiences would decrease their likelihood of contributing to the prison system. For example, Williams et al. (2017) described in their study that parents believed by exposing their children to diversity would allow them to communicate with

diverse ethnic backgrounds effectively would, in return, allow them to learn and understand various experiences.

Although others have investigated and contributed to studies on the disproportionate rate at which Black learners are suspended compared to White students, Skiba (2014) found that while White learners are given second chances to be children and make mistakes. However, corporal punishment is often enforced upon Black learners. Losen and Whitaker (2017) described the rate at which Black learners were suspended for willful defiance in California; they stated that out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for a minimum of 2 days were at an egregious rate for Black students. These inequalities were also casually linked to educational institutions' oppression having more severe repercussions for Black and Latino students than for their White classmates.

### **Stereotypes and the Achievement Gap**

Educational disparities are often referred to as the achievement gap when comparing White and Black student achievement gap. Scholars consistently argue that researchers should view this from a racial equity lens, according to LaForett and De Marco (2020). Consequently, "Blackness" generally carries a negative perspective in American society (Martin et al., 2016). Because of White dominant cultures fear of the pain they inflicted on Black learners. In addition, this group has felt the burden of being stigmatized for being ignorant, intellectually inferior, and competent to advance to a higher level. For example, Morris and Howard (2006) agreed: "Western White

domination has for centuries marginalized—are the same students who are now failing or underachieving at disproportionate rates in our nation's schools” (p. 158).

Additionally, in education, the values instilled in students stem from the dominant White culture. That education then becomes the vain attempt to give children a value system that they did not ask for or understand. Because of the Black males' historical context, their trauma is not accounted for; instead, they will continue to be stereotyped as troublemakers and undisciplined on the word of LaForett and De Marco (2020). Studies such as Skiba and Losen (2016) agree that school suspension and racial disparities challenge the notion of closing the achievement gap as this study exemplifies how racial disparities are a significant social problem that impacts academic achievement for minority students.

### **Socioeconomic Status and School Discipline**

Although scholars cannot define the socioeconomic status or low income in the school systems, research suggests that living below the poverty line negatively affects what resources are steadily available to those who need it the most. Theriault and Mowatt (2020) found that it is challenging for those living in underprivileged communities to quickly access quality health care, healthy foods, and education access outside of their community norms. Supporting literature from Girvan et al. (2017) highlighted that students with lower socioeconomic status are often disciplined more severely than other students; this is attributed to the preconceived notions about their ability to succeed despite their socioeconomic status. It is imperative in a school setting to acknowledge

one's socioeconomic status, but consequently, disciplinarians spend more time disciplining these students than putting time and effort into the learning (Huang & Zhu, 2017).

Furthermore, Gregory et al. (2016) postulated that in low-income communities there is a history of underachievement for students. These students are not only suffering from the trauma of high crime and high poverty in their neighborhoods, but this environment places them in survival mode with little to no resources to see past the oppressions of their communities. In addition, Huang and Zhu (2017) reiterated that learners from low-income backgrounds experience severe disciplinary consequences compared to their White counterparts. Consequently, these inflexible discipline techniques inhibit a student's ability to persist in school, feeding into the achievement gap.

### **Restorative Justice**

There are alternative solutions to solving disruptive behaviors in schools as opposed to removing students from the classroom. Recently schools have implemented restorative justice practices as a powerful tactic to curb school violence and prevent incidents such as Columbine, Colorado, and Taber. This process engages a collection of policies and procedures to ensure the constituents served will have a safer school environment (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Studies such as LaForett and De Marco (2020) demonstrate immense advocacy for building relationships with students instead of subjecting them to disciplinary processes, acknowledging that restorative justice practices

influence the ideology that crime hurts people and deteriorates relationships. Nevertheless, restorative justice principals operate under the core assumption that critical thinking and reflection for one's negative behaviors foster change in the school community. Such an assumption allows the individual to repair relationships with those they may have harmed and required an all-hand-on-deck approach from all stakeholders.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

In this chapter I identified how educational institutions continue to foster unfavorable consequences for young Black students, consequently placing them at risk for falling into the STPP. Researchers have found credible and current evidence for the practices of racial inequalities and the adverse effects of oppression in low-income communities of color. Describing how displacement in school systems due to zero-tolerance policies perpetuate mass incarceration stemming from inflexible school discipline policies increases the likelihood of students contributing to the STPP. The chapter was organized to demonstrate the disadvantages Black students encounter, viewing it from a historical and current lens that models the inequalities that exist. This section revealed how racism influences suspension and expulsion by race and reason and how these create negative educational experiences for minority students and push them towards the STPP.

The literature review outlined how this study fills the gap in the literature about the education leaders' understanding of the link between this overidentification and discrimination and the long-term outcomes such as the STPP. In addition to



demonstrating the effects of exclusionary discipline policies that are excessively and frequently applied to Black elementary-aged boys increasing their risk of contributing to the STPP. It also reflects the need to learn about the administrators' perspectives about Black elementary-aged boys' risk of contributing to the STPP due to exclusionary discipline policies. The chapter also provides evidence from scholars who look at this social problem using CRT. The utilization of CRT was essential while crafting the summaries of each subject related to suspension by race and reason. Nonetheless, this chapter focuses on what exists, and the harsh effects of harshly disciplining Black Elementary age boys places them at risk of contributing to the STPP. The evidence from the literature revealed that using a generic qualitative approach will be appropriate to address to research questions developed. The next chapter outlines the research methodology and research design in addition to the instrumentation and issues of trustworthiness.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand how urban educators consider the consequences of exclusionary discipline practices and the overrepresentation of elementary-age, Black boys who receive them compared to others. According to Parris (2018), exclusionary discipline techniques, like suspension and expulsion, significantly impact young Black boys and increase their chances of contributing to the STPP. Overly disciplining students, particularly Black students, may result in unintended consequences, such as increases in dropout rates, disengagement from school, and contributing to the STPP as well as diminished academic opportunities (Carter et al., 2017; Mallett, 2016; Rocque, 2018; Skiba, 2014). Given that elementary-aged, Black boys are at a high risk of contributing to the STPP, learning the perspectives of both advocates and administrators is important.

I wanted to understand administrators' experiences regarding the disproportionate rate that elementary-aged, Black boys are receiving more stringent punishments under zero-tolerance policies than their peers, increasing their risk of contributing to the STPP. Although exclusionary discipline practices are not the primary cause of the STPP, multiple factors, such as low socioeconomic status, homelessness, poor parenting, and inadequate community support, also impact the likelihood of Black boys being at risk of entering the STPP (Children's Defense Fund, 2021). Furthermore, this study was able to address administrator views of why exclusionary practices, such as zero-tolerance policies, and how these policies are excessively and frequently applied to Black,

elementary-aged boys and understand how this might increase their likelihood of being a part of the STPP.

This chapter is divided into five major sections: The Research Design and Rationale, Role of the Researcher, Methodology, Instrumentation, and Issues of Trustworthiness. In the Research Design section, I restate the research questions, define this study's central concepts, describe the rationale for using a generic qualitative study approach, and explain why other methodologies were not suitable for the study. The Methodology section includes a description of the participants and the procedures for selecting and recruiting participants; the data collection procedures, including the instrumentation; and the data analysis process, including the coding techniques. In the Issues of Trustworthiness section, I discuss the credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures used to access participants and collect data.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1: How do urban administrators describe their understanding of school/district policies that define and implement exclusionary discipline practices that overidentify elementary-age, Black boys?

RQ2: How do urban administrators describe the consequences of the overidentification of elementary-age, Black boys and the link to the STPP?

To answer the main research questions, I conducted semistructured interviews with 10 administrators working in K-12 leadership roles to uncover their understandings and

experiences with the topic. Using a generic qualitative study approach was most appropriate for this study because generic qualitative studies are the most common form of qualitative research in education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data collected through interviews and observations is considered to be a generic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using a generic qualitative study allowed me to learn, describe, and analyze others' perceptions (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2016) advised that generic qualitative studies could provide rich and descriptive data. In addition, Patton (2015) described that using a generic qualitative study design, the researcher could communicate with participants and learn about their perceptions to develop a better understanding of how they view their reality. Evidence from qualitative research experts shows that using a generic qualitative study is considered dependable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The other research designs considered for this study were phenomenology and narrative inquiry. These research inquiries were not appropriate for this study because they are designed to test particular theories and their effectiveness and do not allow the researcher to learn about participants' perceptions and better understand how they view their reality. Although a phenomenological approach would be well suited for studying affective, emotional, and intense human experiences, as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the purpose of this study was not to study shared experiences among the selected participants. Narrative inquiries are stories about ones lived experience and perspectives, and extremely popular in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) This

study allowed me the researcher to use stories as data, and more specifically, first-person accounts (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It was not appropriate to use a narrative inquiry design for this study because I was not interested in the participants' biographies, life stories, or oral histories.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In my role of the researcher, I conducted semistructured interviews with the 10 urban school administrator participants, then transcribed their responses before organizing and sharing the transcripts for participant review. Before each interview began, participants were provided with a consent form. Consent was provided electronically via email correspondence, with the participant indicating, "I consent," when replying to an email from me. I informed the selected participants that their participation was voluntary and that if they chose to withdraw at any time they could do so. Research participants were also informed that all their responses would remain confidential and that pseudonyms would be used to protect their identities and the names of schools, districts, and agencies. For those participants that were not able to move forward with the study, I excluded their names from the participant list.

During this study, I saw that I had taken more of an observer role as a result of my experiences. As a previous program manager for an education nonprofit with access to various partnerships with over 25 schools in an urban school district on the West Coast, there was a possibility that I may have had interactions previously with staff members, but I had not interacted with any of the administrators that took part in this study directly.

I selected participants by asking my existing relationships to share my one-page overview of this study with their colleagues and ask that any who fit the inclusion criteria for this study if they were willing to participate. I also asked research participants that said yes to ask other professionals in their network if they were interested in partaking in the study. This process ensured that the selection was conducted fairly.

I recorded my emotions and experiences over the course of the study, also known as journaling, as advised by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Other actions that I took to limit my own bias were triangulation, member checking, and bracketing. Further clarification on limiting researcher bias can be found in the *Issues of Trustworthiness* section.

### **Methodology**

This section includes a discussion of the setting for the study, the participant and case selection logic, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis.

#### **Participant Selection Logic**

I interviewed a total of 10 urban administrators working in K–12 leadership roles. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the semistructured interviews were conducted using the Zoom platform. Although Patton (2015) recommended specifying a minimum sample size for qualitative studies, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argued that informational considerations often determine a purposeful sampling size and that it is impossible to know ahead of time when saturation might occur until the researcher engages in data analysis and data collection simultaneously. Additionally, Merriam and Tisdell argued that if submitting a dissertation to a committee to “offer a tentative, approximate number

of units to be included, knowing that this will be adjusted in the course of the investigation” (p. 102). The sample size is contingent upon what information is useful, the purpose of the inquiry, and the specific aim a researcher intends to capture (Patton, 2015). Creswell (2013) asserted that the sample size in qualitative research depends on the nature of the study at large.

The participants in this study were 10 administrators from one school district in the West Coast region. Participants’ roles included counselors, principals, vice principals, executive directors, superintendents, and other administrative roles on a K-12 school leadership team. The criterion-based sampling design on which participants selection was based depended on participants’ work experiences with urban demographics in the West Coast region of the United States. Through interviewing these individuals, I aimed to clarify their understandings of the overrepresentation of Black elementary students being suspended and the possible link between exclusionary discipline practices and the STPP for elementary-age, Black boys.

The participants in this study had an extensive knowledge of the administrative structure. I confirmed the administrators’ years of service during the interview process. The administrators were categorized as either novice or veteran based upon the study’s definition and the participants’ responses. If the responses represent both veteran and novice, they will not be represented in the sample section. I was also prepared to modify the sample selection to ensure that both participant categories were represented.

The number of participants was achievable due to potential participants' access and availability, especially because the school districts selected were all in the same district. In this study, I aimed to learn the administrators' views of why zero-tolerance policies are excessively and frequently applied to Black, elementary-aged boys, which increases their risk of contributing to the STPP. It was appropriate to include the perceptions of school principals, school superintendents, assistant superintendents, and vice-principals in leadership roles. The students that are typically impacted the greatest are Black students particularly, those in low-income populations with low socioeconomic status (Children's Defense Fund, 2021). Therefore, I purposefully selected schools with students with low socioeconomic status by using data from The National Center for Education Statistics demonstrating the number of students in elementary school suspended and expelled by race and gender. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), use of purposeful sampling in qualitative research is contingent on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and, therefore, selects a sample from where information can be acquired.

The inclusion criteria for participants included: (a) principals employed by school boards of education in urban school districts of a West Coast region, (b) assistant principals employed by urban school districts of a West Coast region, (c) deans or counselors of student services employed by urban school districts of a West Coast region, and/or (d) an individual classified as an administrator on a K–12 leadership team from the 2021–2022 school year. Administrative participants who were eligible to participate in



this study were all employed by school boards of education in school districts with low socioeconomic status. The participant groups were based on the rationale that each of their employment settings has a distinct administrative, organizational structure, such as the demonstrable hierarchy of administration, which may vary depending on the school site.

### **Instrumentation**

The research instrumentation used in this study was an interview protocol. As the researcher, I created the interview queries to answer both research questions (see Appendix C). These queries reflect questions focused on collecting administrator perspectives regarding exclusionary discipline protocols in their school districts. To ethically conduct this study, I completed and submitted Form A (Description of Data Sources and Partner Sites) to Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and then prepared any documents that IRB requested.

Once approval for the study was granted from Walden IRB (Confirmation number 08-26-21-0672197), I recruited research participants for the study. To recruit participants, I leveraged my relationships with colleagues to connect with their network of professionals who could then share the study announcement within their direct networks. Individuals that expressed interest in participating then received an official invitation letter to participate in the study (see Appendix D). Individuals that were interested in being a part of the study also received a letter of consent that contained (a) an introductory paragraph describing the purpose of the study, (b) a brief description of

participation, (c) the projected timeline for interviewing, (d) any risks or inconveniences, (e) benefits of the study, and (f) a privacy statement explaining how the data would be protected as well as the confidentiality of the participant (see Appendix A). The letter of consent served as a way to identify participants. I then asked all participants to complete the demographic screening tool (See Appendix B). I began all interviews by asking demographic questions to understand the participants' roles. For example, I asked, "How long have you worked in urban school districts?"

The primary data collection source was the semistructured interviews conducted via a virtual platform and then recorded and transcribed using NVivo. This technique provided me with several opportunities to ask probing questions to clarify any nonverbal responses of the participants. Using a semistructured interview questionnaire enabled fresh ideas and perspectives to be discussed in the interviews. With the participants' interview responses, I was able to create various themes. The interview questions were open ended to engage meaningfully with participants and elicit authentic responses. Some examples included:

- What barriers do administrators encounter with zero-tolerance policies that may contribute to the STPP?
- What is your perception of the challenges associated with elementary-aged, Black boys being overrepresented for suspension/expulsion rates compared to their peers?

- What are some of the challenges that you experience when it comes to reprimanding Black students? Can you please provide an example?
- What is your perspective of the effects of exclusionary discipline policies?
- How do you describe the overrepresentation of young Black students being suspended in this school district? If so, can you please describe why this is occurring?

Finally, I took field notes during this process and used a handheld, audio-recording device. After the conclusion of an interviews, I immediately transcribed the content using NVivo by uploading the audio recording from Zoom and selecting the transcribe function on the NVivo platform.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The first steps included obtaining approval from Walden University IRB. Once IRB approval was solidified the next steps included issuing a letter of consent/permission to all participants as seen in Appendix A. This school district is comprised of over 6,000 administrators. Next, I finalized the recruited volunteers for this study. Fundamentally, the contacts I engaged were all willing to communicate via email. To distribute an actual invitation, after I secured IRB approval from Walden University, I sent out an invitation email to potential participants per Walden's guidelines (See Appendix B).

My next steps were to email all participants about the next steps in the interview process and identify how I plan to access participants that meet the criteria as seen in Appendix C. This step allowed me to identify the reason for the study, which was to

explore how urban administrators describe their understanding the of over-representation of Black elementary students being suspended and the possible link of exclusionary practices to prison pipeline for elementary-age Black boys. In addition, the prerequisite for participants were at least 2-5 years' experience as an administrator, working with an urban school demographic in this West Coast district.

### **Local Urban School Setting and Designation**

The local setting was the Local Urban School District (LUSD) where I conducted this generic qualitative study with semistructured interviews held via Zoom. Considering, COVID-19 research in person was not available at this time. This criterion was chosen because of the accessibility to access convenient sampling also previous research has emphasized how this large urban area has been influenced by school discipline policies that affect suspension and expulsion (Losen & Whitaker, 2017).

The school's demographics in larger cities with a massive population represent many people of color in the area. The second category was a city that is significantly smaller but reflects similar student diversity demographics. The final category is a school that is located in a suburban or rural area but continuously experiences shifts in student population diversity all of which pertain to racial, language, culture, and socioeconomic status as described by Huang and Zhu (2017).

Moreover, the interview consisted of open-ended interview questions designed by the researcher (Appendix B, C) to have the participants' express their experiences with school discipline policies and the STPP. Black learners are at a higher risk of being

exposed to the criminal justice system due to school discipline policies causing suspension and expulsion.

### **Screening**

Once individuals demonstrated an interest establishing their eligibility, an email was sent to confirm participant interest, and learn their availability. This email contained the informed consent including the description of the research, the purpose of the study, approximate time commitment, data collection methods such as (semistructured interviews, Zoom audio recording), data safeguarding, confidentiality, demographic screening tools, and participants' rights to withdraw from participating in this study. For example, the demographic screening tool (Appendix B) purpose is to obtain additional information of the participants background such as race, number of years in their position, knowledge of the STPP, and familiarity with school discipline policies.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

This plan outlines the importance of self-report and using constructivist procedures for the research study at large. For this section, I listened to all audio recordings and transcribed each interview immediately. There was also a copy of the transcripts available for participants and member checking confirming the content's fidelity. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), coding permits accurate transcription and permits researchers' ability to further distinguish the participants' responses outside of the interview context. Before and after each interview, I ensured that I am journaling my thoughts, feelings, and emotions and opinions as my bracketing form.

As the lead researcher conducting this study in effort to gain the participant's experiences it was imperative that I was responsive to my emotions and ensured that I did not allow my feelings to influence the outcomes of this study. This is also known as bracketing. Putting my feelings and my own biases aside will be essential during this process (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). Using NVivo 12 I then uploaded the audio transcription by selecting NVivo transcription, and then I will select the English language and the transcription process will begin. Next, I reviewed the transcript by logging in and checking the audio for any issues. Once I confirmed I then saved it and I selected the import function to process the data. This software permits the organization of research questions, interview questions, and other information you insert and looks for ways to code general themes. For example, Walden University (2017) describes NVivo as a solid data analysis software designed for qualitative researchers analyzing rich text-based data. A detailed analysis is critical for small or large data sets.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

On the word of Amankwaa (2016), research must embody truth value, applicability, consistency, and remain neutral to be measured worthy. There are various ways to produce meaningful research according to Ravitch and Carl (2016) credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are critical in establishing trustworthiness throughout a study. To establish trustworthiness, I employed the following things:

### **Transcript Review**

After each interview, I would then email each participant the transcription of their interview as part of member checking asking participants to check my initial interpretations. To ensure the process's accuracy and inclusiveness as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) Additionally, "Member checking is a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (Merriam and Tisdell 2016).

### **Peer Audit**

At the phase where I began to further develop themes from the data, my dissertation chair and a separate colleague currently working on her dissertation then reviewed my research study, discussing the findings, and providing feedback on the accuracy of labeling themes. This extra support reviewing data enhanced the validity and reliability of the study.

### **Credibility**

I then established credibility by using tactics like iterative questioning, probing, audio recordings of the interviews. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), credibility within one's study derives from establishing the results from a particular, qualitative criteria, and this entails credible research participants. As cited by Patton (2015), a qualitative analysis makes sense of the data by revealing and identifying patterns and behaviors, pinpointing themes, and answering the original research questions developed resulting in significant findings.

**Transferability**

Another means to establish trustworthiness was by expanding on transferability piece of this study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) described this technique as allowing readers to review the transcripts and add preexisting experiences to the conversation. I then ensured that transferability occurred by establishing various themes contingent on the participant responses related to the research questions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described multiple strategies to enable transferability; this includes when rich, thick descriptions are used and careful attention to the study's sample. Merriam and Tisdell (2016), also described utilizing maximum variation in the sample, which involves purposefully picking a wide range of cases to get a variation on the dimensions of interest.

**Dependability**

Qualitative studies are considered dependable over time as stated by Saldana (2016) Because of the studies research design, future scholars will have the opportunity to replicate this study. The data analysis plan listed is credible and aligned with a credible and dependable way to answer the research questions. On the word of Merriam and Tisdell (2016), these factors in addition to peer reviewed feedback from committee members established dependability for this study.

**Confirmability**

To examine how researchers identify their personal bias they utilize structured reflexivity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). By using NVivo, the transcription software, it assisted



in the reflexivity process. Also, recording my notes in a journal pre and post all interviews allowed me to check all biases. Nonetheless, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identify that reflexivity is how the researcher is impacted during the research process. Therefore, it was critical to document, record, and journal my feelings.

### **Ethical Procedures**

After the Walden University Research Review [IRB] (Confirmation number 08-26-21-0672197) process I then shared the details of this study to all research participants. Once consent was permitted, I then ensured to maintain a high ethical and moral standard building trusting relationships with all participants. Ensuring that I followed the informed consent from the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (Confirmation number 08-26-21-0672197) of Walden University and then acquired permission to conduct this study by the board before starting the research process. Next, I obtained all participant's consent and asked them to complete the demographic screening tool before conducting the in-depth interviews. Then I facilitated the interview in a natural and comfortable setting. My next steps will include offering participants the option to stop the recorder at any time during the interview.

It was also important that I allowed participants the option the opportunity to withdraw themselves from the study for any reason at any time. The next steps that I took were to email all participants a transcription of their interviews and expand on their statements if necessary. Then I deleted the recordings after each interview after they have been transcribed to preserve the participants' privacy. And lastly, I concealed the data in

a on a password protected electronic device. To ensure ethical practices are utilized I used the following tools in this process:

### **Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol was aimed to create an environment that was compassionate and nonjudgmental and welcomes personal viewpoints and opinions with inquiries guided from the lens of critical race theory. Additionally, the interview occurred in a remote location in a quiet environment, such as one's room or offices. Before the interviews occur, each participant will be emailed an interview protocol, participant survey, and consent form. Furthermore, all sessions were recorded using Zoom audio recording. The purpose of the audio recording was for me to be highly engaged focused during the interview instead of focusing on taking notes. Once the interviews were transcribed and reviewed by the participants, the recordings were deleted to protect all participants' confidentiality. It was important to note that the interview questions followed a stringent interview protocol in order to ensure the reliability of the data at large. I then connected with all 10 participants by email correspondence (Appendix A) to obtain written permission to conduct these interviews and explain the purpose of this study and the step-by-step interview process. Also, I will arrange a time to conduct these interviews virtually. Once that was confirmed I issued the Demographic Screening Tool (Appendix B) to confirm specific information about participant backgrounds, years of service, and familiarity with the STPP. Once the participants consented and had taken the Demographic Screening Tool. Participants were then asked to be interviewed according

to the protocol attached in Appendices A-C. The interviews varied from 20-50 minutes in duration and were conducted via Zoom audio recording. Preceding all interviews, an additional copy of questions will be provided to each interviewee. All interviews will be audio recorded with the permission of each participant. I was also taking written notes during the interviews and through the post interview conversation.

Each participant was then given a transcription copy of their interview session to review the accuracy of the conversation. Once participants receive the transcriptions they were instructed to review and make any changes or additions they feel are necessary this is to ensure that the information represents their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Nonetheless, all participants were asked to return their examined transcriptions within 2 weeks of receiving it. If the information recorded was considered to be transcribed accurately, the participants will be instructed to return their transcription documents indicating that the data is in fact accurate. And if the transcription document is not accurate, they were then instructed to indicate that and make a note to the respective area that does not represent their thoughts, feelings, or ideas. Lastly, as participants returned their transcribed interviews, they were all examined for any changes or additions that are not incorporated in the original document. The member checking process was used on all 10 interview session transcriptions ensuring that the data gathered is an accurate representation of the respondent's thoughts. This in return provided a trustworthy representation for data analysis.

### **Summary**

This chapter outlined the research method for this generic qualitative approach to an inquiry on urban administrators' perspectives on how administrator roles may contribute to the STPP for Black boys. Upon receipt of Walden University IRB approval, participants currently in the roles of urban school administrators were recruited. I then used semistructured interview questions for a total of 10 urban administrators to gather data. A plan was then established for data collection, analysis, and storage, including the trustworthiness and validity of data collected. The results from the data collected will be presented in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand how urban educators consider the consequences of exclusionary discipline practices and the overrepresentation of elementary-age, Black boys who receive them compared to others. I interviewed 10 urban administrators from the West Coast region of the United States to acquire a deeper understanding of their perspectives of the overidentification of young Black boys contributing to the STPP due to exclusionary discipline policies. The following two research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do urban administrators describe their understanding of school/district policies that define and implement exclusionary discipline practices that overidentify elementary-age, Black boys?

RQ:2 How do urban administrators describe the consequences of the overidentification of elementary-age Black boys and the link to the STPP?

This chapter begins with a description of the study setting, then I provide specific information about the collection and analysis of the data and present the results as well as the methods used to ensure the study's trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results.

### **Setting**

The setting for this study was an urban, predominately African American, school system located on the West Coast of the United States. The school system has approximately 700,000 students and over 1,000 schools. Of the approximately 1,000

schools, roughly 85% of those schools were classified as Title I schools. The urban administrators who participated in this study represented schools with large Black and Latino populations. Ten administrators met the qualifying criteria and consented to participate in the study.

### **Demographics**

Participants were administrators who had at least 2 years of leadership experience at urban, predominately low-income schools that reflected a vast majority of Black and Latino students. Of the 10 participants, nine were female, and one was male. Two of the participants led elementary schools (i.e., pre-K to fifth grade), six led a middle school, and two led a high school. Administrators averaged 5 years of leadership experience at their current schools, with 2 years being the least and 20 years being the most. Five of the administrators have their master's degree, three have a doctorate, and two participants have their bachelor's degree. The administrative roles of the participants varied from principals, vice principals, school counselors, therapists, school district leaders, and directors of equity and diversity.

**Table 1***Participant Demographics*

<b>Participant pseudonym</b>	<b>Administrative experience</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Education</b>
Carmello	2–4 years	Male	Masters
Selma	5 years or more	Female	Masters
Pearl	2–4 years	Female	Bachelors
Claire	2–4 years	Female	Doctorate
Gwen	2–4 years	Female	Masters
Francine	1 year	Female	Doctorate
Rebecca	2–4 years	Female	Masters
Destiny	5 years or more	Female	Doctorate
Caresha	5 years or more	Female	Bachelors
Roxanne	2–4 years	Male	Masters

Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increased level of anxiety and uncertainty leaving administrators to work from home to perform their work duties. Administrators who would have once participated in an in-person, face-to-face interview now felt comfortable having these interviews virtually. I conducted all participant interviews via Zoom, a web-based video and audio-conferencing platform. Zoom provides security features that ensured the participants' confidentiality and privacy. I sent each participant a unique, password-protected, private link to access the Zoom meeting. All participants kept their video off to proceed with a virtual, audio-recorded interview.

### **Data Collection**

To better understand the research problem of this generic qualitative case study, I used two data sources. The primary data source was open-ended, semistructured, virtual,

audio-recorded interviews. I conducted the one-on-one interviews virtually in the privacy of my home using the Zoom conference platform on both a password-protected laptop and a password-protected cellphone. I took notes during the interviews. There were minimal to nonexistent variables of interview conditions, and the primary variable was the time that each participant was available. The administrator participants were all in leadership positions that fit the study criteria. I emailed them each the interview consent form. A total of 10 participants responded who were then asked to proceed by completing a demographic screening tool that I had created to capture in-depth responses about their roles and responsibilities towards the overidentification of young Black boys contributing to the STPP. Once this form was completed administrators were then asked to schedule a virtual interview based on their availability. Once scheduling was confirmed, I conducted individual interviews lasting between 15 and 50 minutes. This was contingent upon participants that were more passionate about this topic and expressed more professional experiences that tied to some of the questions asked. Interviews were scheduled on days and times that were convenient for each participant. There was also no variation to the previous shared data collection plan found in Chapter 3.

The second data source was the participant responses to the demographic screening tool administered prior to participants being interviewed. These thorough and in-depth responses served to provide more context to the conversations at large.

I audio recorded the interviews conducted on Zoom through that platform, and then downloaded the recordings and saved them to my password-protected computer. The



researcher-developed interview protocol was used to guide the interviews, ensuring consistency in the questions asked and the type of information gathered from the administrators. The protocol included an introduction to the study, interview norms, and the interview questions. I also reminded the participants of their right to opt out of the study at any time.

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed the collected data using an inductive approach, as Patton (2015) advised. Patton described this approach as the researcher's ability to immerse themselves in the data reading and digesting it to make sense of the whole data set. I used this approach because it was the most basic approach to analyze the qualitative data and answer both research questions.

The data were then transcribed using NVivo transcription. After completing each interview, I relistened to each audio recording and edited grammatical errors in the transcriptions, ensuring the participant's words were accurate. The transcriptions were shared with the participants for their review and feedback, requested back within a week. Participants were asked to make any edits or revisions to their responses to capture their thoughts accurately within 48 hours. After participants completed and reviewed each transcription, I relistened to the audio recordings while reading alongside the transcription. This process ensured that I was able to familiarize myself with the data described as the first step in thematic analysis (see Nowell et al., 2017).

I uploaded each interview transcription separately from a password-protected laptop to a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) for storing and initial organization to assist me with analytic reflections (see Saldaña, 2016). Although the data were stored using CAQDAS, this qualitative data tool only assisted in the organizational structure of storing the data, not in the intellectual stewardship of this research study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) explained that CAQDAS does not conduct the data analysis. As the researcher, I created essential functional procedures, like sorting and organizing the data, coding, and identifying emergent patterns and themes. And more importantly, I provided step-by-step instructions to the laptop to conduct the processes.

### **Interviews**

I ensured that I familiarized myself with the data by reviewing the transcriptions multiple times. This resulted in me understanding themes that emerged in the text (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Reviewing each school administrator's demographic screening tool responses also allowed me to triangulate the data. It is also important to acknowledge that there were no unusual occurrences for the archival data review and the interview process. Next, I assigned meaning to the data assigning codes to the text or phrases that described what was occurring in the data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Trustworthiness was ensured by using the following protocols to analyze the data sets:

1. Maintaining anonymity, all participant names were substituted with a pseudonym. Using pseudonyms allowed me to incorporate direct quotes captured during each interview.

2. Reading each transcription line by line at least twice ensured the accuracy of the text and that I had a comprehensive understanding of the overall concepts of the interviews.
3. Utilizing participant words, I used open and invivo coding to discover potential categories.
4. I combined categories to create short phrases identifying themes that emerged from the codes and categories.
5. While reviewing the field notes taken during the interviews, I wrote new codes as they emerged based on the statements made by multiple administrators.
6. Lastly as described by Saldana (2016), I synthesized themes as necessary.

### **Coding**

I organized the data to make coding easier. The first level of coding used with each interview data set was open coding as I combed through the text looking for repetitive words, phrases, and concepts (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

After reviewing all the interview transcripts line by line, I used an inductive approach to data analysis to reveal patterns of themes and interactions in the data (see Patton, 2015). The first phase was identifying words and phrases that were commonly used. The first cycle of coding revealed codes, such as require antiracist approaches, alternative practices, professional development, and exposing the injustice. Other examples are listed in Table 2. Those codes emerged by seeing concepts, phrases, and

words that participants repetitively used during the semistructured interviews. This allowed me to fully comprehend how urban administrators perceived their experiences of the overidentification of Black boys experiencing harsher discipline consequences than their peers and the systems that were in place to disrupt the STPP in their school communities. The data in Table 2 provides samples of the overall coding process, demonstrating the open codes to categories. The data also highlights the connection between the open codes generated during the first cycle and the respective category. All transcripts were carefully reviewed to ensure that each participant's sample excerpts aligned with the open codes and categories.

Using the CAQDAS software that stored the interview transcriptions, I reviewed each transcript individually line by line and reviewed each open code, a process that led to combining the open codes to develop a clear category. For example, the open code of requires antiracist approaches developed into the category of leadership beliefs because participants discussed how their belief system directly impacted their work performance. Administrators believed that there was more harm in enforcing exclusionary discipline policies for Black students at a greater rate than their peers and had preventative methods to reduce the exposure to the STPP. Administrators also believed that the understanding of faculty and staff regarding an individual's cultural experiences directly affect how their staff reprimands students. They also felt that it was necessary to understand the trauma of being Black in America, particularly in an urban demographic.

**Table 2***Open Coding to Categories for Participant Interview Data*

Participants	Open Codes	Sample Excerpts	Categories
Gwen	Requires antiracist approaches	“.... One challenge our staff has had the way perceive our black students. Do we see that as a kid acting like a kid, or do we see it as through a racist lens? This is why our trainings it requires antiracist approaches.”	Staff training
Claire	Professional development	“We did a lot of work and professional developments around confronting anti blackness and racism within our organization in the world.”	Strategic planning and process
Francine	Confronting anti-Blackness	“I think 2 years ago is when as organization we created a strategic priority. And this is pre-covid. And this priority was confronting anti-Blackness.”	Alternative practices
Caresha	Exposing the injustice	“To better support our school community our leadership teams created professional development materials exposing the injustice.”	Resource development and planning
Selma	Checking our bias	“We understand the effects of exclusionary discipline and the influence on the pipeline. In our school community we have recently employed critical race theory in our leadership practices, this	Grounded in research

Participants	Open Codes	Sample Excerpts	Categories
		ensures that we as a staff are checking our bias.”	
Rebecca	Collaborative mindset	“Definitely a collaborative mindset. When dealing with student discipline we want to make sure that teachers, parents, school psychologists or anyone involved is there to support the child and not penalize them.”	Community collaboration
Pearl	Parent involvement	“To better understand how to support the whole child, and their experiences or trauma they may have incurred parent involvement is critical.”	Parent engagement
Destiny	Self-fulfilling prophecy	“Does this mean I should fit the description of how America views a black boy. Then the self-fulfilling prophecy begins. Everyone views me this way, so I should behave like this.”	Empathy
Francine	At risk	“... Having a deeper understanding that when we are discussing the school to prison pipeline, we are talking about our black boys are at risk.”	Perception and awareness
Roxanne	Hinders student success	“...The lack of knowledge and a lack of wanting to know how to increase their perceptions of what to do, for their students in the classroom.”	
Pearl	Hinders student success	“As leaders in practice when we are bias in our decision making towards student	Equity and justice

Participants	Open Codes	Sample Excerpts	Categories
		discipline, and we are not treating students equitably this in fact hinders student success.”	
Rebecca	Disrupts student learning	“We train our educators to be skilled in managing disciplinary behaviors within their control, how a staff member responds to the student is essential. We often find that no nonsense behavior does not warrant the need to disrupt student learning.”	Critical thinking and decision making
Caresha	Root of the behavior	“But if we really sit down and take a look at what's happening with kids and why they are behaving this way or acting this way, you get to really see, you know, the story behind the root of the behavior.”	Problem solving
Carmello	Limits opportunities	“Removing students from the classroom increasing access to the school to prison pipeline and expansively limits opportunities.”	Hyperawareness
Claire	Traumatic	“Black students are coming to our school communities with some of the most traumatic experiences that one could ever deal with.”	Compassion and understanding
Gwen	Cultural competencies	“We ensure that our staff are equipped the cultural competencies necessary to serve the student demographics.”	Intentionality

**Other Data**

A Demographic Screening Tool was created to capture in-depth responses about urban administrator roles and responsibilities towards the overidentification of young Black boys contributing to the STPP. Upon completing the interview analysis, I then used the archival data from the demographic screening tool responses (See Appendix A). During this process, I recorded notes while re-reading the responses from the demographic screening tool. Some of the detailed questions included learning about the available resources to promote equitable disciplinary consequences for all students and for participants to elaborate on alternative reasons that young Black boys are more at risk of contributing to the STPP than others. The questions on the screening tool that aligned with the focus of the study were then reviewed, and then those responses were captured in a data collection tool developed in an Excel spreadsheet.

**First Cycle**

For the first cycle of coding the archived data, aware of the culture, lack of opportunities, track data, policing, equipped with the tools, and awareness were a few codes that emerged. Some of those codes are reflected in Table 4. In an effort to remain organized a color-coded system was utilized to distinguish the participant responses and identify phrases, repetitive words that appeared frequently in the demographic screening tool responses. When there were words or phrases that were used consistently across the data set, I began to assign codes.



My next step was to review the open codes and relationships between the codes began to emerge. This allowed me to then develop categories. For example, the open code aware of the culture was assigned to the pattern code consciousnesses because administrators believed that staff needed to be aware of Black culture, and competent about their experiences. The data in Table 3 illustrates the progression from open codes to categories for the archived data. There also proved to be a relationship between the open codes in the first cycle of coding and the categories.

**Table 3**

*Open Coding to Categories for Archived Data*

Participants	Archived Data	Open Codes	Sample Excerpts	Categories
Carmello	Demographic screening tool responses	Aware of the culture	“Staff need to be aware of the culture and be competent or open to learn about other cultures.”	Consciousnesses
Selma	Demographic screening tool responses	Lack of opportunities	“Lack of role models (i.e. lack of educated, working father figure/male role models, lack of education, lack of opportunities, peer pressure.”	Contributes to the overidentification
Pearl	Demographic screening tool responses	Track data	“I do feel it’s on the school to track data and be conscious of the ways Black boys are at risk.”	Accountability
Claire	Demographic screening tool responses	Policing	“Yes - our Black boys are more at risk due to the policing of Black bodies.”	Broken Systems
Destiny	Demographic screening tool responses	Equipped with the tools	“Educators are not equipped with the tools and taught about black boys.”	Increased access to trainings and cultural competencies

Participants	Archived Data	Open Codes	Sample Excerpts	Categories
Francine	Demographic screening tool responses	Awareness	“It’s first awareness then conversation then training then action steps to try to make changes that result in a different outcome.”	Strategic planning and process
Rebecca	Demographic screening tool responses	Confronting anti-Blackness and racism	“Commitment to confronting anti-Blackness and racism and incorporating the tenet, Every Child is a Blessing.”	Change agent
Roxanne	Demographic screening tool responses	Racial profiling	Anti-Blackness sentiments drive behaviors and decision-making; racial profiling and an implicit bias in which Black boys are seen as problematic and offensive.”	Injustice systems and structures
Gwen	Demographic screening tool responses	Systemic racism	“The primary reason is systemic racism.”	Decolonizing systems
Caresha	Demographic screening tool responses	Lack cultural competence	“Institutional racism, ill-equipped teachers that lack cultural competence.”	Professional development

Urban administrators all shared similar belief systems about the overidentification of black boys contributing to the STPP. There were many external factors that influenced this, such as homelessness, lack of community support, and socioeconomic status. However, a relationship was determined in the data between the open codes and categories. As I navigated through the coding process, I understood administrator perceptions of black boys being at risk of contributing to the STPP in their demographics. This insight allowed me to answer both research questions.

The interview data determined that Black boys were fighting an uphill battle because of systemic racism in the U.S system. Administrators had in-depth knowledge that to minimize police contact and provide more educational opportunities, enforcing exclusionary discipline policies was ineffective and warranted alternative approaches.

Administrators took more of an equitable process in solving behavioral challenges on school campuses through restorative justice practices, which focused on supporting the whole child and understanding the root of their behavior. Administrators also identified the trauma that black pupils endure and how this exposure to their world promoted healthier approaches that would limit the overidentification of Black students receiving harsher discipline consequences that could potentially increase the risk of them entering the STPP. Nonetheless, there were no participants whose interview data or responses from the demographic screening tools provided any discrepant data that disputed any emerging themes. Some leaders provided their staff with cultural bias training to increase awareness of the disparities in school discipline policies that overidentify Black pupils.

### **Emergent Themes**

A cyclical process was to then analyze the data and develop temporary themes. Themes consistently emerged as I continued the cyclical process analyzing the codes and categories developed. I referred to the CRT conceptual framework which guided the study and research questions. According to Dixson and Anderson (2018), the boundaries consist of racial education inequality, which is also describe as the most logical outcome

of a system of achievement controlled by the opposition. It is important to note that the interview data and the archival data were both analyzed closely and compared and contrasted, this resulted into themes emerging that answered both research questions as advised by Saldana (2016).

The data were grouped based on similarities, leading to categories and themes all of which addressed the research. These categories and themes were generated coincided with the CRT framework. The three themes that emerged were (a) Leadership beliefs (b) Mutual Respect and Empathy (c) Impacts student experiences.

**Table 4**

*Categories to Themes*

Categories	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff training</li> <li>• Strategic planning and processes.</li> <li>• Confronting anti-Blackness</li> <li>• Resource development and planning</li> <li>• Grounded in research</li> </ul>	Leadership beliefs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Perceptions and awareness</li> <li>• Support system</li> <li>• Equity</li> </ul>	Mutual respect and empathy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth mindset</li> <li>• Collaborative mindset</li> <li>• Positive mindset</li> <li>• Support</li> </ul>	Impacts student experiences

**Theme 1: Leadership Beliefs**

This theme included antiracist approaches, professional development, exposing injustices, and checking bias. Urban administrators demonstrated professional morals and

values indicating that although exclusionary discipline practices are an option, it is not always the appropriate solution for all students particularly young Black boys because they are entering their school communities already at risk of contributing to the prison pipeline. Administrators believed that it was critical to think deeply about removing Black male students from the classroom for no nonsense behaviors because of the potential harm that it could cause in the future. Outlining the historical context of structural racism and how it applies to modern day disciplinary consequences.

Professionals were hyperaware of the inherently racist school systems they inherited from when U.S schools were desegregated. With this knowledge as the foundation of how they lead in their school communities, participants shared their expertise of the overidentification of Black pupils receiving harsher discipline consequences due to racial inequalities in the U.S school systems. For example, participants made statements emphasizing the significance of intentionally training staff and hiring practices obtaining leaders who were knowledgeable about the cultural differences that Black students experience.

## **Theme 2: Mutual Respect and Empathy**

The second theme involved social and emotional support categories that are necessary to embed in school cultures. Administrators' understanding that there is a casual link between exclusionary discipline policies and the STPP reaffirmed new ways of thinking, and educating the whole child opposed to enacting systemic racist policies that segregate Black students from their peers. Administrators focused on the need to

have community collaboration, and supportive systems in place to minimize the possibility of exposing Black boys to harsher discipline consequences than their peers. Because past actions of enforcing exclusionary discipline policies for Black students at a higher rate than their peers proved to be harmful administrators demonstrated innovative ways to support their students lived experiences as much as possible.

For example, some approaches that were discussed were the “Buddy system” according to Claire, when Marcus was acting out in class rather than send him to the dean’s office, she decided to be his lunch buddy for the week. This resulted in a bonding opportunity learning about Marcus’s hardships, and recent family traumas that had affected his behavior in school. The theme mutual respect and empathy also models how administrators have taken an honest assessment that they are a part of a community that they do not live in, they take an oath to be of service in this space and educate the whole child the best way they can. This does not include punishment, belittling, or reinforcing racist stereotypes. Pearl described it best it is our responsibility as administrators to model expectations of love, and employ mutual respect, if we understand where a child is coming from, we can improve their experience and trust in our schools; that is motivation enough for a child to want more for themselves than society does.

### **Theme 3: Impacts Student Experiences**

The theme impacts student experiences emerged as leaders described real time consequences occurring in their current roles, and professional experiences. Urban administrators acknowledged that because Black students come into contact with

exclusionary discipline consequences more frequently than others, they feel misunderstood and unsupported. Often, there is a self-fulfilling prophecy that the stereotypes regarding their behavior are accurate. Because of the way society views them they will succumb to the oppressions of their community.

Participants advocated for students in their school community that they have impacted directly indicating that there is often a severe distrust in administrative staff, and rarely positive interactions with school personal. Therefore, these experiences have been described as traumatic and non-supportive which negatively influence students' willingness to participate in their school community activities, or maximize the learning materials. External factors that students are experiences are often brought into school, and a lack of unrelatable staff, teachers, or supportive systems only exacerbate a Black youth's ability to be misunderstood for minor behavior that could be rectified through cultural awareness, compassion, and understanding.

### **Discrepant Cases**

In qualitative research discrepant cases represent a researcher's ability to thoroughly examine their developed themes by checking and rechecking their understandings around the data, and considering alternative solutions and possible misunderstandings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Additionally, qualitative researchers should not group the data to fit into bias or preconceived notions as stated by Ravitch and Carl (2016). In this research study discrepant cases were well-thought-out during the data analysis phase. During the interview process, I consistently reflected on the participants'

responses and evaluated again what I learned through the interviews while analyzing the archival data. I learned that there were no discrepant cases, and there were no alternative explanations. The themes that were developed were in accordance with the data presented.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

In the word of Patton (2015), authentic credibility is described as the integrity of the qualitative inquiry containing a combination of fieldwork, a knowledgeable researcher, high-quality fieldwork, and so forth. Throughout this study credibility was reserved by abiding by the guidelines, protocols, and best practices at Walden. In an effort to uphold the credibility of quality standards I established methods and procedures to do so. These procedures contained sending emails requesting consent to each administrator that met the study's criteria. Those participants who agreed to move forward responded to the email with the words "I consent." Next steps included participants completing the Demographic screening tool, and then scheduling a convenient date and time for them to be interviewed. It is important to note that participants were selected from the school district I have stated my affiliation. The data analysis software, NVivo was used to organize the data resulting from the interviews and the demographic screening tool data. Also, peer review was used to prevent bias, and saturation was addressed by interviewing 10 administrators.



**Transferability**

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016) qualitative research is how qualitative studies can become applicable to broader narratives. In terms of transferability the transparency of the research through protocols and procedures should have the ability to be replicated in other scenarios by other researchers that aim to further investigate this phenomenon. In this study transferability was established by purposeful random selection among the sample population providing a rich and meaningful participant sample group. The selection process produced 10 participants from Title I, predominately African American schools with over 2 years of experience in their roles.

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to how stable the data is, and how accurately it is described. To achieve dependability, I utilized the triangulation and sequencing of methods as advised by Ravitch and Carl (2016). To triangulate the data, I used various data sources for observed occurrences. In this study, interviews with Urban administrators were compared with the data from the demographic screening tool. Next, transcript reviews were used to ensure the accuracy of interview data, in which interviewees were provided the opportunity to review for accuracy. Interviewees were given the opportunity to provide any corrections to information gathered during the interview. There were no adjustments needed to be made. As Patton (2015), described, triangulation was conducted by exploring information from multiple sources.

## **Confirmability**

Researchers Ravitch and Carl (2016) note that a specific goal of confirmability is always to acknowledge our biases and prejudices that may influence our interpretations of the data. To successfully establish confirmability, I consistently implemented triangulation tactics and reflexivity. While reviewing and engaging in data collection, I regularly and consistently reflected on my personal bias and documented that information accordingly without further interpretation. All the interviews were recorded, which ensured the fidelity and integrity of the content that was provided during the interviews, Also, by providing the research participants with the opportunity to review the transcripts this also helped to establish confirmability. Validity in qualitative research is the ways the researchers can affirm that the findings are faithful to the participants' experiences and perspectives (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used several methods to ensure validity that met a trustworthy or valid study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria.

## **Results**

The results from the 10 interviews and supporting archival data are summarized below. As demonstrated below the results are organized by research questions and are explained in detail using sample excerpts from interviews, and tables for visualization.

### **Research Question 1**

To answer this research question, I asked interview questions that would enable me to gauge the perspectives of participants accurately. The results of all ten interviews,

demonstrated how participants implemented their belief systems into strategic initiatives to incorporate alternative discipline protocols opposed to traditional suspension and expulsion removing the child from the classroom. During the interview with participants the data collected and gathered fell into three themes: leadership beliefs, mutual respect and empathy, and impacts student experiences. Urban administrators were aware of the effects of exclusionary disciplinary consequences like suspension and expulsion that disproportionately impact Black males. They described their understanding of school/district policies that define and disproportionately impact Black males as a dangerous consequence that often requires alternative solutions, opposed to subjecting a student to harsher discipline infractions than their peers. Administrators also described the proposed theme of Black boys being overidentified to be rooted in racism and inequality and how White supremacist structures have shaped the way society view Black students and associated their responses to structural racism as bad behavior. Gwen stated,

“... [We Must] understand how the systems are inherently racist from the start so that we can rebuild them differently. It just brings up this whole huge challenge that exists because we're living in a world that's systemically racist. And., I know that instead of suspension, what we have leaned into is. Restorative discipline policies to support kids giving back to the community as opposed to being excluded from the community and 95 percent of the time, most problems can get solved that way. I think there are certain challenges that make it more difficult when you get to kids that are really upset with each other and they fight. They

fight. They sort of need a cool down period of time, and whenever you send kids away from campus or you exclude them from a classroom environment while they're in that hot period of time, it's called suspension. Because you're excluding them from class, so there's a challenge in that because of the term that it's called and how they define what a suspension is, any time you're missing class, at least that's my understanding when you miss class because you did something wrong, even if it's legally required to define it as a suspension and mark it down on your scorecard card that you're reporting out to the state on. I don't necessarily think it needs to be a suspension because I think there are alternatives.”

Participants demonstrated a comprehensive understanding that this is an extremely challenging social issue that they can get in front of by educating themselves past comfort zones, and implementing evidenced based practices to support all students in urban school environments. Claire stated,

“...[To]understand students and properly support them in my school district we hire relatable staff whether that is race, socioeconomic status, cultural backgrounds. Whatever it takes to make sure our kids feel safe. They’ve been through enough. The purpose of this intentionality was to have supportive staff on board to serve as mentors for students dealing with problematic behaviors.”

Administrators that were interviewed consistently addressed the need to create alternative discipline protocols than current exclusionary ones available at the school’s discretion for example, multiple participants identified resources like restorative justice practices to

ensure that students feel loved and supported in their school community, minimizing conflict and disruptive behavior while building a safe and secure environment for students. Caresha discussed that it is just as important as a school community staff to check their biases when enforcing disciplinary consequences to their black students and do their best at reserving judgment and taking an honest assessment at the situation to determine if that child is really causing harm before escalating incidents. This is where I experienced conversations around having monthly all staff professional development meetings around equity and diversity to educate schools on the racist cultures that exist in the students' worlds outside of the classroom and how to manage typical behavior coming from Black students. Pearl acknowledged that racial inequalities and racial hierarchies have made Black students a targeted community, and there is over-policing in school communities and urban neighborhoods influencing the STPP.

**Table 5**

*RQ1 Themes, Codes, and Sample Excerpts*

Theme	Codes	Sample Excerpts
1. Leadership beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative approaches</li> <li>• Exposing the injustice</li> <li>• Checking your bias</li> <li>• Confronting anti-Blackness</li> </ul>	<p>“Their own bias and there has to be a system within your organization for this to exist and live so because if you're serving kids of color and you're serving young Black men and girls, you have to understand who you're serving and what trauma they're bringing with them to school.” (Gwen)</p>
2. Mutual respect and empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-fulfilling prophecy</li> <li>• Inclusive</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>Support system</li> </ul>	<p>“Does this mean I should fit the description of how America views a Black boy" Then the self-fulfilling prophecy begins. Everyone views me this way, so I should behave like this?” (Destiny)</p>

**Research Question 2**

Like the first research question, the second, research question was answered through participants' responses. The interview guide which outlined specific questions that aligned with the research questions. During this process I utilized my reflexive notes. The perspectives that administrators all seemed to have in common was the need to address the root of a child's behavior, before removing students from the classroom and utilizing exclusionary discipline approaches as a primary consequence. Roxanne and Selma, indicated that through trial and error of learning about what their students' livelihoods entailed outside of the classroom, they gave them greater insight into the types of training and courses that faculty and staff needed to participate in. Administrators were all aware of the increased access to the STPP that exist in this school district. Outside of the classroom students run the risk of gang violence, increased access to food deserts, poverty, lack of family and community support, among other challenges that could limit their opportunity for long-term success.

Francine and Rebecca both indicated that after the murder of George Floyd there was a shift in the culture and communities and a surge of administrators sharing best practices around how they should employ racial equity data into key solutions and preventative protocols for Black students. School cultures began to experience the need to disrupt harmful practices that overidentify and harm young Black boys. For example, Roxanne stated:

“...[To]understand the problem we have to understand that the consequences of an inherently racist society have resulted in not just an anti-black education system, but we are fighting an uphill battle against an anti-black society. The same consequences that place Black boys at risk for simply being Black the fear of the dangerous black man is ingrained in our ecosystem, and it’s simply not true or an accurate reflection of who a person is”.

Each participant mentioned that student success could only be made possible if there was a certain level of trust in the school. Distrust on school communities and leadership only further expands Black students’ likelihood of not graduating, and succumbing to the oppressions of their community. Participants shared experiences of the positive impact that it has on a child when they feel loved and supported in a school community, it positively impacts their behavior and their belief system in themselves when it comes to attaining an education. Carmello stated,

“...When I first started in this role I did my research, I learned about the community that I was signing up for, I learned about the parents, the trauma that our kids were experiencing, and what they truly carried before coming through those doors. I realized the key component of any monumental relationship was love and support. I did what I could to show my students that I was trustworthy, and those relationships transformed into them wanting more for themselves and viewing themselves in a totally different light. There were colleagues of mine that had a not so nice approach, who were less compassionate, and the students could

feel that they can always feel if you're being real with them. What I did see is that the teachers and staff that were less compassionate were the staff that the students always experienced hardships with. The students didn't have their respect and feel respected and in return they modeled unsatisfactory behavior. Those staff would constantly enforce exclusionary discipline policies, very little effort in giving second chances. But we learned from that as a team, and we trained our teams on solutions to identify when a child is really being a threat or throwing a

In summary, the theme "impacts student experiences" outlined how administrators described the overall consequences of the overidentification of elementary-age Black boys and the link to the STPP. Administrators believed that they (Black students) were being conditioned as a part of an inherently racist anti-black society that we exist in in the United States. However, administrators' perspectives depict that the overarching consequences of exclusionary discipline and the impact on student experiences whether positive or negative. If students do not feel like they are a part of a community their chances of contributing to the STPP is greater than expected. The self-fulfilling prophecy that exists behind the live trajectory of the young Black male carries on if our schools in urban community do not instill an alternative perceive about what their success could entail. While participants agreed that racial bias and racial equity training were pertinent in the school districts, they did identify that there is a lot more work to be done to invent new ways of thinking, and new systems that promote equity for all students, especially



Black students. See Table 5 for detailed descriptions of themes, codes, and sample excerpts.

**Table 6***RQ2 Themes, Codes, and Sample Excerpts*

Theme	Codes	Sample Excerpts
3. Impacts Student Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distrust in schools</li> <li>• Limits opportunities</li> <li>• Traumatic</li> </ul>	<p>“When kids don't feel loved in the classroom, they look for other ways to feel loved and if. We have. People who aren't prepared in the classroom to serve students and to serve our black boys and to understand where they're coming from and they experience their lived experience.” (Roxanne)</p> <p>“Staff that were less compassionate were the staff that the students always experienced hardships with. The students didn't have their respect and feel respected and in return they modeled unsatisfactory behavior. Those staff would constantly enforce exclusionary discipline policies.” (Carmello)</p>

**Summary**

In summary, in this study I explored how urban administrators describe their understanding of the over-representation of elementary-age Black boys who receive exclusionary discipline practices placing them at risk of entering the prison pipeline. The research questions explored urban administrators' perspectives of this overidentification of elementary-age Black boys receiving exclusionary discipline consequences disproportionately than their peers. They aimed understand urban administrators' school and district policies comprehensively. Through this inquiry I learned that three main perspectives accurately describe Urban administrators' perspectives of this phenomenon. The themes include leadership beliefs, mutual respect and empathy, and impacts student experiences. Participants also identified that because school cultures are inherently racist new systems need to be created through intentional hiring, training, cultural competency assessments, and more. Administrators all agreed that trial and error has been their best

friends as they employ previous wins and failures to effectively enforce strategies to support vulnerable Black boys that are at risk. Therefore, building strategic partnerships and alliances with their community are critical components of ensuring that Black boys in urban communities successfully obtain their education which in return is anticipated to minimize their exposure to the criminal justice complex. In Chapter 5, I delve deeper into the findings of this study, and identify the limitations that existed and future recommendations for future studies for scholars that aim to explore this phenomenon.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand how urban educators consider the consequences of exclusionary discipline practices and the overrepresentation of elementary-age, Black boys who receive them compared to others. By interviewing 10 urban administrators and collecting their perspectives, I acquired a more significant understanding of how local and district policies work to develop ways to support other school district leaders in the future regarding best practices and solutions to equitably support vulnerable Black students who are at risk of contributing to the STPP.

Through this research inquiry, I found three consistent approaches that all 10 administrators used at their school sites: strategic partnerships, racial equity and diversity trainings, and intentional hiring. Participants attributed the overidentification of elementary-age, Black boys being at risk in their school district to stem from an inherently racist society whose foundation is based on anti-Blackness and overindulges in punishing Black students for no-nonsense behavior. All participants were honest about their experiences and that they have not always done right by their Black students in the past because of the stigmas that exist. However, in terms of revamping current school policies that do not serve students, administrators were adamant about the use of professional development training consisting of racial equity and diversity content to address structural racism and better elevate the school district's thinking when it comes to Black students and problematic school behavior.

## **Interpretation of the Findings**

In this chapter, I describe the conclusions drawn from the data collected and analyzed during the study, using categories and theme analysis. CRT was the conceptual framework for this study. Seamster and Ray (2019) reported that CRT is essential at unearthing topics around racism because it is important that when exploring the disparate effects that exclusionary discipline policies have on a specific group, it is best to conduct the research using CRT when examining inequality and the oppression of Black people.

### **Key Finding 1**

The leadership belief systems were most pertinent in driving school initiatives, trainings, and school culture. Leaders who were authentic about their experience and the disservice that exclusionary discipline policies have caused for students as well as the potential harm it has on their academic success used these experiences to learn what they should and should not do. All leaders focused on student experiences being the driving factor of elevating new systems. They viewed these students as children, emphasized that the students are at risk of contributing to the prison industrial complex because of their environmental factors, and understood their students' trauma and negative thought cycles. This knowledge and hyperawareness transformed the participants' belief systems on the potential and capabilities of their Black students, particularly Black boys impacted as early as elementary school. Participants described staying informed through webinars and readings as well as having healthy conversations with Black staff on campus. Their heart was in the right place when it came to transforming the communities around them. The

leaders believed they only had to influence one student because they believed that positively impacting one child will potentially reshape their future for the better. Because leadership belief systems were so compelling, they believed that they should get ahead of the problem, their schools demonstrated more solutions and preventative methods that were in place than problematic behaviors that were necessary to address.

This finding aligns with the work of Carter et al. (2017) who highlighted that to address racial discipline disparities, an authentic approach needed to be taken for transformative justice in the classroom. Simultaneously, these views aligned with those of Duncan (2020) who outlined their role of helping Black students navigate White supremacy. Leadership beliefs and hyperawareness are designed to support equitable outcomes for all students and address the systemic racism that Black students are exposed to as early as pre-K. These leaders wanted a better future for students than society anticipates.

### **Key Finding 2**

The urban administrators in this study struggle with dismantling racist systems in school cultures. During participant interviews, the interviewees described the anti-Black society in the United States, detailing that non people of color hide in the shadows and pretend that it does not exist. After the murder of George Floyd in 2020, most school districts in this West Coast moved towards a more just and equitable system that they believed would benefit vulnerable Black students at risk of being exposed to the STTP. This finding reaffirms the need for intentional hiring for equity and diversity roles, school

deans, and cultural competency assessments to ensure that staff are professionally trained. Although administrators in these districts improved their processes, they all identified that this is only the beginning of what is necessary to address the traumatic experiences that Black youth have endured. Providing more access to opportunity would only come through demonizing Western traditions. This key finding is in alignment with Camacho and Krezmien (2020) who advocated for alternative discipline policies because the current practices only expand the racial achievement gap. Moreover, participants in the current study agreed that to support Black students adequately, urban administrators need to first understand their lived experiences and perspectives.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The sample size of this study was a limitation. Although this study was within the range of participants recommended for qualitative research, the sample size was still small. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), when there is a small sample size, the researcher can address these limitations through purposeful sampling, which I used to recruit all research participants for this study.

An additional limitation to this study was that I did not include teachers. Teachers' perspectives could have provided additional insights into exclusionary discipline behaviors since teachers spend the most time with students. While the administrators did share their experiences with their teachers to support the teachers' responses, this information did not come directly from teachers. Moreover, this study

could potentially be replicated through expanding the scope to include the perspectives of teachers and the effects of exclusionary discipline in the classroom.

### **Recommendations**

My recommendation for future scholars is to expand the scope of the study to include racial equity data from the state and local school districts. The purpose of using racial equity data would be to compare and contrast the strategies that others have employed to disrupt the overidentification of Black students being disciplined at a disproportionate rate. The future researcher could potentially discuss the trends that are occurring. I would also recommend including any assessment data that schools are using to support the assessments that have resulted in positive outcomes for student discipline behavior and the protocols in place. An additional recommendation would be to conduct participant interviews with educators directly to further explore their perspectives of Black boys being overidentified and having greater likelihood to enter the STPP.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study indicated that alternative approaches are necessary to implement in school cultures because leadership beliefs showed that exclusionary discipline practices are ineffective. In this study, administrators in their respective school districts reported that they address the inherently racist society that exists in the United States today. They acknowledged how they use racial equity and diversity trainings in their professional development series to further expand the conversation on racial inequality and the effects on Black students. In this study leaders acknowledged that



before the consequences of their school communities' actions could ever manifest, they were ready and willing to employ new and existing alternative approaches to exclusionary discipline. I discovered the administrator's belief system was the most effective tool in changing the school culture. Administrators determined that all staff are at different levels and that they will continue to have a trial-and-error system until they find their rhythm of ensuring that inherently racist policies are no longer embedded into the mindset of U.S school systems.

### **Other Implications**

In the results of this study, it was apparent that although administrators had a knowledge base of racist structures in society, there has been a fear of talking about racism and inequality. Despite the administrators valuing the work, there are no concurrent strategies employed to sustain the upward mobility of Black youths' success. However, the intention and effort to be consistent to arrive at a long-term destination is there. I believe that through using shared resources, hiring staff intentionally, implementing cultural competency assessments, asking the right questions, and engaging appropriate stakeholders the administrators will effectively shift the inherently racist culture that exists. The more openly racism and inequality are discussed, the closer society gets to addressing how systemic policies are designed to create barriers for Black students.

Administrators modeled a clear roadmap to provide training materials to enhance their overall progress in ensuring that they combat systemic policies that negatively affect

elementary-age, Black boys and placing them at risk of contributing to the STPP. Furthermore, through the development of district-level recommendations, urban administrators can strategically implement resources consistent with their school communities' missions and values of promoting a more just and equitable society. This strategic and specific approach would provide schools with the strategies to best engage students in ways that support successful academic outcomes without administrative staff losing time during the trial-and-error phase.

### **Conclusion**

Through interviews and review of the demographic screening tool responses, I gained a critical insight into the 10 urban school administrators' perspectives of the effects on the overidentification of elementary-age, Black boys being exposed to exclusionary discipline policies and the link to the STPP. For the most part, leadership belief systems drove community cultures, and whatever the leader believed to be true about their students appeared in the administrator's practices, solutions, and work ethic to sustain and promote equity at the school district level. At the center of improving school culture was first addressing that anti-Blackness and racism perpetuated a cycle of systemic oppression that has been harmful to young Black students. Having this as a center focus provided administrators with a key insight into strategic planning and processes for developing protocols that would disrupt the pattern of young Black boys contributing to the STPP.

The most significant theme that was developed in this study was mutual respect and empathy. This theme highlighted the significance of administrators' having understanding and compassion for their Black students because the trauma that Black students are bringing to the table is really unknown. Rather than reprimanding the students, educators should have a more compassionate and empathetic perspective because this compassion unlocks a different level of awareness. The administrators in the study site school district continue to struggle with racism and anti-Blackness because it is engrained in society. However, they are doing the best that they can at reshaping the school systems by developing new protocols that promote a more equitable environment.

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## Appendix A: Demographic Screening Tool

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Email address: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Best form of communication:
  - a. Email
  - b. Phone [please provide best contact number]
  - c. Mail
4. What is your gender
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Prefer not to say
5. How do you identify yourself racially?
  - a. Black or African American
  - b. White or Caucasian
  - c. Latino or Hispanic
  - d. Asian or Pacific Islander
  - e. American Indian or Native American
  - f. Bi-racial
6. Age
  - a. 20-35

- b. 36-50
  - c. 51 and older
7. How many years have you served in your role?
- a. 1 year or less
  - b. 2-4 years
  - c. 5 years or more
8. What is your Highest Educational Level?
- a. Associates Degree
  - b. Bachelor's Degree
  - c. Master's Degree
  - d. Doctoral degree
9. Do you identify as an administrator in an urban school district?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
10. Do you have a general understanding of the school-to-prison pipeline?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
11. Have you considered other alternative reasons that young Black boys are more at risk, could you explain?
12. How do you describe the overidentification of Black students that receive exclusionary discipline consequences compared to others?

13. What resources are available to promote equitable disciplinary consequences for all students?
14. Is there anything else that you would like to add about this topic?

## Appendix B: Interview Questions for Participants- Administrators

In this section in this document the questions developed below reflect the interview queries that will help me address each research question. The questions are carefully written in an objective format to learn about the experiences of an urban administrators' school community, and roles and responsibilities that require them to use exclusionary discipline practices.

1. How do you see your role in helping your school community when dealing with problematic school behaviors? (Research Question 1)
2. Which students appear to receive exclusionary discipline practices? (Research Question 1)
3. What are your responsibilities as an administrator? (Research Question 1)
4. Can you describe which students appear to be influenced more by exclusionary discipline practices? Why? (Research Question 2)
5. The literature shows that there is an overidentification of Black elementary-age- boys that receive more stringent discipline practices. What is the culture like in your school district? (Research Question 2)
6. From your perspective, how do exclusionary discipline practices like suspension and expulsion contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline for Black boys? (Research Question 2)
7. How do you describe the overrepresentation of Black students receiving harsher discipline consequences than their peers? (Research Question 2)

8. In your opinion, what are the pros and cons of using exclusionary discipline practices like suspension and expulsion? (Research Question 1)
9. Are there alternative exclusionary discipline practices that are used in your school district or community? If so, what are they? (Research Question 1)
10. What best practices are available to support those students that receive exclusionary policies more frequently? (Research Question 2)
11. What other influences have facilitated young boys entering the STPP? (Research Question 2)
12. Are Black students at your school at a higher risk of contributing to the STPP? If so, why, and what preventative methods are in place to protect them? (Research Question 1)
13. Is there anything else that you want to include? (Research Question 1 &2)