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Perceptions of K-12 School Principals Regarding the Use of Exclusionary Discipline Practices

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ShaLonda W. Adams

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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Abstract

Perceptions of K-12 School Principals Regarding the Use of Exclusionary Discipline
Practices

by

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MA, University of Texas at Tyler, 2011

BS, University of Texas at Tyler, 2004

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

Exclusionary discipline practices (EDPs), including suspensions and expulsions, are used in public schools, from kindergarten to 12th grade (K–12). Excessive use of EDP can have a negative impact as students face delays in completion of their academic work. The problem of increasing use of EDPs at a suburban public school district located in a southern state was addressed in this study. Hallinger and Murphy’s instructional leadership model was used to examine the perceptions of K–12 school principals regarding their use of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs. Purposeful sampling was used in this basic qualitative study to select 10 K–12 school principals trained in restorative discipline who had at least 2 years of administrative experience. Findings from the data collected through online synchronous interviews and a multicycle thematic analysis revealed that participants: (a) implement instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs by building a sense of community, supporting teachers, and helping students improve their behaviors; (b) perceive lack of professional development as a barrier to reducing the use of EDPs; and (c) recommend a policy on student discipline strategies. The resulting project was a policy recommendation for K–12 principals and senior school administrators proposing strategies to reduce the use of EDPs. The project contributes to positive social change through strategies that K–12 school principals can apply to reduce the use of EDPs, decrease the potential delays in the completion of students’ academic work, improve student classroom behavior, and support teacher retention.

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Dedication

I humbly submit and dedicate this life work and every aspect of this phenomenal journey to my God Jehovah, who is my Creator, Redeemer, and Everlasting Hope. My life purpose is to ‘heal the hearts of the children, so they don’t become hurting adults.’ To this end, is this work purposed. May God be glorified.

My heart dedication is to the memory of my three Queens, my Trifecta: my paternal grandmother, Lizzie B. Wilcott; my mother, Vernita Wilcott Mathis; and my aunt, Essie Wilcott-Hill. All three departed this life in the span of 7 months during the midst of this academic journey. May their lives continue to shine bright in the hearts of all whose lives were influenced by their love. May this accomplishment bring them joy even in the heavenly realm. I am forever grateful for their love, nurturing, and encouragement to be the best person I could be.

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I am truly grateful for every person who encouraged, influenced, guided, and cheered me on during these past 7 years of work. Thank you for being the best ‘Team Dr. Adams’ that I could ever imagine. There are too many to name so I cover this by saying thank you to all that had a hand in this accomplishment. WE did it!

I acknowledge my husband, Larry W. Adams, Sr. and my children: LaSeanda, Izrell, Gabrell, and Larry, Jr. and my daughter in love, Jazmin, and my 7 grandsons. Thank you for understanding the work process and pushing me to completion. Thank you all for being an inspiration to continue working to establish a legacy with our name on it. I love you and thank you for being the best family ever.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

There are three primary forms of exclusionary discipline practices (EDPs) in K–12 public schools: an in-school suspension (ISS), an out-of-school suspension, and an expulsion. ISS is a form of EDP used in K–12 public schools to keep students in school to complete their academic work. During ISS, students are removed from the classroom and placed into a separate location in the school for assigned times. ISS can be repeated for several school days. Out-of-school suspensions require the temporary and short-term exclusion of students from the school setting.

The project site for this study was a suburban public school district located in a southern state in the United States. The identified problem was that the use of EDPs had been increasing. Teachers were referring students to the principal's office who were misbehaving in the classroom. School principals increased the number of ISSs and out-of-school suspensions including expulsions. The purpose of this project study was to examine the perceptions of K–12 school principals regarding their use of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The research site serves over 23,000 students in Grades K–12. More than 10% of K–12 students had either ISSs, out-of-school suspensions, or expulsions. K–12 school principals received training in restorative discipline (RD) practices comprised of inclusive discipline practices most effective when modeled by school leadership to learn how to reduce the use of EDPs (school district superintendent, personal communication,

January 11, 2020). RD practices are used to reduce student discipline by promoting learning and respect among students and staff. As shown in Table 1, K–12 school principals reported to senior district administrators that the rates of EDPs had increased (senior district administrator, personal communication, November 30, 2019). According to the district board minutes, between academic years 2016 and 2018, K–12 school principals had not reduced the use of EDPs (school district superintendent, personal communication, January 11, 2020).

Table 1

Local Expulsions and Out-of-School Suspensions

Year	Number of students	Expulsions	Out-of-school suspensions
2015	23,500	5.11%	10.01%
2016	23,550	5.31%	12.31%
2017	23,900	5.59%	12.59%
2018	23,911	6.90%	13.97%
2019	24,033	7.01%	14.11%

Senior district administrators, such as associate school district superintendents and directors, decided to support the leadership capacity of K–12 school principals by visiting the school sites on a monthly basis to help these principals reduce the use of EDPs by implementing RD practices they learned in 2015 during their training (senior district administrator, personal communication, November 30, 2019). The associate superintendents found that many K–12 school principals did not reduce the use of EDPs (school district superintendent, personal communication, January 11, 2020).

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

Many researchers have found that RD practices help to reduce EDPs in schools. Additionally, school districts use RD to reduce student behavioral issues (Baule, 2020). Moreover, RD practices have been used as a guide by K–12 school principals to reduce student discipline issues and as alternatives to EDP (Garnett et al., 2018). Furthermore, RD practices are used to reduce the number of students receiving exclusionary consequences (Rainbolt et al., 2019). K–12 school principals are responsible for teaching, modeling, and providing feedback to teachers to ensure the use of RD (Baule, 2020). K–12 school principals are responsible for providing support to teachers and to students to ensure quality instructional delivery to promote learning (Mansfield et al., 2018). Reyneke (2020) explored school disciplinary strategies for dealing with the challenging behavior of students and concluded that implementing RD could lead to the prevention of EDP problems. Furthermore, RD is an alternative way to address student behavior and to reduce EDP (Wymer et al., 2020). Additionally, Gahungu (2018) reported that nonexclusionary discipline practices can be effectively implemented when school principals are committed to the success of the discipline practice.

There is a significant gap between the time of training and the active implementation of RP in the schools being served (Gerlach et al., 2018). Additionally, Katic et al. (2020) concluded there are positive outcomes such as reductions in student discipline referrals to the school office. Moreover, Kennedy et al. (2017) stated that school principals use RD to reduce the use of EDPs.

RD is comprised of inclusive discipline practices that are most effective when modeled by school leadership (Garnett et al., 2018). Moreover, RD practices have been used as a guide by K–12 school principals to reduce student discipline (Garnett et al., 2018). Additionally, some RD practices provide instructional practices that promote learning among students such as circle talks to discuss lessons and classroom contracts to promote respect among students and staff (Garnett et al., 2018).

Rationale

The state education agency at the research site implemented a training program for the regional service centers within its system. The regional service centers were responsible for providing training to K–12 school administrators and other staff with the responsibilities pertaining to student behavior and discipline. A training was designed for K–12 administrators and focused on the implementation of EDPs for these administrators.

RD practices and EDPs are used in public schools. Buckmaster (2016) stated that administrators face challenges with the implementation of RD practices. Anderson and Ritter (2017) stated that RP can serve as an alternative to EDP for students. Additionally, Darling and Monk (2018) stated that educators apply RD practices to decrease the use of EDP in the schools. Furthermore, RD is an integrated in all aspects of the school, in both academic and nonacademic manners (Darling & Monk, 2018). By applying RD, teachers and other staff contribute to a more inclusive school environment for K–12 school principals to reduce EDP (Freeman et al., 2019). EDP programs are introduced to the school campus and their use depends on school leadership (Reyneke, 2020). Therefore,

K–12 school principals must ensure proper training of all staff responsible for implementation of EDPs (Reyneke, 2020). RD requires the training of varied aspects of the school staff for the fidelity of implementation within the school (Fenning & Jenkins, 2018). At the research site, all K–12 school principals were trained in RD and EDPs (Garnett et al., 2018).

Definition of Key Terms

Exclusionary discipline practice (EDP): Curran (2016) defined EDP as the use of punishments such as ISSs, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions. Goldys (2016) referred to EDPs as a type of school disciplinary action that removes a student from their usual educational setting, such as office discipline referrals, suspension, and expulsion. EDPs disrupt students' learning process and these students can fall behind academically because of their negative school behaviors (Chiedozie & Victor, 2017). Additionally, because of the use of EDPs, students may choose to drop out of school altogether (Chiedozie & Victor, 2017).

Instructional leadership practices: Leadership practices school administrators use to train, instruct, and equip faculty and staff in varied learning processes with the goal of creating environments for learning and improving student learning outcomes (Chiedozie & Victor, 2017).

Restorative discipline (RD) practices: A tiered framework interconnected to positive behavior intervention support (Chiedozie & Victor, 2017).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of K–12 school principals regarding their use of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs. K–12 school principals should ensure the campus staff are knowledgeable and able to implement the targeted discipline practices effectively (Farr et al., 2020). Camacho and Krezmien (2019) suggested that schools and districts interested in improving school climate should adopt prevention- and intervention-focused discipline practices to decrease the use of punitive practices.

Significance of the Study

This project study helps to address a gap in practice concerning the perceptions of K–12 school principals regarding their use of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs. The findings of this project study may lead to further research on reducing the use of EDPs. This project is significant because the findings may help K–12 school principals reduce the use of EDPs. The findings may help senior school district administrators develop or revise policies on how to reduce the use of EDPs. K–12 school principals may use the strategies found in this project (Appendix A) to reduce the use of EDPs. Moreover, senior school district administrators may use the findings to support K–12 school principals to reduce the use of EDPs. The local community may also benefit from the findings of this project study through a decrease in EDPs and an increase in graduation rates. Implications for positive social change include strategies for K–12 school principals to apply to reduce the use of EDPs, which can lead to more students graduating from school.

Research Question

The following research question guided this project study:

RQ: How do K–12 school principals describe how they implement instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs?

Review of the Literature

This literature review includes a discussion of the conceptual framework used to guide this study concerning the perceptions of K–12 school principals and their use of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs. This comprehensive review of research is related to: (a) the school discipline rehabilitative framework, (b) instructional leadership practices, (c) exclusionary and nonexclusionary discipline practices, (d) positive behavior intervention supports, and (e) effects of RD on student behaviors and social–emotional learning (SEL). These topics provide a detailed explanation of the research problem of the increasing use of EDPs in K–12 schools. The keywords used to search for research were *school discipline, instructional leadership practices, exclusionary discipline practices, non-exclusionary discipline practices, positive behaviors of students, intervention supports to help students to improve their behaviors, effects of RD on students' behaviors, teaching practices, and social and emotional learning*.

Conceptual Framework

The instructional leadership model proposed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) was the conceptual framework for this project study. The holistic view of Hallinger and Murphy's instructional leadership model is that K–12 school principals, as instructional

leaders, have an impact on instructional leadership practices. The instructional leadership model has three dimensions—namely, (a) defining the school mission, which requires principals to frame and communicate school goals regarding student discipline; (b) managing the instructional program, which necessitates principals to supervise and evaluate instruction, coordinate curriculum, and monitor students' behaviors and progress; and (c) promoting a positive school learning climate, which entails principals' efforts to protect instructional time, promote professional development (PD), maintain high visibility, provide incentives for teachers and learning, and enforce academic standards including students' discipline. The contention for those dimensions lies on the assumption that, because the main function of the school is to cater to education, school principals need to focus on matters related to teaching and learning. From this perspective, Hallinger and Murphy's instructional leadership model is a principal-centered model. This model was appropriate for this project study regarding principals' instructional leadership practices. Furthermore, school principals' instructional leadership practices are closely linked not only to academic achievement but also to school outcomes (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership model is the most cited instructional leadership model in the literature and is a widely adopted framework in this area. I used this conceptual framework to examine how K–12 school principals implement their instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs by applying the instructional leadership model's aforementioned three dimensions. I used the three dimensions of the instructional leadership model to develop

the interview protocol containing interview questions to answer the research question and to analyze the interview data.

Review of the Broader Literature

School Discipline Rehabilitative Framework

According to Mallett (2016), several programs with a prevention and intervention model have been developed within the framework for the rehabilitation of school discipline. Mallett (2016) identified RD practices, schoolwide positive behavior intervention supports, PD, and socioemotional learning as integral aspects of this approach concerning the use of EDPs by K–12 school principals. For this project study, the instructional leadership of the K–12 school principal was a fundamental key to ensuring that any academic or nonacademic instructional approach is successfully implemented within the school campus.

Instructional Supervision of Principals

Teachers should have classroom and behavior management skills. Chiedozie and Victor (2017) identified instructional supervision as an instructional leadership practice, which is defined as the act of checking and observing a teacher's activities with the goal of improving student learning outcomes. According to Tookes et al. (2020), student discipline and effective classroom management are critical parts of sustaining a school environment conducive to student learning and overall academic success.

The school instructional leader is responsible for supporting classroom teachers and other staff in implementing varied strategies. These strategies include academic and nonacademic learning processes. The nonacademic process are those that teach the

students the identified school and classroom expectations so the school environment is optimal for learning. Riley (2018) asserted that school principals need to inform and assure teachers that supporting students' emotional growth is a priority on the same level as academic learning. Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018) indicated that staff training and evaluation are essential components to the successful implementation of RD. An introductory training of the program concepts, as well as more specific trainings, is one of the most important steps that K–12 school principals can provide for school staff. EDPs are the school discipline actions that remove students from an active presence in the classroom and/or school setting for a specified time period due to a violation of the school student codes of conduct.

Exclusionary Discipline Practices

Using EDPs, students are removed from the classroom. Nese et al. (2020) explained that the risk of negative outcomes is amplified for individual students due to exclusionary discipline. Nese et al. (2020) stated that the overuse of exclusionary discipline results in a cyclical series of removals. Thus, the repeated removals from school directly affect the educational experiences of the student, and the school system and society are impacted as well.

According to Schiff (2018), policies based on zero-tolerance may include even minor disciplinary violations that were not the initial focus. EDPs are ineffective in reducing negative behavior by students who receive such consequences (Schiff, 2018). “Zero-tolerance discipline relies on suspension and expulsion, also called exclusionary

discipline,” which punishes students by denying access to classrooms and exiling them from the school environment (Nussbaum, 2018, para. 2).

With the initiation of zero-tolerance policies in school discipline came the initiation of a culture that aimed to manage student behavior using punitive and exclusionary practices (Armour, 2016). Armour (2016) reported that 79% of the schools in the nation have adopted zero-tolerance policies that address major violations such as violence, alcohol, and drugs. EDPs are associated with zero-tolerance school discipline policies implemented in response to violent school events, such as the school shooting at Columbine High School (Armour, 2016).

Moreover, zero-tolerance policies in public school systems lead to high exclusionary discipline use, specifically impacting expulsion and suspension rates (Thompson, 2016). Students who have experienced expulsion or suspension are more likely to be involved with the prison system than students who have not been disciplined using exclusionary practices (Thompson, 2016). Thompson (2016) found an increase in expulsions and out-of-school suspensions due to the implementation of zero-tolerance policies, which has led to other negative outcomes.

The intent of zero-tolerance discipline policies was to increase school safety and to reduce disruptive behavior (Armour, 2016). Mallett (2016) explained that student codes of conduct outline behaviors expected of students as well as behaviors that are inappropriate and not permitted in the school community. Additionally, Nese et al. (2020) stated that although the overuse of exclusionary discipline has been addressed, there is still evidence of persistent overuse. Thus, Manassah et al. (2018) reported that federal and

state agencies made recommendations for schools to reduce the use of EDPs in favor of alternative practices.

Repeatedly removing a student from learning activities promotes a negative student–teacher relationship that impacts student learning (Wymer et al., 2020). An alternative approach to the use of EDPs has been made in some educational settings to reduce the use of student removal (Wymer et al., 2020). The use of soft exclusionary strategies that are not official expulsions result in a student being excluded from classroom learning activities (Wymer et al., 2020). A soft exclusionary practice reduces the opportunity for a child to learn from the activity or experience they should be engaged in during the school day (Wymer et al., 2020). According to Thompson (2016), suspension is one of the first steps in a cycle with short- and long-term repercussions. This cycle for the suspended student includes “academic disengagement, academic failure, dropout, and delinquency” (Thompson, 2016, para. 2). According to Armour (2016), the repeated use of EDPs results in 31% of students with one or more suspensions or expulsions failing a grade at least once.

The application of EDPs may be subjective to the school authority assigning the student discipline, especially in situations with a discretionary category. According to Mallett (2016), repeated use of EDPs influences some students to continue the cycle of noncompliant behaviors to the school student code of conduct. Moreover, Gregory et al. (2016) reported that each additional exclusionary discipline that a student experiences further decreases the student’s odds of graduating high school by 20%.

Local school districts develop and implement school discipline policies based on guidelines from the state and federal school discipline guidelines (Mallett, 2016). During the time when the No Child Left Behind Act was in effect, the school discipline mindset developed that those students who misbehaved should be removed so that teachers could focus on the remaining students (Armour, 2016). However, Armour (2016) reported that the discipline consequence of a student behavior is determined by the school administrator in a particular school.

Restorative Discipline Overview

RD is an inclusionary and nonpunitive alternative to EDPs. Mansfield et al. (2018) determined that taking a restorative approach to discipline was the best method to begin alleviating discipline gaps. Reyneke (2020) explored school disciplinary strategies for dealing with challenging student behavior and concluded that implementing restorative practices could lead to the prevention of exclusionary discipline problems. Wymer et al. (2020) stated that RD is an alternative way to address student behavior while reducing use of EDPs.

RD practices provide an impactful environment for students to practice the social–emotional skills that build a strong sense of community. RD allows for connectedness, a sense of being wanted, belonging, and engagement in the learning process (Armour, 2016). RD practices include the goal of reducing EDP in schools and are used to reduce inappropriate student behaviors (Baule, 2020; Green et al., 2018). Gregory et al. (2016) stated that RD allows for the development of relationships between educators and students. Armour (2016) stated that when a teacher or principal knows the

backstory of a student's life, it promotes understanding and decreases the misjudgment of responses in behaviors expressed by the student. Manassah et al. (2018) and Gregory et al. (2016) noted that intervention programs, such as RD, are more likely to be integrated into daily instructional practices rather than as a stand-alone instructional curriculum. Therefore, K–12 school principals ensure that a system is in place to ensure teachers and staff are trained and capable of applying targeted practices within the academic and nonacademic settings.

Positive Behavior Intervention Support and Restorative Discipline

Positive behavior intervention support (PBIS) is a form of RD practices focusing on positive responses to violations of student code of conduct and prevention (Thompson, 2016). Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018) stated that structural interventions, such as PBIS, have been effective in producing positive changes in student behavior. According to Armour (2016), EDPs are less likely to be used when school principals are open to preventive alternatives such as PBIS and RD.

PBIS is focused on meeting the needs of students with more serious behavior problems and provides the most intense and individualized interventions (Mitchell et al., 2018). The established relationship of PBIS and RD provides research-based support for the fidelity of RD as a viable addition to the repertoire of disciplinary approaches available to K–12 school principals (Gagnon et al., 2020). While PBIS provides for the reduction of the use of EDPs, Kittelman et al. (2019) indicated there is still a need for other systems and programs that directly address the needs of students when they are removed from the classroom setting. Nese et al. (2020) posed that the traditional process

does not provide an opportunity for remediation or reconciliation, denies students opportunity for academic progress, promotes deficiencies, does not address the core of the problem behavior, and promotes increasing recidivism rates.

According to Kittelman et al. (2019), implementing PBIS could be a possible means of identifying mental health practices provided to students with such needs. Nese et al. (2020) stated that students, teachers, and school principals are in need of EDP alternatives that still provide the opportunity for students to continue to learn and to receive behavior intervention supports that promote positive changes in behavior. The desired changes in student behavior are realized by schools that consistently implement the fundamental components of PBIS (Goldin & McDaniel, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2016).

Student Behaviors and RD

Based on a national survey, 44% of teachers left their career as a result of the negative and disruptive student behaviors in the classroom (Armour, 2016). Nese et al. (2020) explained that teachers who overused exclusionary discipline were more exhausted emotionally and less confident in their ability to manage student behaviors. Wymer et al. (2020) explained that eliminating exclusionary discipline strategies does not provide support to teachers to help them manage the negative student behaviors in the classroom. Reyneke (2020) noted that some teachers do not know how to promote positive behavior in students. Thus, Armour (2016) reported that 50% of principals leave their jobs within the first 3 years due to issues with student behavior management.

Professional Development on Successful Implementation of Restorative Discipline

PD of the selected discipline intervention frameworks is vital for successful implementation and target goals to be accomplished. According to Nese et al. (2020), improvements in staff retention, student engagement in learning, and student instructional time are positive results of effective PD on improving classroom management for teachers and administrators. Short et al. (2018) identified the need for staff refresher training in intervention programs such as RD for successful implementation. Weaver and Swank (2020) said that the lack of formal training can be a limitation for integrating RD practices within the school campus and classrooms. Horner and Macaya (2018) reported that PD and training were insufficient to ensure that the discipline intervention strategies are adopted successfully and able to be implemented by the teachers and staff. O'Reilly (2019) noted that receiving training in structured tier systems, such as PBIS, do not ensure that implementation is done in an effective manner. Horner and Macaya (2018) suggested that a coach could support the teacher in ways to provide instruction, to provide for the specific needs of an individual student, or to engage in effective classroom management procedures. O'Reilly (2019) noted that the organizational system of the school campus should provide for a designated support staff to serve in the lead capacity as a coach to reach a level of implementation that makes a positive impact in the achievement of its students.

Social–Emotional Learning and RD

SEL promote a positive instructional environment without impacting the learning of most of the students (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). By integrating SEL and RD

into the school academic instructional curriculum, Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018) proposed that the use of SEL approaches improves students' abilities to regulate emotions and to understand social interactions and that social skills instruction is important for a healthy school environment. Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018) also emphasized that a prerequisite for academic achievement is a positive school environment. Riley (2018) reported that many schools are already incorporating SEL programs or components of SEL curricula. According to Riley (2018), the integration of RD with the SEL programs enhance the impact of these programs. Therefore, to implement SEL effectively, the staff and teachers need to know that the school leadership has a high priority for this aspect of student learning.

Implementation of Nonexclusionary Discipline Interventions

Successful implementation of nonexclusionary discipline interventions requires the buy-in of all staff, especially those with an assigned responsibility in dealing with student behavior and discipline. Schools with high exclusionary discipline rates had lower academic quality (Nese et al., 2020). Gahungu (2018) noted that the successful implementation of nonexclusionary discipline policies can only happen when principals and teachers are equally committed to its success. Wymer et al. (2020) identified the following three key positive behavioral interventions that can be foundational to a non-exclusionary discipline intervention approach: (a) strategies that focus on relationships, (b) understanding the why of the behavior, and (c) the use restorative practices promote change in the way discipline is implemented.

For a non-traditional program such as RD to be successful in a school campus, the K-12 principal must be invested in each step of the implementation process (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). The K-12 school principal should have a formal orientation and thorough understanding about the program in order to be able to effectively train school staff. It is also very important that the school principal is involved in all critical decisions regarding the program (Garnett et al., 2018). The implementation of the program is vital in that it defines how the teachers and staff are trained and supported in their knowledge and ability to use the program within the classrooms and other areas of the school community (Armour, 2016). Thus, these critical decisions include those that determine the program guidelines and indicators for program use; however, one of the most essential decisions is how the program will be implemented.

According to Evanovich and Scott (2016), one of the first challenges of new program implementation is changing the actions and behaviors of the adults or staff. When the adult behavior is not producing adequate student success, a change must take place in what the adult is doing (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). K-12 school principals are responsible for promoting the change in the adult behavior (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). Therefore, according to Evanovich and Scott (2016), the actions of the K-12 school principal may cause conflict and resistance among the staff if the proposed process is not presented with understanding and logic.

Restorative Discipline Implementation in Project Site

K-12 principals use their instructional leadership practices for teaching, modeling, and providing feedback to the teachers and staff to support the integration of academic

and non-academic instructional strategies in the school campus. Armour (2016) reported that after the implementation of RD in the state of the project site, the Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue established 13 best practices that support RD implementation within school settings. Six of the targeted 13 best practices align with this project study of how K-12 school principals could implement instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs (Hashim et al., 2018). According to Armour (2016), RD is a philosophy and system-wide intervention based on the development of positive relationships. Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018) noted that relationship building creates healthy school climates that promote student success in their educational experiences. Secondly, the goal of RD is to change the climate of the school (Armour, 2016). RD incorporates the use of a whole school, multi-tiered approach which addresses more than isolated and individual student behaviors (Schiff, 2018). Thirdly, according to Armour (2016), a whole school approach in which training is available to all school staff and students is essential for the successful implementation of RD. Short et al. (2018) reported that RD provided positive learning opportunities for students and staff. Fourth, RD requires an active leadership response team which includes the K-12 school principal (Armour, 2016). Acosta et al. (2019) indicated that RD requires actions by the K-12 school principal to support the implementation process and facilitate critical dialogue. Next, RD uses a data system that is essential in identifying the discipline trends of the campus so that problems may be identified by the K-12 school principal (Armour, 2016). According to Riley (2018), sharing information and providing feedback with staff is important as a leader implementing RD. Finally, with RD, the K-12 school principal

trains and involves staff in various RD strategies and processes (Armour, 2016).

According to Nese et al. (2020), RD aspects such as restorative circles and restorative chats focus on the harms, needs, and causes of the student behavior.

Instructional Leadership and Staff Support

K-12 school principals should demonstrate active support to their teachers and staff during all phases of any approach to promote a positive change in the well-being of the school, specifically the students. Often, this comes through modeling the principles that have been identified as vital for the success of the program (Riley, 2018). School principals can support staff by showing compassion and empathy (Riley, 2018). By using the restorative strategy of circles, school principals can promote relationship building through active listening, connections, and leadership (Riley, 2018). The circle strategy can be used during staff meetings, retreats, and PD sessions (Riley, 2018). Riley (2018) encouraged the use of data to track office referrals, student suspensions, and other disciplinary techniques to help evaluate the impact of RD or other structured discipline approach.

Another strategy that provides support to the staff and teachers is the sharing of anecdotal stories that detail the success and lessons learned in the implementation of the program within the school. The school principal can encourage the staff to share all successes and reflective feedback so that it can be used to strengthen the entire school. Thus, success stories can motivate and encourage resistant or reluctant staff members to become engaged and open to applying the strategies in their interactions with the students.

Implications

A policy recommendation was developed for K-12 school principals to use new strategies on how to apply instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP. The content of the policy recommendation includes new findings that may result in the reduction of EDP. The findings may help K-12 school principals to apply instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP. Senior school district administrators may use the findings to support K-12 school principals to reduce the use of EDP by providing funding and PD training. The findings of this project study were summarized in the policy recommendation that will be presented to K-12 school principals at the project site (Appendix A). The findings from this project may lead to positive social change by helping K-12 school principals to reduce the use of EDP. Implications for positive social change include strategies for K-12 school principals to apply to reduce the use of EDP for students to graduate from school

Summary

At the time of this study there was a gap in practice regarding K-12 school principals and the strategies they use to reduce the use of EDP. K-12 principals are responsible for the well-being of all students and staff in their school. There was an increase in the use of EDP in the K-12 public schools. PD in alternative, non-punitive discipline methods, such as RD was available to K-12 school principals at this project site, which was a suburban public school district located in a southern state in the United States. The problem was that the use of EDP had been increasing. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of K-12 school principals regarding their use of

instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP. The instructional leadership model of Hallinger and Murphy was the conceptual framework, which has three dimensions: (a) defining the school mission, (b) managing the instructional program, and (c) promoting a positive school learning climate. The research question focused on how K-12 school principals implement instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP. Purposive sampling was used to select 10 K-12 school principals who were trained in RD and were school administrators for at least 2 years.

In Section 2, a description of the methodology for this project study including data collection and analysis are presented. In Section 3, a description of the project including data findings are presented. Finally, in Section 4 reflections as a learner during this project study as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the project as it addresses the problem and the implications for future research opportunities are presented.

Section 2: The Methodology

K–12 school principals are the primary instructional leaders of a school campus. There has been an increase in the use of EDPs in K–12 public schools. PD in alternative, nonpunitive discipline methods, such as RD, was available to K–12 school principals at this project site, which is a suburban public school district located in a southern state. The problem is that the use of EDPs was still increasing. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of K–12 school principals regarding their use of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs. In this section, I present the research design and approach and data collection and analysis process.

Research Design and Approach

Qualitative research is a social science approach used to address a research problem with an emphasis on the collection of data that uses inductive thinking, places importance on understanding the viewpoint of the subject, and occurs in natural settings (see Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). A basic qualitative research design was selected for this project study. A basic qualitative research design is used by researchers interested in how people interpret their experiences (see Merriam, 2009). Additionally, a basic qualitative research design helps to understand a specific phenomenon (see Yin, 2017).

Justification of Research Design

The central phenomenon of this project study was the perceptions of K–12 school principals regarding their use of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs. This project study was bounded by the perceptions of K–12 school principals on the reduction of the use of EDPs. A qualitative research design was appropriate to

examine the perceptions of K–12 school principals regarding their use of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs.

A basic qualitative research approach was used to conduct this project study because the research question was qualitative in nature and focused on K–12 school principals’ perceptions regarding their use of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs. Other research designs were given consideration, such as ethnography, phenomenology, case study, and grounded theory (see Garnett et al., 2019). Ethnography is used to examine a phenomenon over an extended time with a focus on an entire cultural group (see Trochim, 2006). Phenomenology was not selected because the purpose of this project study was to examine the instructional leadership practices of K–12 school principals who received training in RD practices to reduce EDPs. According to Yin (2017), case studies are the preferred method when researchers are asking why and how questions. Finally, grounded theory was not selected because the purpose of this study was not to develop a theory (see Trochim, 2006).

Research Question

The following research question guided this project study:

RQ: How do K–12 school principals describe how they implement instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs?

Participants and Sampling

The setting for this study was a suburban public school district located in a southern state. The population for this project study was 53 K–12 school principals. I purposefully selected 10 K–12 school principals who consented to be interviewed and

who met the participation criteria. Purposeful sampling is about selecting participants who understand a phenomenon (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), participants should have experience with the phenomenon under study. The central criteria to select participants is to consider those who may inform the study's research question (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The selection criteria included K–12 school principals who (a) attended PD on RD and (b) have been school principals at the project site for at least 2 years.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a sample size of three to 10 participants is sufficient for a qualitative research design in exploring a phenomenon. In a qualitative study, the participants should contribute the most to answering the research question (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I invited 10 participants who were able to respond to the questions included in the interview protocol (Appendix B). The participants for this project study were K–12 school principals who were familiar with RD and EDPs. All 10 school principals who were invited agreed to participate in the study.

I received institutional review board (IRB) approval from the research site to interview K–12 school principals. According to a senior district leader responsible for IRB at the study site, all school leaders at the district have district email addresses and a synopsis of their curriculum vitae is shown on each school's website (senior administrator, personal communication, July 31, 2021). I also received IRB approval from Walden University to start the data collection process (#05-08-22-0609300). Upon IRB approval from Walden University, I used the website of each school at the project

study site to create a list of email addresses for K–12 school principals who met the participation criteria based on the information provided on the website of the school district. I sent out emails and included in the email information about this project study such as its purpose and significance. In the same email, I requested those who agreed to participate in interviews to respond with “I consent.”

Research ethics must be implemented to protect the rights of participants and minimize harm (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I obtained certification from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative program before I began collecting data. To protect the rights of the participants and minimize harm, research ethics were implemented (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). During this project study, ethical issues such as informed consent and confidentiality were addressed. The names of the participants, schools, or school district were not included in the interview transcripts. I used a unique letter followed by a number to refer to each participant, e.g., A1 to refer to the first participant. Using this strategy, I knew who provided the responses to the interview questions. I informed the participants that participation in this project study was voluntary. I also informed the participants that all interview data would be treated confidentially. I stored the transcripts of the interviews electronically in my residence in a password-protected file on my personal computer. All files containing the interview transcripts are encrypted. Per the Walden University protocol, all data will be kept secure for 5 years. I will destroy all interview data after 5 years.

Data Collection

The instructional leadership model was the conceptual framework for this project study. This model has three dimensions: (a) defining the school mission, (b) managing the instructional program, and (c) promoting a positive school learning climate. The instructional leadership model is a principal-centered model because leadership practices are linked to academic achievement and school outcomes (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). I used this conceptual framework to examine how K–12 school principals implement their instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs by applying the instructional leadership model’s aforementioned three dimensions. I used the three dimensions of the instructional leadership model to develop the interview protocol containing interview questions to answer the research question, and I used these dimensions to analyze the interview data.

I used the conceptual framework to develop the interview protocol, which contained open-ended interview questions. Additionally, I developed the interview protocol because interviews were the sole data collection instrument (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Nonparticipating retired K–12 school principals from the project study site were asked to review the interview questions for clarity and ambiguity. After receiving their feedback, I updated the interview questions and sent out the updated questions via email to each reviewer for further review and comment. A final version of the interview protocol was then created (see Appendix B).

Those participants who replied to my initial email with the phrase “I consent” were invited to interviews. Data were collected via semistructured interviews using the

Zoom online conferencing tool, which allows both audio and video recordings. I used the interview protocol to ask the same interview questions to each participant to answer the research question.

The semistructured interviews took place on a day and at a time agreed upon with each participant. The interviews were approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour in length. The interviews were audio recorded with participant permission. The participants were encouraged to ask questions during the interviews. Also, the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The identity of the participants was not used during the data collection process or as part of the finding reporting.

Establishing a Researcher–Participant Working Relationship

I was a novice researcher when I conducted the interviews. I made sure the participants felt comfortable to honestly answer the interview questions. During the interviews, I developed a professional researcher–participant working relationship with all participants.

Systems for Keeping Track of Data

While keeping track of data, priority was given to protecting the confidentiality and privacy of each participant. The participants' personal information and interview data are protected. I used a letter followed by a number for each specific interview participant. Each participant's recorded session was stored on my personal laptop with copies stored on a flash drive.

Role of the Researcher

I have been an educator for over 20 years, working with students with challenging intellectual disorders, severe behaviors, and persistent discipline issues which have resulted in exclusionary discipline consequences. These experiences have provided me with awareness of the critical issue regarding the high rate of EDPs. Currently, I am a principal of a disciplinary alternative education program serving students in Grades 3–12. The goal of my campus team was that each student successfully returns to their home campus, continues their academic progress to completion, and becomes productive citizens of society. The participants in this study were not compensated. The credibility of this study was reinforced by ensuring that participants did not feel coerced into sharing their perspectives.

Sufficiency of Data Collection

I interviewed 10 participants who met the selection criteria. The sample size of 10 participants for this project study was sufficient to answer the research question (see Connelly, 2016). As the interviews were analyzed, the responses from the 10 participants started to overlap signaling the potential to reach data saturation.

Data Analysis

I transcribed verbatim the interviews from the audio recording files, and I assigned a unique number to each participant. A1 referred to the first participant, and A10 referred to the 10th participant. Using A1 to A10 as pseudonyms protected the confidentiality of the participants (see Connelly, 2016). Each interview transcript was

saved in a password-protected Microsoft Word document on my personal computer; I am the only one with the password.

I used the NVivo program to organize and analyze the interview transcripts. I read each interview transcript multiple times to understand the participants' responses, as recommended by Connelly (2016). I searched thoroughly the interview transcripts to identify words and phrases that represented recurring ideas from the responses of the participants. I used different colors to highlight similar words and phrases. I charted similar phrases and keywords and identified categories and subcategories during the coding process. I used axial coding and identified common words and phrases (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using axial coding, I identified subcategories that emerged from the participants' similar responses (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, I used axial coding to identify common words, phrases, categories, and subcategories.

I reviewed all words, phrases, categories, and subcategories for consistency. I examined all the transcripts using the conceptual framework and the literature review. The instructional leadership model was the conceptual framework for this project study. Based on this conceptual framework, K–12 school principals are instructional leaders who: (a) define the school mission, which requires them to frame and communicate school goals regarding student discipline; (b) manage the instructional program, which requires they supervise and evaluate instruction, coordinate curriculum, and monitor student behaviors and progress; and (c) promote a positive school learning climate, which entails efforts to protect instructional time, promote PD, maintain high visibility, provide incentives for teachers and learning, and enforce academic standards including student

discipline. Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership model is a school principal-centered model, which was appropriate for this project study regarding principals' instructional leadership practices, RD, and EDPs. I used this conceptual framework to examine how K–12 school principals implement their instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs by applying the instructional leadership model's aforementioned dimensions. Specifically, I used the dimensions of the instructional leadership model to analyze the interview data. I used thematic analysis for emergent themes. Additionally, I reviewed the themes to confirm they were consistent.

Evidence of Quality of Data

Trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, and confirmability are important to ensure the trustworthiness of this project study (see Connelly, 2016). A different challenge in qualitative research is the trustworthiness of findings being generalized or transferred to other situations (see Connelly, 2016). Internal validity occurred with an external audit conducted by professionals not associated with the research study (see Connelly, 2016). K-12 school principals who were not interviewed and were not associated with the project study reviewed the findings (see Connelly, 2016).

Credibility

Member checking was conducted to ensure the credibility of the data collected for this project study. Member checking ensured that the participants' responses were a true reflection of their perceptions. Thus, interviews were transcribed verbatim and member checking was conducted for each participants' interview. By conducting member checking, I ensured that personal biases were not reflected in the interview transcripts. I

used peer review to ensure the credibility of the findings. Peer reviewed is a process to solicit input from qualified colleagues on the progress of the study in terms of data analysis and potential findings. No significant changes to the findings resulted from the peer review process.

Confirmability

Confirmability was established by reviewing participants' responses to the interview questions. Confirmability was established through the responses from the interviews of the different participants. I accurately represented the interview data to reduce the researcher's bias (see Connelly, 2016). Confirmability was ensured through an external audit conducted by professionals who were not associated with the research study (see Connelly, 2016).

Dependability

I addressed concerns of dependability by interviewing multiple participants (see Connelly, 2016). I kept a reflexivity journal during the interviews. I examined my thinking and feelings, and recorded predispositions, emotions, and reactions to notice, reduce, and avoid biases and reactivity.

Discrepant Cases

I considered all data and found no discrepant cases (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As a result, no discrepant cases were presented in the findings. Discrepant cases may be used by school officials at the project site to make decisions regarding EDP. Policymakers may use discrepant cases to better support policies that help reduce the use of exclusionary school discipline by the K-12 school principals.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

I used purposeful sampling to select the participants. I assumed that the participants were familiar with RD and EDP. Moreover, I assumed that participants provided honest responses. I only interviewed K-12 school principals. A limitation of this project study was that I did not interview teachers or students. Another limitation was the sample size of 10 participants. The scope of this project study was a suburban school district. The themes of this study may not be transferred or generalized to other similar public school districts.

Data Analysis Results

RQ: How do K-12 school principals describe how they implement instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP?

Theme 1: K-12 School Principals Implemented Their Instructional Leadership Practices to Reduce the Use of EDP by Building a Sense of Community

All participants implemented their instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP. For example, the participants worked with teachers to help students improve students' behaviors. A1 created a school environment conducive to student academic success and worked with teachers to reduce the use of EDP. According to A1, EDP were ineffective because students were dropping out of school. A2 referred to "zero-tolerance" resulting in the overuse of EDP. A2 agreed with A1 that EDP were ineffective in reducing negative behaviors of students. Similar A1 and A2, participant A3 said that EDP were overused at the school, and those students who were suspended had academic disengagement and academic failure. A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, A8, A9, and A10

implemented sense of community and their instructional leadership practices to work with teachers and students to reduce the use of EDP. Thus, all participants implemented their instructional leadership practices to build a sense of community, as a school disciplinary strategy, to reduce the use of EDP at the school by building a sense of community. Details regarding specific actions reported by each participant in support of this theme are presented below.

According to participant A1, instructional leadership practices must be implemented to reduce the use of EDP by building a sense of community. A1 referred to the application of “a prevention and intervention model to reduce the use of EDP by building a sense of community.” A1 further said that “instructional leadership practices mean to work with teachers and students to improve student learning outcomes by building a sense of community.” One of the instructional leadership practices that A1 implemented was to create a school environment conducive to student academic success. A1 worked with teachers, as an instructional leader, to reduce the use of EDP by building a sense of community. An example provided by A1 was that an instructional leader needs to work with teachers to support students’ academic growth. EDP were used as a school discipline action to remove students from the classroom for 1 to 5 school days, which was ineffective because students were dropping out of school. A1 reported that EDP had negative outcomes. As a result, A1 applied their instructional leadership practices to work with teachers to reduce the use of EDP.

A2 revealed that their school mission was “zero-tolerance,” which resulted in the overuse of EDP. According to A2, many students were suspended even for minor

disciplinary violations. Moreover, A2 reported that the use of zero-tolerance was ineffective at the school because the academic achievement of students was reduced. According to A2, EDP were ineffective in reducing negative behaviors of students. According to A2, zero-tolerance did not reduce disruptive behaviors. Additionally, A2 said EDP were overused. As a result, A2 implemented their instructional leadership practices to work with teachers to reduce the use of EDP by building a sense of community.

According to A3, EDP were overused at the school. A3 reported that suspended students had academic disengagement and academic failure. Moreover, A3 noticed that dropout rates increased at the school. As a result, A3 decided to work with teachers and students to reduce the use of EDP. A3 stated that strategies from the state and federal school discipline guidelines were used. Moreover, A3 said that a school disciplinary strategy was for teachers to help students by building a sense of community. Therefore, A3 implemented their instructional leadership practices to work with teachers and students to reduce the use of EDP by following state and federal school discipline guidelines for teachers to build a sense of community for students.

A4 reported that school disciplinary strategies, based on state and federal school discipline guidelines, were implemented to reduce the use of EDP. According to A4, instructional leadership practices were implemented to work with teachers and students to reduce the use of EDP because teachers were complaining about the challenging behaviors of students. Furthermore, A4 said that a school disciplinary strategy, such as to build a sense of community, was used as an alternative way to address student behaviors.

A4 mentioned the need to help students build a sense of community. A4 implemented the building of a sense of community as a school disciplinary strategy to reduce the use of EDP at the school. Thus, A4 implemented their instructional leadership practices to work with teachers to use sense of community as a school disciplinary strategy to reduce the use of EDP at the school.

A5 reported that an effective school disciplinary strategy for teachers to help students improve their behaviors was to build a sense of community for students. A5 used their instructional leadership practices to help teachers support students by building a sense of community in the classrooms. According to A5, a school disciplinary strategy such as building a sense of community at the school by teachers may reduce the use of EDP. Thus, A5 implemented their instructional leadership practices to work with teachers to use sense of community as a school disciplinary strategy to reduce the use of EDP at the school.

According to A6, sense of community was used as a school disciplinary strategy to reduce the use of EDP at the school. A6 supported teachers to engage student in the learning process. Moreover, A6 implemented their instructional leadership practices to set as a school goal to reduce EDP. An example provided by A6 was that teachers needed support for the development of professional relationships between teachers and students. A6 not only worked with teachers but also with students to “decrease the misjudgment of responding to students’ behaviors.” A6 supported teachers to build a sense of community as a school disciplinary strategy to reduce the use of EDP at the school. Therefore, A6 implemented their instructional leadership practices to work with teachers to build a

sense of community, as a school disciplinary strategy, to reduce the use of EDP at the school.

According to A7, teachers were leaving the school because of the negative and disruptive students' behaviors in the classroom. Moreover, A7 said that EDP were overused and the majority of the students were suspended from classes. A7 implemented their instructional leadership practices to work with teachers to build a sense of community to reduce the use of EDP at the school. A7 explained that teachers were challenged with students' behaviors, and this administrator supported teachers to manage students' behaviors in the classrooms by building a sense of community, as a school disciplinary strategy, to reduce the use of EDP at the school. Thus, A7 implemented their instructional leadership practices to support teachers to build a sense of community to improve students' behaviors at the school.

A8 said that students' behaviors at the school were increasing and EDP were overused. A8 decided to support teachers to reduce negative and disruptive students' behaviors in the classrooms. According to A8, a school disciplinary strategy to reduce EDP is to build a sense of community. Thus, A8 implemented their instructional leadership practices to help teachers build a sense of community to reduce the use of EDP at the school.

A9 said that a school disciplinary strategy for teachers to help students improve their behaviors was needed to reduce EDP at the school. A9 decided to support teachers to build a sense of community for students to improve their behaviors in the classrooms. According to A9, their instructional leadership practices were implemented to support

teachers by building a sense of community in the classrooms. Thus, A9 implemented their instructional leadership practices to work with teachers to use sense of community as a school disciplinary strategy to reduce the use of EDP at the school.

A10 implemented school disciplinary strategies based on state and federal school discipline guidelines because EDP were overused at the school. A10 worked with teachers to reduce the use of EDP. According to A4, instructional leadership practices were implemented to work with teachers to build a sense of community with students in the classroom. A10 implemented building a sense of community as a school disciplinary strategy, which was used as an alternative way to address students' behaviors in the classrooms. Thus, A10 implemented their instructional leadership practices to build a sense of community as a school disciplinary strategy to reduce the use of EDP at the school.

Theme 2: The Benefits of Implementing Leadership Practices Include Building a Sense of Community, Supporting Teachers to Reduce the Use of EDP, and Helping Students Improve Their Behaviors

K-12 school principals, at the project site, reported that building a sense of community, supporting teachers, and helping students are three benefits of implementing instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP. The participants said teachers need support from K-12 school principals to reduce the use of EDP, and these principals need to work with both teachers and students for students to improve their behaviors at the school by building a sense of community, which should be a school goal.

Additionally, the participants implemented instructional practices to support teachers to

build a sense of community to manage students' behaviors because students who were suspended were dropping out of school. In conclusion, the benefits of implementing instructional leadership practices include a sense of community, supporting teachers to reduce the use of EDP, and helping students improve their behaviors. According to all participants, K-12 principals at the project site, built a sense of community, supported teachers to reduce the use of EDP, and helped students improve their behaviors. Specific input from the participants that support this second theme are presented in the remaining part of this subsection.

A1 mentioned that teachers need support to reduce the use of EDP. Moreover, A1 reported that principals need to work with both teachers and students for students to improve their behaviors at the school. According to A1, building a sense of community is an excellent strategy to use to support teachers to reduce the use of EDP, and help students improve their behaviors. Building a sense of community should be a school goal, according to A1. Supporting teachers to reduce the use of EDP should be a priority of school principals. A1 mentioned that helping students improve their behaviors should be the major goal of school administrators. Thus, A1 built a sense of community, supported teachers to reduce the use of EDP, and helped students improve their behaviors.

On the same line of action, A2 implemented instructional practices to support teachers to reduce the use of EDP. According to A2, instructional leaders have the skills to work with teachers to manage students' behaviors in the classroom. A2 mentioned EDP being used to remove students from the classrooms even for minor misbehaviors. As a result, A2 applied their skills to support teachers to reduce EDP because "suspending

students for 1 to 5 school days was an ineffective strategy.” According to A2, many of the students who were suspended were also dropping out of school because “they missed so many lessons because they were suspended.” The goal of participant A2 was to reduce the use of EDP because “EDP had negative school outcomes such as dropouts.” In addition, A2 achieved the goal of reducing EDP by supporting teachers to manage students’ behaviors in the classroom which helped students improve their behaviors at the school. A2 encouraged teachers to work with students to build a sense of community. A2 indicated that the benefits of implementing leadership practices were to build a sense of community at the school, support teachers to reduce the use of EDP, and help students improve their behaviors. According to A2, the school mission was zero-tolerance and teachers were referring students to the principal’s office concerning students’ behaviors. In that context, A2 considered that teachers overused EDP and many students were missing instructional time. Moreover, A2 applied leadership skills to work with teachers to reduce disruptive behaviors because, in their view, “the benefits of implementing leadership practices include building a sense of community, supporting teachers to reduce the use of EDP, and helping students improve their behaviors.”

For A3 a major challenge as a school principal was that EDP were overused at the school because according to the mission of the school “misbehaviors would not be tolerated.” Participant A3 found that students who were suspended many times “lost important instructional time and did not pass state tests.” Furthermore, A3 said “EDP had a negative effect on students’ academic achievement, and many students who were frequently suspended dropped out of school.” A3 also noted that “the benefit of

implementing instructional leadership practices is to work well with teachers and students to reduce EDP.” A3 supported teachers to help students improve their behaviors in the classrooms to reduce the use of EDP. Additionally, A3 emphasized that the benefits of implementing leadership practices include the reduction of the use of EDP. Furthermore, A3 provided teachers with guidelines containing strategies, such as ways to build a sense of community, from the state and federal school discipline guidelines to apply in the classrooms to help students improve their behaviors. A3 said teachers implemented a school disciplinary strategy to help students build a sense of community. Finally, A3 implied “the benefits of implementing leadership practices are to support teachers to help students reduce the use of EDP.”

Like A1, A2, and A3, participant A4 found that “the benefits of implementing instructional leadership practices are to reduce EDP.” Similar to the response provide by A3, A4 supported teachers to apply “school disciplinary strategies, such as building a sense of community, found in state and federal school discipline guidelines to reduce the use of EDP.” For participant A4 the benefits of instructional leadership practices were “to keep students at the school to pass state tests and graduate.” Moreover, as A4 mentioned, “a major benefit of instructional practices is to work with teachers and students to reduce the use of EDP.” Furthermore, A4 found that after the implementation of instructional practices to reduce EDP “teachers were complaining less about the challenging behaviors of students because teachers were building a sense of community to address student behaviors.” According to A4, “teachers need to help students build a sense of community at the school to reduce EDP.” As A4 reported “building a sense of community, as a

school disciplinary strategy, helped with the reduction of the use of EDP at the school, which was one of the benefits of implementing instructional leadership practices.” Thus, A4 found that a benefit of leadership practices was to build a sense of community by supporting teachers to reduce the use of EDP, and by helping students improve their behaviors.

Similar to A3 and A4, participant A5 supported teachers to use effective school disciplinary strategies to help students improve their behaviors in the classroom. Moreover, as A5 indicated, teachers were supported to build a sense of community at the school. Additionally, A5 emphasized that “the benefits of instructional leadership practices are numerous; however, the school goal is to support teachers to help students build a sense of community for students to graduate from school by not being suspended.” As A5 reported, “the benefit of applying a school disciplinary strategy, such as building a sense of community at the school by teachers, reduced the use of EDP”. Thus, according to A5, the benefits of implementing leadership practices include building a sense of community, supporting teachers to reduce the use of EDP, and helping students improve their behaviors.

A6 indicated that the benefits of implementing leadership practices should be applied to reduce the use of EDP. According to A6, the benefits of implementing leadership practices include support for teachers to help students improve their behaviors. Moreover, A6 supported teachers to “built a sense of community to reduce the use of EDP.” As A6 emphasized, “the benefit of implementing instructional leadership practices is to set school goals to reduce EDP.” The benefit of implementing instructional

leadership practices was to identify the needs of teachers and to support them to develop professional relationships with students. According to A6, a benefit of leadership practices was to work with teachers and students to help students improve their behaviors at school to “succeed academically.” Additionally, according to A6, “by supporting teachers and students build a sense of community, EDP were reduced at the school.” To summarize, the benefits of implementing leadership practices that A6 reported include building a sense of community, supporting teachers, and helping students improve their behaviors in order to reduce the use of EDP.

Participant A7 “... implemented instructional leadership practices and worked with teachers to build a sense of community to reduce the use of EDP at this school.” As A7 found, the benefits of implementing instructional leadership practices were many, such as student academic success and reduction of EDP. Specifically, as A7 found, because teachers were supported to build a sense of community, the use of EDP was reduced and student academic achievement improved. Moreover, A7 reported EDP were not overused and more students participated in state testing and graduated from school. A7 also stated that teachers helped students improve their behaviors. That is, because of the implementation of their instructional leadership practices, the use of EDP was reduced, and teachers were not leaving the school because of students’ behaviors in the classroom improved. Additionally, A7 mentioned that after they implemented instructional leadership practices for teachers to build a sense of community by supporting teachers, the use of EDP was reduced. Finally, as A7 reported, students improved their behaviors in the classrooms and teachers were less challenged with

students' behaviors because of the administrative support teachers received. Thus, according to A7, "the benefits of implementing instructional leadership practices include building a sense of community, supporting teachers to reduce the use of EDP, and helping students improve their behaviors."

According to A8, students' behaviors at the school improved because of "the implementation of instructional leadership practices." A8 supported teachers "to build a sense of community at the school." Participant A8 also supported students to "understand the benefits of building a sense of community." According to A8, supporting teachers and students resulted in "the reduction of the use of EDP." Moreover, as participant A8 mentioned "the reduction of the use of EDP by supporting teachers was a benefit of implementing instructional leadership practices." Another benefit of implementing instructional leadership practices identified by this participant was "the reduction of negative and disruptive students' behaviors."

Participant A9 also found that "the benefits of implementing instructional leadership practices" of K-12 school principals "are numerous and include support for teachers to help students to behave better in the classroom." Additionally, as A9 indicated, "in order to reduce the use of EDP, principals should help students improve their behaviors." Moreover, as A9 mentioned "implementing instructional leadership practices are beneficial to the school community when principals are building a sense of community." Furthermore, participant A9 was "supporting teachers to reduce the use of EDP by helping students may improve the behaviors of students" Finally, A9 emphasized that "the benefits of implementing instructional leadership practices" are focused on

building a sense of community, helping students improve their behaviors, and supporting teachers.” As A9 indicated, the end result of the benefits of implementing instructional leadership practices was the reduction of the use of EDP.

Finally, A10 implemented “building a sense of community” as a school disciplinary strategy “based on state and federal school discipline guidelines.” Participant A10 “implemented their instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP” because EDP were overused at the school. That is, participant A10 used instructional leadership practices to support teachers to help students improve their behaviors. According to A10, “instructional leadership practices are beneficial to the school when implemented to work with teachers to build a sense of community with students.” Thus, as participant A10 indicated, “the benefits of implementing instructional leadership practices are a sense of community, supporting teachers to reduce the use of EDP, and helping students improve their behaviors”.

Theme 3: Lack of Professional Development Is a Barrier of Leadership Practices on Reducing the Use of EDP

The participants perceived lack of PD as a barrier of leadership practices on reducing the use of EDP. According to the participants, PD for K-12 school principals is vital for the successful reduction of the use of EDP. Moreover, participants reported PD is necessary to accomplish school goals, such as teacher retention, student academic success, student engagement in learning, and student instructional time, and classroom management for teachers and administrators. Furthermore, participants reported PD is needed to ensure that student discipline strategies are implemented by the teachers and

staff. Finally, the participants recommended the creation of a policy for K-12 school principals to know how to implement student discipline strategies with teachers and staff at the school. As shown in the detailed analysis below, all participants perceived lack of PD to be a barrier of implementing leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP.

According to all participants, PD for K-12 school principals is vital for the successful reduction of the use of EDP. Finally, the participants recommended a policy to be created for K-12 school principals to know how to implement student discipline strategies with teachers and staff at the school.

As participant A1 reported, insufficient PD was a barrier of leadership practices on reducing the use of EDP. According to A1, PD sessions can be used to teach school principals specific strategies on how to reduce the use of EDP. Moreover, as A1 said, PD is necessary to retain teachers and support students' academic success. Furthermore, participant A1 indicated that PD was helpful to principals by helping them to know about student engagement as part of the learning and instructional time. Participant A1 also expressed the need to know about classroom management not only for teachers but also for the administrators at the school. Consequently, A1 recommended the creation of a policy for all school principals to know how to implement student discipline strategies with teachers and staff at the school.

Participant A2 considered also that PD is necessary to know how to implement instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP. According to A2, "the lack of PD is a barrier of leadership practices on reducing the use of EDP" because PD can train K-12 school principals on "how to reduce the use of EDP." As an instructional leader, A2

set school goals to “retain teachers who experienced student discipline issues” and to “help students succeed academically.” A2 mentioned that “student engagement in learning” was one of their school goals and in order to achieve that goal they focused on “student instructional time, and classroom management for teachers.” Participant A2 also mentioned that PD on “student discipline strategies can help school principals implement specific goals by supporting teachers, staff, and students.” Finally, A2 emphasized the need to create “a policy on how to implement student discipline strategies at the school.”

According to participant A3, “a barrier of leadership practices on reducing the use of EDP is the lack of PD.” A3 perceived the lack of PD on how to reduce the use of EDP as an obstacle to “implement instructional leadership practices to achieve school goals.” Moreover, as participant A3 said, “PD is needed by school principals concerning the reduction of the use of EDP.” Furthermore, A3 emphasized that to retain teachers and to graduate students PD on student discipline strategies is necessary to school principals. Finally, as A3 indicated, “the school district should create a policy for K-12 school principals on how to implement student discipline strategies with teachers and staff at the school.”

Participant A4 provided similar responses to A1, A2, and A3. As A4 emphasized, there is “a lack of PD for school administrators on how to reduce the use of EDP.” A4 also emphasized that “PD content on student discipline strategies may help school administrators to support teachers for students to improve their behaviors.” According to participant A4, one of their school goals was teacher retention and student academic success; however, EDP were overused and negatively impacted these goals. To address

this issue, A4 “implemented instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP; however, [the implementation of] PD on what strategies to use concerning student discipline would be beneficial to school administrators.” Participant A4 strove for student engagement in learning in order for them to not miss instructional time due to suspensions and expressed the need for PD on how to support teachers regarding classroom management to reduce student discipline issues. Moreover, as A4 said “PD is needed to learn new student discipline strategies to be implemented by the teachers and staff.” Finally, participant A4 mentioned multiple times that a policy for K-12 school principals should be developed by the school district for administrators to know what strategies to implement with teachers and staff concerning student discipline.

Participant A5 agreed with previous four participants that lack of PD is as a barrier of leadership practices on reducing the use of EDP. A5 also said that PD for school administrators is necessary in order to know how to reduce the use of EDP. Furthermore, participant A5 mentioned that “PD may be helpful to school administrators to meet the needs of the school.” According to A5, “student academic success depends on student engagement in learning, and the use of EDP decreased student instructional time due to student suspensions.” Furthermore, as participant A5 mentioned, “PD for school principals regarding classroom management for teachers and administrators to know how to reduce the use of EDP is necessary.” A5 also added that “with PD on specific student discipline strategies school administrators could better support teachers and staff to reduce the use of EDP.” Participant A5 concluded that “a policy for K-12 school

principals should be created by the school district to support these administrators to know how to use new student discipline strategies to reduce the use of EDP.”

Participant A6 perceived “the lack of PD as a major barrier of instructional leadership practices on reducing the use of EDP.” As A6 said, PD is needed for administrators and teachers to learn strategies to help students improve their behaviors in the classrooms. According to A6, “PD may help administrators to successfully reduce the use of EDP.” Moreover, as participant A6 said, “PD on how to reduce the use of EDP is necessary to know how to support teachers and students.” Furthermore, A6 was “challenged with teacher retention and the overuse of EDP.” A6 mentioned that regarding student academic success and engagement in learning, “PD on how to improve student instructional time is beneficial to school administrators.” A6 also mentioned that regarding classroom management strategies for teachers and administrators to use to reduce the use of EDP, “PD for administrators may be proven beneficial to ensure that student discipline strategies are implemented by the teachers and staff.” Finally, according to participant A6, “a policy for school administrators should be created for these administrators to have a district-wide list of student discipline strategies to use with teachers and staff at the school to reduce the use of EDP.”

As participant A7 indicated, there is “a lack of PD at the school district regarding strategies to use to reduce the use of EDP.” Moreover, A7 explained that “PD on how to manage student misbehaviors at the school is needed because students are dropping out after being suspended multiple times due to receiving less instructional time.”

Additionally, participant A7 mentioned “a need to learn about strategies to use as school

administrators need to help students improve their behaviors because students' misbehaviors affect teacher retention." Furthermore, as participant A7 said, "training on how to reduce the use of EDP is absolutely necessary for school administrators to learn how to maintain order at the school."

According to participant A8, "K-12 school principals need strategies on how to successfully reduce the use of EDP." Moreover, A8 mentioned that teachers leave the school due to students' misbehaviors. As A8 suggested, "PD on how to reduce the use of EDP should be a district-wide policy in order for administrators to know how to support teachers and students." A8 also indicated that student academic success and engagement in learning affect student instructional time, and as a result "PD is beneficial to school administrators." Finally, A8 concluded the interview with a recommendation for "a policy for school administrators at the district level to be created to assist administrators by providing student discipline strategies to use with teachers and staff to reduce the use of EDP."

As participant A9 mentioned, "in order to reduce the use of EDP, school principals need PD on how to improve student instructional time." A9 further explained that the lack of PD on how to reduce the use of EDP affected student academic achievement at the school. Participant A9 also explained that school principals need "PD on how to implement instructional leadership practices to achieve school goals by reducing the use of EDP." Additionally, as A9 mentioned, "student academic achievement and teacher retention are affected by the overuse of EDP and PD is vital to learn effective student discipline strategies for students to focus on learning". Finally,

participant A9 concluded by suggesting that, “a school district-wide policy may help school administrators to learn how to implement student discipline strategies to reduce the use of EDP.”

Finally, participant A10 mentioned that “in order to reduce the overuse of EDP, PD is need on how to implement instructional leadership practices to improve students’ behaviors at the school.” A10 also mentioned “at the school district, there is lack of PD for school principals.” As participant A10 perceived, there is a lack of PD for school principals on how to address the challenge created by the overuse of EDP. A10 also perceived the need to know how to reduce the use of EDP by successfully “implementing instructional leadership practices to implement school goals.” AsA10 reported, “PD is needed to reduce the use of EDP.” Finally, as participant A10 suggested, “the creation of a policy on how to implement student discipline strategies reduce the use of EDP.”

Theme 4: K-12 School Principals Need Guidelines From Senior School District Administrators on How to Reduce the Use of EDP

All the participants reported that student discipline issues were the reason teachers overused EDP. All the participants also reported that student discipline issues affected academic achievement and instructional time. For K-12 school principals to implement instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP, guidelines are needed to help them reduce the use of EDP. Finally, all participants recommended the development of guidelines by the school district to support school principals on how to: create a positive school environment, support staff and teachers regarding student learning, implement nonexclusionary discipline interventions, deal with student behaviors and discipline, use

positive student behavioral interventions, use restorative practices to promote change in student discipline, train and support teachers and school staff on nonexclusionary discipline interventions. Participants' specific recommendations are presented in the remaining part of this subsection.

As participant A1 said, principals need guidelines on how to create a positive school environment for student learning. Additionally, A1 also indicated that guidelines on how to support staff and teachers regarding the use of EDP would be helpful. Moreover, A1 mentioned that guidelines on the implementation of nonexclusionary discipline interventions could help reduce the use of EDP at the school by knowing how to deal with student behaviors. Furthermore, A1 mentioned that principals could use guidelines on nonexclusionary discipline interventions, such as restorative practices to promote positive change in student discipline. According to participant A1, guidelines on how to support school staff on nonexclusionary discipline interventions could be used to reduce the use of EDP.

Participant A2 stated that in order to create a positive school environment and focus on student learning, guidelines could be beneficial to school principals because by using specific district-wide guidelines they could better support staff and teachers to reduce EDP. Regarding student learning and behaviors, A2 stated that nonexclusionary discipline interventions could be used at the school should guidelines be available in the school district. Participant A2 also stated that district-wide guidelines on how to deal with student behaviors and discipline can help school principals better support students. Next, A2 focused on positive student behavioral interventions; however, A2 indicated that

principals need guidelines from the district for consistency reasons. As participant A2 said, restorative practices may promote change in student discipline; however, guidelines on how school principals may support teachers to use nonexclusionary discipline interventions are needed. Finally, participant A2 indicated that principals need guidelines on how to support school stakeholders on the use of nonexclusionary discipline interventions.

Participant A3 implemented instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP; however, according to A3, the school district did not have guidelines on how to create a positive school environment for student learning with less discipline issues. A3 mentioned that guidelines on how to support staff and teachers to reduce student discipline issues are needed. A3 also mentioned nonexclusionary discipline interventions may help students focus on learning and graduate from school. Moreover, according to A3, guidelines on how to deal with student behaviors and discipline may help teachers, staff, and administrators to reduce the use of EDP. Furthermore, A3 suggested that guidelines on positive student behavioral interventions, such as restorative practices may help students improve their behaviors in the classroom. Finally, participant A3 indicated that in order to promote change in student discipline, guidelines on how to support teachers to use nonexclusionary discipline interventions would be beneficial.

Participant A4 implemented instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP. However, as A4 suggested, guidelines on creating a positive school environment may be beneficial to administrators. Participant A4 also focused on student learning and attempted to support staff and teachers regarding student learning; however, according to

A4, the district should use guidelines on the implementation of nonexclusionary discipline interventions to help students stay in school and graduate. That is, A4 emphasized the need for guidelines on how to deal with student behaviors and discipline, and on how to use positive student behavioral interventions and indicated that restorative practices may help students improve their behaviors in the classroom. Finally, participant A4 stated that guidelines on how K-12 school principals should support teachers on nonexclusionary discipline interventions may be beneficial to these administrators.

As participant A5 reported, guidelines from the school district on creating a positive school environment where students are learning and graduating, can be beneficial to have. A5 also indicated that guidelines on student learning that contain strategies on how to involve teachers in dealing with nonexclusionary discipline interventions may be used by administrators to reduce the use of EDP. Participant A5 said that administrators could use guidelines on how to deal with student behaviors and discipline by implementing positive student behavioral interventions. Finally, participant A5 also mentioned that guidelines on the use restorative practices may be used to promote change in student discipline by training teachers on nonexclusionary discipline interventions.

Participant A6 expressed the need to use guidelines on how to create a positive school environment where student learning takes place and teachers are satisfied with their jobs. A6 also expressed the need to know how to support staff and teachers regarding the implementation of nonexclusionary discipline interventions to deal with student behaviors and discipline. According to participant A6, guidelines on positive

student behavioral interventions should be available to school principals and used to promote change in student discipline. Finally, participant A6 also mentioned the need for guidelines on how to help teachers use nonexclusionary discipline interventions at their school.

According to participant A7, every school principal should have access to guidelines on creating a positive school environment. As A7 said, the district should have guidelines on student learning and on how to assist teachers with the implementation of nonexclusionary discipline interventions at the school. Moreover, A7 mentioned that teachers at the school needed help with student behaviors and discipline and recommended the need for guidelines on positive student behavioral interventions. Finally, participant A7 indicated that principals are familiar with the use of restorative practices; however, they need guidelines to know how to promote change in student discipline.

Participant A8 mentioned that to create a positive school environment, school principals need guidelines on student learning and teachers support regarding student learning. A8 also mentioned nonexclusionary discipline interventions may help students behave better; however, guidelines are needed on how to deal with student behaviors and discipline. Finally, participant A8 said that guidelines on how to use restorative practices to promote change in student discipline may help school principals to support teachers.

Participant A9 recommended district-wide use of guidelines on creating a positive school environment for students to graduate from school. The school district should use guidelines on student learning and on how school principals to support staff and teachers

to use nonexclusionary discipline interventions to deal with student behaviors and discipline. According to A9, guidelines on positive student behavioral interventions

Such as restorative practices may promote change in student discipline by training and supporting teachers on the use of nonexclusionary discipline interventions.

Finally, participant A10 expressed the need for guidelines on creating a positive school environment for student learning. Moreover, A10 also expressed the need to support teachers with the implementation of nonexclusionary discipline interventions. According to participant A10, guidelines on how to use restorative practices may promote change in student discipline.

Interpretation of the Findings

The instructional leadership model was the conceptual framework for this project study. Based on the instructional leadership model, there are three dimensions: (a) defining the school mission, which requires principals to frame and communicate school goals regarding student discipline, (b) managing the instructional program, which necessitates principals to supervise and evaluate instruction, coordinate curriculum, and monitor students' behaviors and progress, and (c) promoting a positive school learning climate, which entails principals' efforts to protect instructional time, promote PD, maintain high visibility, provide incentives for teachers and learning, and enforce academic standards including students' discipline. Based on this model, school principals' instructional leadership practices are closely linked not only to academic achievement but also to school outcomes (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). I used this conceptual framework to understand how K-12 school principals implemented their

instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP by applying the instructional leadership model's aforementioned three dimensions. I also used the three dimensions of the instructional leadership model to develop the interview protocol containing interview questions to answer the research question and to analyze the collected data. The four themes answered the research question. The themes are in line with the findings of scholars who examined instructional leadership practices and the reduction of the use of EDP. The themes are also in line with the instructional leadership model's aforementioned three dimensions.

The findings revealed that RD practices, district-wide and schoolwide PBISs, and PD for administrators could reduce the use of EDP (Mallett, 2016). The findings also revealed that instructional leadership practice should be implemented with the goal of improving student learning outcomes (Chiedozie & Victor, 2017). Student discipline, classroom management, and school environment are conducive to student learning and academic success (Tookes et al., 2020).

The findings from this study revealed that (a) school principals should support teachers and school staff to create a school environment for student learning (Riley, 2018); (b) school principals should support teachers for the successful implementation of RD (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018) and (c) exclusionary student discipline affects student academic achievement (Nese et al., 2020). Policies on zero-tolerance proved to be ineffective (Schiff, 2018) because zero-tolerance discipline relies on suspension and expulsion (Nussbaum, 2018). EDP are associated with zero-tolerance school discipline policies (Armour, 2016) and the implementation of zero-tolerance policies lead to

negative student outcomes (Thompson, 2016).

The findings from this study revealed that the use of EDP impacts student learning (Wymer et al., 2020). The findings also revealed that the repeated use of EDP result in students failing grades (Armour, 2016). School disciplinary strategies such as restorative practices could lead to the prevention of exclusionary disciplinary (Reyneke, 2020). Exclusionary discipline affects student graduation from high school (Gregory et al., 2016). RD is an alternative to EDPs (Mansfield et al., 2018). RD could be used to reduce the use of EDPs (Wymer et al., 2020).

Theme 1

K-12 school principals implemented instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP by building a sense of community. The findings are supported by findings of scholars who revealed zero-tolerance results in the overuse of EDP. School administrators implement leadership practices to train, instruct, and equip faculty and staff to improve student learning outcomes (Chiedozie & Victor, 2017). K-12 school administrators' instructional leadership practices are associated with school outcomes (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Moreover, K-12 principals implement instructional leadership practices to support instructional strategies in the school (Armour, 2016). K-12 school principals could implement instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP (Hashim et al., 2018).

Theme 2

The second theme was that the benefits of implementing leadership practices include building a sense of community, supporting teachers to reduce the use of EDP, and

helping students improve their behaviors. K-12 principals at the project site built a sense of community, supported teachers to reduce the use of EDP, and helped students improve their behaviors. The findings are supported by findings of scholars who reported relationship building among administrators and teachers promotes student success (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). K-12 administrators could change the climate of the school (Armour, 2016). Moreover, K-12 school administrators could also use restorative strategies to promote relationship building through leadership (Riley, 2018). Furthermore, K-12 school principals should support teachers and students to promote learning (Mansfield et al., 2018). Additionally, K-12 school principals should use disciplinary strategies to handle challenging behaviors of students (Reyneke, 2020). K-12 school principals should use disciplinary strategies such as RD as an alternative way to address student behavior and to reduce EDP (Wymer et al., 2020) Finally, K-12 school principals should implement non-exclusionary discipline practices (Gahungu, 2018).

Theme 3

The third theme was that the lack of PD is a barrier of leadership practices on reducing the use of EDP. The participants reported PD as a barrier of leadership practices on reducing the use of EDP. PD for K-12 school principals is vital for the successful reduction of the use of EDP. The findings are supported by findings of scholars. The instructional leadership model by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) stated that the school administrator defines the school mission, which requires principals to frame and communicate school goals regarding student discipline. According to Tookes et al. (2020), school leaders should use leadership practices regarding student discipline,

classroom management, and school environment because these are conducive to student learning and academic success. According to Evanovich and Scott (2016), school administrators may change the actions and behaviors of teachers and staff. When the adult behavior is not producing adequate student success, a change must take place in what the adult is doing (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). According to Hultshorn and Mulholland (2018), school administrators should support teachers to create a healthy school climate to promote student success. The instructional leadership model also states that school principals should promote a positive school learning climate, which entails principals' efforts to protect instructional time, promote PD, maintain high visibility, provide incentives for teachers and learning, and enforce academic standards including students' discipline. Moreover, improvements in staff retention, student engagement in learning, and student instructional time are positive results of effective PD on improving classroom management for teachers and administrators (Nese et al., 2020).

The findings from this study are also supported by findings of scholars, such as Tookes et al. (2020) who reported that student discipline and effective classroom management could sustain a school environment that is conducive to student learning and overall academic success. Additionally, PD could help administrators and teachers improve classroom management (Nese et al., 2020). According to Horner and Macaya (2018), a coach could support the teacher to engage in effective classroom management procedures. School administrators should support teachers and staff concerning the achievement of students (O'Reilly, 2019). Administrators should support teachers to improve student learning outcomes (Chiedozie & Victor, 2017; Tookes et al., 2020). In

conclusion, the findings revealed that PD for K-12 school principals is vital for the successful reduction of the use of EDP.

Theme 4

The fourth theme was K-12 school principals need guidelines from senior school district administrators on how to reduce the use of EDP. All of the participants recommended guidelines to be developed by the school district to support school principals on how to: create a positive school environment, support staff and teachers regarding student learning, implement nonexclusionary discipline interventions, deal with student behaviors and discipline, use positive student behavioral interventions, use restorative practices to promote change in student discipline, train and support teachers and school staff on nonexclusionary discipline interventions. These findings are supported by previous findings of in the literature. School discipline polices should be developed based on guidelines from the state and federal school discipline guidelines (Mallett, 2016). K-12 principal should use school discipline polices (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). Moreover, K-12 school principals should be able to effectively train school staff (Garnett et al., 2018). The implementation of a school discipline program should specify how the teachers and staff are trained and supported in their knowledge and ability to use the program within the classrooms (Armour, 2016). Thus, program guidelines are necessary.

Evidence of Quality

I followed ethical procedures. Upon IRB approval from the project site and Walden University, I started collecting data from the participants who were K-12 school

principals. I collected data via semistructured interviews. I interviewed each participant for about 1 hour. To achieve credibility of this project, I used interviews. I interviewed 10 participants who agreed to participate in this study. I collected sufficient data because no new information emerged after the seventh interview. I also used the interview protocol to ask each participant the same interview questions. I used a basic qualitative research design. During the interviews, I kept field notes concerning reflexivity. The four emergent themes may apply to similar school districts. The findings may be transferred to other similar study settings. The interview excerpts are a true representation of the perceptions of the K-12 school principals I interviewed who consented to participate in the interviews. Concerning dependability, I used a data audit. Regarding credibility, I contacted member checks to minimize personal research biases and each participant verified the accuracy of the interview data.

Project Deliverable

Based on the four themes, I developed a policy recommendation. The policy recommendation is for K-12 school principals and for senior school district administrators. The content of the policy recommendation added new information for K-12 principals to use to reduce the use of EDP. The policy recommendation is based on the perceptions of K-12 school principals regarding their implementation of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs. K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators should use the content of this policy recommendation to support teachers regarding instruction time, classroom management, PD, and strategies to use to reduce the use of EDP.

Summary

The problem was that the use of EDP had been increasing. The purpose of this project study was to examine the perceptions of K-12 school principals regarding their use of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP. The instructional leadership model of Hallinger and Murphy (1985) was the conceptual framework. The research question focused on how K-12 school principals implement instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP. Data were collected via face-to-face semistructured interviews by using an interview protocol. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis for emergent themes. A policy recommendation was developed. In Section 3, I present the project.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The study site was a suburban public school district located in a southern state. K–12 school principals used three forms of EDPs, such as in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions. The study problem was that the use of EDPs had been increasing. Of the 23,000 students in Grades K–12, more than 10% had in-school or out-of-school suspensions, or expulsions. At the study site, according to the school district superintendent, K–12 school principals reported to senior district administrators that the rates of EDP had increased. According to the district board minutes, K–12 school principals had not reduced the use of EDPs. K–12 school principals received training in RD practices in academic year 2015 to learn strategies to reduce the use of EDPs, according to the school district superintendent. Senior district administrators, such as associate school district superintendents and directors, decided in academic year 2016 to support the leadership capacity of K–12 school principals by visiting the school sites on a monthly basis to help principals reduce the use of EDPs. The associate superintendents found that between 2016 and 2018, many K–12 school principals did not reduce the use of EDPs. The purpose of this project study was to examine the perceptions of K–12 school principals regarding their use of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs.

Research revealed practices that K–12 school principals can use to help students improve their behaviors in the classroom. According to Baule (2020), RD practices include strategies to reduce EDP in schools. Moreover, RD practices are used to reduce

the number of students receiving exclusionary consequences (Rainbolt et al., 2019).

Furthermore, implementing RD could lead to the prevention of EDP problems (Reyneke, 2020). Finally, RD is an alternative to reduce EDPs (Wymer et al., 2020).

RD practices contain inclusive discipline practices to reduce student discipline issues (Garnett et al., 2018). Additionally, RD practices provide instructional practices to promote learning among students (Garnett et al., 2018). RD practices should be used to reduce student discipline referrals to the school office (Katic et al., 2020). RD should be used in schools (Darling & Monk, 2018), and K–12 school principals should implement RD practices and support teachers and school staff to reduce EDPs (Freeman et al., 2019; Reyneke, 2020).

K–12 school principals should support teachers and school staff to reduce the use of EDPs. K–12 school principals could implement RD practices as a guide to reduce student discipline issues (Garnett et al., 2018). Moreover, K–12 school principals should support teachers in using RD (Baule, 2020). Additionally, K–12 school principals should support teachers and students concerning student learning (Mansfield et al., 2018). K–12 school principals should implement nonexclusionary discipline practices (Gahungu, 2018). Moreover, K-12 school principals should implement RD practices to reduce the use of EDP (Kennedy et al., 2017). Finally, K-12 school principals need training on the implementation of RD (Gerlach et al., 2018). RD requires the training of teachers, school staff, and school principals (Fenning & Jenkins, 2018).

Rationale

The problem was that the use of EDPs at the project study site had been increasing. I researched this problem in the local setting and examined the perceptions of K–12 school principals regarding their use of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs. This project study was developed to assist K–12 school principals with strategies to reduce the use of EDPs.

The participants implemented their instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs (Theme 1). The participants reported instructional leadership practices must be implemented to reduce the use of EDPs. The participants indicated instructional leadership practices should be implemented to work with teachers and students to improve student learning outcomes. Instructional leadership practices may be implemented to create a school environment conducive to student academic success. The participants indicated EDPs have negative student outcomes. The participants revealed the use of zero-tolerance was ineffective at the school and EDPs were ineffective in reducing negative behaviors of students. The participants also indicated that zero-tolerance did not reduce disruptive behaviors. EDPs were overused at the school, and suspended students experienced academic disengagement and academic failure; the participants indicated that dropout rates increased. Moreover, as the participants indicated, teachers need support to build a sense of community for students as an alternative way to address student behaviors. Additionally, the participants also indicated that school disciplinary strategies based on state and federal school discipline guidelines may be implemented to reduce the use of EDPs. The participants reported a school goal

for the reduction of the use of EDPs. The participants also reported the need to develop professional relationships between teachers and students. As the participants indicated, teachers are leaving the school because of the negative and disruptive student behaviors in the classroom. The participants also said that teachers have been challenged with student behaviors. Thus, all the participants implemented their instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs (Theme 1).

The benefits of implementing leadership practices include building a sense of community, supporting teachers to reduce the use of EDPs, and helping students improve their behaviors (Theme 2). The participants said supporting teachers to reduce the use of EDP should be a priority of school principals. The participants also said helping students improve their behaviors should be the goal of school administrators. The participants reported the need to work with teachers and students to help students improve their behaviors at school to succeed academically (Theme 2).

The participants mentioned a lack of PD is a barrier of leadership practices on reducing the use of EDPs (Theme 3). The participants also mentioned that PD for K–12 school principals was vital for the successful reduction of the use of EDPs because PD is necessary to accomplish school goals, such as teacher retention, student academic success, student engagement in learning, student instructional time, and classroom management for teachers and administrators. The participants stated that PD is needed to ensure that student discipline strategies are implemented by the teachers and staff. The participants recommended the creation of a policy for K–12 school principals to know

how to implement student discipline strategies with teachers and staff at the school (Theme 3).

All participants said that guidelines from senior school district administrators on how to reduce the use of EDPs are needed (Theme 4). As the participants stated, student discipline issues are the reason teachers overuse EDPs, and those student discipline issues affect academic achievement and instructional time. The participants recommended guidelines developed by the school district to support school principals on how to create a positive school environment, support staff and teachers regarding student learning, implement nonexclusionary discipline interventions, deal with student behaviors and discipline, use positive student behavioral interventions, use restorative practices to promote change in student discipline, and train and support teachers and school staff on nonexclusionary discipline interventions (Theme 4).

Based on these findings, a policy recommendation was selected as the project genre. The content of the policy recommendation may help K–12 school principals and senior school district administrators to reduce the use of EDP. The policy recommendation may result in positive social change by supporting students to improve their behaviors and graduate from school.

This project is a policy recommendation for K–12 school principals and senior school district administrators based on the emergent themes. The reason I selected a policy recommendation is to help K–12 school principals and senior school district administrators support students by reducing the use of EDPs. The goal of this project was to present a policy recommendation to K–12 school principals and senior school district

administrators at the study site. K–12 school principals may use the policy recommendation to reduce the use of EDPs. Senior school district administrators may use the policy recommendation to support K–12 school principals.

I was a novice policymaker at the time of this study and conducted this project study using a basic qualitative research design. I used the findings of this project to develop a policy recommendation, which is evidence based. Thus, I created this policy recommendation for the stakeholders at the study site, such as K–12 school principals and senior school district administrators to improve student learning and instruction.

Review of the Literature

I present here a literature review based on peer-reviewed articles pertinent for a policy recommendation. The genre of this project is a policy recommendation for K–12 school principals to reduce the use of EDPs. To develop the policy recommendation, I followed a process published by scholars.

According to Kyriakides et al. (2015), a school policy can affect student achievement. Based on the findings of this project study, the policy recommendation may help K–12 school principals increase student achievement by implementing instructional practices to reduce the use of EDPs. A school policy may have an indirect effect on student achievement (Kyriakides et al., 2015). The goal of this project is to support K–12 school principals by providing them with strategies to reduce the use of EDPs. According to Kyriakides et al. (2015), a policy may change the practices of school principals to improve student learning. The focus of the policy recommendation in this study is on the reduction of the use of EDPs at the study site.

Policymakers should follow a process to defend their decisions by providing evidence to stakeholders (Desouza & Lin, 2011). In this project, I provide evidence based on interviews with 10 K–12 school principals and the themes that emerged from analysis of the data collected through those interviews. Policymakers need to justify their recommendations found in the policy recommendation (Desouza & Lin, 2011). I justified the policy recommendations based on the emergent themes in this study. Policymakers need to revise the policy as well (Desouza & Lin, 2011). I will evaluate the policy recommendation 1 year after I present the content to the attendees, who will be K–12 school principals and senior school district administrators.

A policy can be created to help stakeholders to work together. Education stakeholders should work together concerning student achievement (Cohen et al., 2018). A policy recommendation can be designed to involve stakeholders to make decisions in a local setting (Cohen et al., 2018). The policy recommendation I developed encourages stakeholders, such as K–12 school principals, senior school district administrators, teachers, and school staff, to support each other to help students improve their behaviors. The policy recommendation focuses on engaging stakeholders to reduce the use of EDPs. According to Cohen et al. (2018), stakeholders can work together to improve schools by addressing educational problems.

The instructional leadership model has three dimensions focused on school principals as instructional leaders responsible for teaching and learning. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) developed the instructional leadership model and its three dimensions: (a) defining the school mission, which requires principals to frame and communicate school

goals regarding student discipline; (b) managing the instructional program, which necessitates principals to supervise and evaluate instruction, coordinate curriculum, and monitor student behaviors and progress; and (c) promoting a positive school learning climate, which entails principals' efforts to protect instructional time, promote PD, maintain high visibility, provide incentives for teachers and learning, and enforce academic standards including student discipline. The instructional leadership practices of K–12 school principals are linked to academic achievement and school outcomes (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

K–12 school principals use RD or EDPs regarding student discipline. RD or EDPs are used as intervention strategies to maintain order at the school. School administrators may use several programs of intervention regarding student discipline (Mallett, 2016). Examples of such interventions are schoolwide positive behavior interventions (Mallett, 2016). Regarding RD and EDPs, K–12 school principals need PD on how to implement RD or EDPs (Mallett, 2016). K–12 school principals should apply instructional leadership practices to support teachers and students as instructional leaders (Mallett, 2016). Moreover, K–12 school principals should also apply instructional leadership practices to support teachers with classroom management and students to improve their behaviors (Chiedozie & Victor, 2017). Additionally, K–12 school principals are responsible for instructional supervision, and as a result, instructional leadership practices should be implemented to achieve school goals (Chiedozie & Victor, 2017). Furthermore, K–12 school principals should focus on improving student learning outcomes (Chiedozie & Victor, 2017).

The role of K-12 school principals is to support teachers and students (Chiedozie & Victor, 2017). Another role of K-12 school principals is to check and observe teachers' school activities to focus on improving student learning outcomes (Chiedozie & Victor, 2017). Additionally, K-12 school principals need to oversee student discipline and classroom management (Chiedozie & Victor, 2017). Student discipline is critical to create a safe school environment (Tookes et al., 2020). Effective classroom management is another critical factor affecting the creation of a safe school environment (Tookes et al., 2020). Student discipline and effective classroom management are conducive to student learning (Tookes et al., 2020). The overall students' academic success is affected by student discipline and effective classroom management (Tookes et al., 2020).

K-12 school principals are responsible for student learning (Riley, 2018). As school instructional leaders, K-12 school principals should implement practices to meet school goals (Riley, 2018). Academic and nonacademic learning processes are the responsibility of school leaders (Riley, 2018). Nonacademic learning processes include strategies to teach students classroom expectations (Riley, 2018). Academic learning processes include the creation of a school environment optimal for student learning (Riley, 2018). According to Riley (2018), school principals should support teachers and students. Supporting students' emotional growth should be a priority of school principals (Riley, 2018).

Scholars have reported that PD benefits teachers. PD helps teachers to be better prepared for classroom management. According to Postholm (2018), PD helps education stakeholders improve not only schools but also student learning. School principals should

support teachers by providing PD on how to improve student learning (Postholm, 2018). Moreover, school principals could implement instructional leadership practices to improve student achievement (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). PD on how to implement instructional leadership practices could help school stakeholders improve student achievement (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018).

The content of PS sessions should be inclusive of students (Samuels, 2018). School principals could implement instructional leadership based on instructional standards to support teachers and improve student achievement (Samuels, 2018). PD sessions should incorporate theories and research-based evidence to prepare school principals and teachers to improve student achievement (Samuels, 2018). Additionally, PD sessions should focus on how to encourage students to build relationships and learn the curriculum (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The content of PD sessions should focus on how to improve student achievement where students could understand the curriculum and focus on learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). School administrators should support teachers to teach students critical thinking skills through instruction to develop meaningful professional relationships with teachers and peers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). PD for educators could have an explicit influence on how to improve student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

According to Brandmo et al. (2021), school administrators should create relationships with school stakeholders. Moreover, school administrators should focus on creating trusting and positive relationships with teachers and school staff (Brandmo et al.,

2021). Additionally, school administrators should apply leadership to prioritize school goals (Brandmo et al., 2021).

School principals, as instructional leaders, should have high expectations for student achievement. Moreover, school principals should create opportunities for students to succeed academically (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Furthermore, school principals should students' interactions with teachers and students' positive outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Thus, PD could help teachers learn how to interact with students in the classrooms and outside of school (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

School principals benefit from PD sessions on how to create a safe teaching and learning environment. Through PD, school principals could learn how to use communication with teachers and students to create a safe school environment (Senol & Lesinger, 2018). School principals could learn from PD strategies to increase teacher and student morale (Senol & Lesinger, 2018). Additionally, school principals could learn from PD strategies to create a safe school environment where teachers and students could express concerns (Senol & Lesinger, 2018). Thus, school principals could implement leadership practices to manage instruction and create a safe school environment (Senol & Lesinger, 2018).

School principals are responsible for academic achievement. Scholars reported school principals' practices are associated with academic achievement (Marshall, 2018). School principals' leadership practices affect academic success (Marshall, 2018). Thus, school principals could learn from PD how to improve student achievement (Marshall, 2018).

Regarding the implementation of RD and EDP, school principals should support teachers and students. The successful use of RD depends on PD and the support from school principals (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). School principals should encourage teachers and school staff to attend PD on RD because training affects academic learning (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). Moreover, school principals should evaluate teachers and school staff on the use of RD to ensure the successful implementation of RD (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). PD for teachers and school staff on RD are the responsibility of school principals (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). PD on RD or EDP could help teachers and school staff to learn about effective school discipline actions (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). RD are focusing on nonexclusionary school discipline actions (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). EDP are school discipline actions that remove students from the classroom and/or school for a specified time period (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). A removal of a student from the classroom depends on a violation of the school student code of conduct (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018).

When teachers and the school principal use EDPs, students are removed from the classroom, which affects their learning (Nese et al., 2020). A removal of a student from the classroom results in loss of instruction time and students fall behind academically (Nese et al., 2020). EDPs negatively affect students that can lead to school dropout (Nese et al., 2020). The overuse of EDPs do not only negatively affect students but also the school environment (Nese et al., 2020). According to Nese et al. (2020), EDPs could result in a cyclical series of students' removals from the classroom. Repeated removals of students from school directly affect the academic success of students (Nese et al., 2020).

When students are removed from school because of the overuse of EDPs, not only students are affected but also society is affected because in most cases those students do not graduate from school (Nese et al., 2020).

School principals implement zero-tolerance policies for student disciplinary practices. Zero-tolerance school policies could be implemented for minor student misbehaviors (Schiff, 2018). Moreover, zero-tolerance school policies regarding student behaviors are ineffective (Schiff, 2018). Due to the implementation of zero-tolerance school policies by school principals, students are removed from schools (Schiff, 2018). Those students who are removed from school due to behavioral issues may end up in prison (Schiff, 2018). Zero-tolerance school policies negatively affect student success (Schiff, 2018). According to Schiff (2018), EDP are not reducing negative behavior of students. Moreover, zero-tolerance student discipline policies and EDP result in the removal of students from school and therefore deny access to education (Nussbaum, 2018). EDP are associated with zero-tolerance student discipline policies (Nussbaum, 2018). Furthermore, zero-tolerance student discipline policies and EDP practices are designed to manage student behavior (Nussbaum, 2018). EDP and zero-tolerance student discipline policies are punitive and exclusionary practices (Nussbaum, 2018).

Scholars have reported EDP and zero-tolerance student discipline policies are designed to address school violence, and use of alcohol and drugs by students (Armour, 2016; Thompson, 2016). Moreover, the application of zero-tolerance student discipline policies contributes to the creation of the pipeline from school to prison (Armour, 2016; Thompson, 2016). Scholars have also reported EDP and zero-tolerance student discipline

policies in public schools result in high exclusionary school discipline use by suspending or expelling students from school (Armour, 2016; Thompson, 2016). There is an increase in expulsions and out-of-school suspensions due to the implementation of zero-tolerance policies that lead to other negative outcomes (Thompson, 2016). An example provided by Thompson (2016) was students who have experienced expulsion or suspension are more likely to be involved with the prison system than students who have not been disciplined using exclusionary practices. Zero-tolerance discipline policies are designed to increase school safety and to reduce disruptive behavior (Armour, 2016; Mallett, 2016; Thompson, 2016). Student codes of conduct outline behaviors that are expected of students, as well as behaviors that are inappropriate and not permitted in the school community (Mallett, 2016). Thus, EDP and zero-tolerance student discipline policies affect the rates of expulsions and suspensions (Armour, 2016; Thompson, 2016).

EDP are overused. The repeated use of removing a student from learning activities promotes a negative student-teacher relationship that impacts student learning. An alternative approach to the use of EDPs has been made in some educational settings to reduce the use of EDP (Wymer et al., 2020). Exclusionary practices are used to exclude students from classroom learning activities (Wymer et al., 2020). Exclusionary practices reduce the opportunity for students to learn from classroom learning activities (Wymer et al., 2020). Although the overuse of exclusionary discipline has been addressed, there is still evidence of persistent overuse (Nese et al., 2020). Federal and state agencies made recommendations for schools to reduce the use of EDPs in favor of alternative practices (Manassah et al., 2018).

School discipline policies are developed by local school districts (Mallett, 2016). School discipline consequences are determined by the school administrator (Armour, 2016). A suspension is a step in a cycle with short- and long-term repercussions. Such a cycle for the suspended student includes “academic disengagement, academic failure, dropout, and delinquency” (Thompson, 2016, para 2). According to Armour (2016), the repeated use of EDPs resulted in 31% of students with one or more suspensions or expulsions failed a grade at least once. According to Mallett (2016), repeated use of EDPs influenced some students to continue the cycle of noncompliant behaviors to the school student codes of conduct. Each additional exclusionary discipline that a student experienced further decreased the student’s odds of graduating high school by 20%. (Gregory et al., 2016).

A restorative approach to student discipline may alleviate discipline gaps. RD is an inclusionary and non-punitive alternative to EDPs (Reyneke, 2020). Reyneke (2020) concluded that implementing restorative practices could lead to the prevention of exclusionary disciplinary problems. RD is an alternative way to address student behavior while reducing use of EDPs. Moreover, RD is an also alternative to EDPs (Mansfield et al., 2018). Additionally, RD allows for connectedness, the sense of being wanted, belonging, and engagement in the learning process (Armour, 2016; Baule, 2020). Furthermore, RD practices could help students to practice the social-emotional skills that build a strong sense of community (Baule, 2020). The goal of RD practices is to reduce EDP in schools by reducing inappropriate student behaviors (Baule, 2020; Green et al., 2018). School principals could use RD for the development of relationships between

teachers and students (Baule, 2020). When a teacher or principal knows the back story of a student's life, it promotes understanding and decreases the misjudgment of responses in behaviors expressed by the student (Armour, 2016; Baule, 2020; Green et al., 2018). RD are intervention programs (Manassah et al., 2018). School principals ensure that a system is in place to ensure teachers and staff are trained and capable of applying targeted practices within the academic and non-academic settings (Gregory et al., 2016; Manassah et al., 2018).

PBISs (PBIS) are used to focus on positive responses to violations of student code of conduct and prevention (Thompson, 2016). PBIS have been effective in producing positive changes in student behavior (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). PBIS and RD should be used by school principals (Armour, 2016; Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Thompson, 2016). PBIS are used to meet the needs of students (Mitchell et al., 2018). Moreover, PBIS provide intense and individualized interventions (Mitchell et al., 2018). PBIS and RD provide research-based disciplinary approaches to K-12 school principals (Gagnon et al., 2020). PBIS could be used to reduce the use of EDP (Gagnon et al., 2020; Kittelman et al., 2019). RD and PBIS could be used to address the needs of students when they are removed from the classroom setting (Gagnon et al., 2020; Kittelman et al., 2019). PBIS could be a possible means of identifying mental health practices that are provided to the students with such needs (Kittelman et al., 2019). Students, teachers, and school principals need EDP alternatives to provide the opportunity for students to continue to learn and to receive behavior intervention supports that promote positive changes in behavior (Nese et al., 2020). Traditional discipline processes do not provide

opportunities for remediation or reconciliation, and do not address the core of the problem behavior (Nese et al., 2020). Changes in student behavior could occur by implementing PBIS (Goldin & McDaniel, 2018; Nese et al., 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2016).

Teachers do not know how to promote positive behavior in students (Reyneke, 2020). Moreover, teachers need support to manage the negative student behaviors in the classroom (Wymer et al., 2020). Additionally, teachers who overused exclusionary discipline are more exhausted emotionally and less confident in their ability to manage student behaviors (Nese et al., 2020). Teachers and principals leave their jobs within the first 3 years due to issues with student behavior management (Nese et al., 2020; Reyneke, 2020; Wymer et al., 2020).

Principals and teachers need PD on discipline interventions. PD is necessary for the successful implementation of RD (Nese et al., 2020; O'Reilly, 2019; Short et al., 2018). Nese et al. (2020) reported improvements in staff retention, student engagement in learning, and student instructional time are positive results of effective PD on improving classroom management for teachers and administrators. School stakeholders such as teachers and principals need PD on RD (O'Reilly, 2019; Short et al., 2018; Weaver & Swank, 2020). The lack of formal training can be a limitation for integrating RD practices within the school campus and classrooms (Weaver & Swank, 2020). Horner and Macaya (2018) said PD is insufficient to ensure that the discipline intervention strategies are adopted successfully and able to be implemented by the teachers and staff. PD on PBIS is beneficial to teachers and principals (O'Reilly, 2019; Short et al., 2018; Weaver &

Swank, 2020). Horner and Macaya (2018) suggested that a coach could support the teacher in ways to provide instruction, to provide for the specific needs of an individual student, or to engage in effective classroom management procedures. O'Reilly (2019) noted that the organizational system of the school campus should provide for a designated support staff to serve in the lead capacity as a coach in order to reach a level of implementation that makes a positive impact in the achievement of its students.

SEL and RD promote a positive instructional environment without impacting the learning of most of the students (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). School administrators are incorporating SEL programs or components of SEL curricula (Riley, 2018). SEL and RD should be integrated into the school academic instructional curriculum (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). According to Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018), the use of SEL approaches improve students' abilities to regulate emotions and to understand social interactions and that social skills instruction is important for a healthy school environment. A prerequisite for academic achievement is a positive school environment (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). According to Riley (2018), the integration of RD with the SEL programs enhance the impact of these programs. Thus, staff and teachers need to know that the school leadership has a high priority for this aspect of student learning (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Riley, 2018).

Schools with high exclusionary discipline rates had lower academic quality (Nese et al., 2020). Successful implementation of nonexclusionary discipline interventions requires the buy-in of all staff, especially those with an assigned responsibility in dealing

with student behavior and discipline. Gahungu (2018) noted that the successful implementation of nonexclusionary discipline policies can only happen when principals and teachers are equally committed to its success. Wymer et al. (2020) identified the following three key positive behavioral interventions that can be foundational to a non-exclusionary discipline intervention approach: (a) strategies that focus on relationships, (b) understanding the why of the behavior, and (c) the use restorative practices promote change in the way discipline is implemented.

K-12 principal must be invested in each step of the implementation process of using RD (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). Moreover, K-12 school principal should have a formal orientation and thorough understanding about the program in order to be able to effectively train school staff (Evanovich & Scott, 2016). School principal should be involved in all critical decisions regarding RD and PD (Garnett et al., 2018). PD on RD could help teachers and school staff to know how to use RD (Armour, 2016; Evanovich & Scott, 2016; Garnett et al., 2018). K-12 school principal should make decisions how PD and RD are implemented (Armour, 2016; Evanovich & Scott, 2016; Garnett et al., 2018). Evanovich and Scott (2016) wrote a challenge of a new program implementation is changing the actions and behaviors of school stakeholders and school principals are responsible for promoting the change in behaviors.

Project Description

I created this policy recommendation for K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators. The content of the police was created from the emergent themes. I will present this policy recommendation to K-12 school principals and senior school

district administrators who will be the attendees at the study site. I will focus the presentation of this policy on the evidence-based findings. The specific recommendations for the K-12 principals and senior school district administrators are presented in Appendix A.

Based on the findings from this study, the aforementioned recommendations is the content of the policy recommendation to help K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators to reduce the use of EDP. The policy recommendation may result in positive social change by supporting students to improve their behaviors and graduate from school.

Needed Resources, Existing Supports, Barriers, and Solutions

I will present the policy recommendation to K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators at the study site. I will ask the school district superintendent for permission to present the content of the policy recommendation to K-12 school principals during their monthly meetings at the board of education. I will also ask the school district superintendent for permission to present the content of the policy recommendation to senior school district administrators at the boardroom during their board meetings.

The needed resources are a projector to present the content of the policy recommendation. Another needed resource are hard copies of the entire policy recommendation for each attendee to have during the presentation. I will ask the school district superintendent's office person responsible for meetings to add to the K-12 school

principals' monthly meeting agenda and to the senior school district administrators board meetings the policy presentation.

The potential barriers to the policy recommendation presentation may include the busy schedules of K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators at the study site. Another potential barrier may be the interest of K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators to attend the presentation of the policy recommendation. A final barrier may be the time and willingness of K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators to implement the policy recommendation.

Project Implementation and Timetable

K-12 school principals have nine monthly meetings at the study site. Senior school district administrators have 10 monthly meetings at the study site. For the academic year 2022-2023, I will present the policy recommendation to K-12 school principals in October, November, and December 2022, and in January, February, March, April, May, and June 2023. For the same academic year, I will present the policy recommendation to senior school district administrators in October, November, and December of 2022, and in January, February, March, April, May, June, and August 2023.

Roles and Responsibilities

I developed the policy recommendation and will take a leading role to present its contents to K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators at the study site. I will also take a leading role in the implementation of the policy recommendation designed for K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators to reduce the

use of EDP. I will present the contents of the policy recommendation to K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators in the aforementioned months in the academic years 2022-2023.

I will request K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators to review the content of the policy recommendation and to ask me questions for clarification or support. My role and responsibility is to explain in as much detail as possible the content of the policy recommendation. After I present the policy recommendation during the K-12 school principals' monthly meetings and senior school district administrators' board meeting, I will schedule another meeting at the board of education meeting in September 2023 to request the implementation of the policy recommendation for the academic year 2023-2024. The roles and responsibilities of K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators will be to review the content of the policy recommendation. The roles and responsibilities of the school district superintendent will be to review the content of the policy recommendation with board members and seek the approval of the policy recommendation.

Project Evaluation Plan

I will attend the nine monthly meetings of K-12 school principals and the 10 monthly meetings of senior school district administrators at the study site in the academic year 2022-2023. I will present the content of the policy recommendation during the aforementioned meetings. After I present the policy recommendation to the nine monthly meetings of K-12 school principals and the 10 monthly meetings of senior school district administrators at the study site, I will evaluate the policy recommendation in the

academic year 2023-2024. The policy recommendation will be evaluated in order to strengthen its content to help K-12 school principals to reduce the use of EDP. The project evaluation plan is to use an outcome evaluation after the implementation of the policy recommendation. The purpose of the outcome evaluation will be to examine the long term effects of the policy on the reduction of the use of EDP. Using an outcome evaluation, I will provide K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators with a questionnaire to evaluate the content of the policy recommendation to find out if the goals of the policy were achieved meaning a reduction in the use of EDP at each school at the study site. Another goal of the project evaluation will be to identify factors that affect the policy implementation. To achieve this policy evaluation goal, I will use a summative evaluation to collect responses from K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators to improve the project.

Project Implications

The policy recommendation contains (a) strategies for K-12 school principals to use to reduce the use of EDP at the study site and (b) strategies for senior school district administrators to support K-12 school principals to reduce the use of EDP at the study site. K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators will benefit from this project by implementing the policy recommendation at the study site by learning specific strategies to use to support teachers and school staff to help students to improve their behaviors. Teachers may benefit from the implementation of the policy recommendation by being supported by K-12 school principals to reduce the use of EDP at the study site. Students may benefit from the implementation of the policy recommendation by being

supported by K-12 school principals, teachers, and school staff to improve their behaviors and graduate from school.

Direction for Future Research

As part of this project study, I interviewed K-12 school principals at the study site. Scholars wishing to replicate this project, should interview more K-12 school principals familiar with the use of EDP. Moreover, scholars may wish to interview senior school district administrators from the same study site regarding the use of EDP. Additionally, scholars may wish to interview teachers regarding the use or overuse of EDP and the students' behavioral issues that lead to the use of EDP. Additionally, scholars may wish to interview students regarding the use of EDP.

Summary

The problem was that the use of EDP had been increasing. I examined the perceptions of K-12 school principals regarding the use of EDP. The participants implemented their instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP (Theme 1). The benefits of implementing leadership practices include building a sense of community, supporting teachers to reduce the use of EDP, and helping students improve their behaviors (Theme 2). The participants mentioned a lack of PD is a barrier of leadership practices on reducing the use of EDP (Theme 3). The participants said guidelines from senior school district administrators on how to reduce the use of EDP are needed (Theme 4). Based on these findings, a policy recommendation is the project. The content of the policy recommendation may help K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators to reduce the use of EDP. The policy recommendation may result

in positive social change by supporting students to improve their behaviors and graduate from school.

I will present the policy recommendation to K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators at the study site. I will take a leading role to present its contents to K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators at the study site. The policy recommendation will be evaluated in order to strengthen its content to help K-12 school principals to reduce the use of EDP. I will use a summative evaluation to collect responses from K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators to improve the project. I present my reflections and conclusions in Section 4.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In this section, I present the reflections and conclusions. I also present recommendations for alternative approaches. Additionally, I present scholarship, project development and evaluation, and leadership change. I reflect on the importance of conducting this project study. I conclude this section with implications, applications, and directions for future research.

Project Strengths and Limitations

I examined the perceptions of K–12 school principals regarding the use of EDPs, and four themes emerged. The participants implemented their instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs (Theme 1). The benefits of implementing leadership practices include building a sense of community, supporting teachers to reduce the use of EDP, and helping students improve their behaviors (Theme 2). The participants mentioned a lack of PD as a barrier of leadership practices on reducing the use of EDPs (Theme 3). The participants said guidelines from senior school district administrators on how to reduce the use of EDPs are needed (Theme 4). A policy recommendation was created as a result of this project study. The content of the policy recommendation is designed to help K–12 school principals and senior school district administrators to reduce the use of EDPs.

One of the project's strengths is that the content of the policy recommendation is research based, which may result in positive social change by supporting students to improve their behaviors and graduate from school. Another strength of the project is the list of strategies for K–12 school principals to implement to reduce the use of EDPs at the

study site. Moreover, another strength of the project is the list of strategies for senior school district administrators to support K–12 school principals to reduce the use of EDPs at the study site. Furthermore, another strength of the project is the list of strategies for K–12 school principals to implement to support teachers and school staff to help students improve their behavior. A final strength of the project is that the focus of the project is on students who will benefit from the implementation of the policy recommendation by being supported by K–12 school principals, teachers, and school staff to improve their behaviors and graduate from school.

The project has limitations. One limitation of the project is the timeframe to present the content of the policy recommendation to K–12 school principals and senior school district administrators during their monthly meetings. Another limitation of the project is the availability of K–12 school principals and senior school district administrators to attend the presentation of the policy recommendation. Moreover, a limitation of the project is its applicability to other similar public school districts in the county or state. Additionally, a limitation of the project is its approval by the board of education members for implementation at the study site. Furthermore, a limitation of the project is its sample size of 10 K–12 school principals. A final limitation of the project is that the participants may have responded with limited experiences concerning the use of EDPs or supporting teachers to reduce the use of EDPs.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

A future study may include interviews with senior school district administrators from the same study site regarding the use of EDPs. The input from senior school district

administrators could include suggestions for K–12 school principals, teachers, and school staff to use as guidelines to reduce the use of EDPs. Moreover, the input from teachers and school staff could include suggestions for K–12 school principals to develop guidelines to reduce the use of EDPs. Additionally, input from students could include specific student discipline issues that K–12 school principals could use to support these students to improve their behaviors. Finally, the input from the parents of students could include suggestions that K–12 school principals could use to support students to improve their behaviors.

The policy recommendation, designed for K–12 school principals and senior school district administrators, adds new knowledge to the field of education regarding the use of EDPs. K–12 school principals should implement their instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs by working with teachers to create a school environment conducive to student academic success to address student behaviors. The benefits of implementing leadership practices include building a sense of community, supporting teachers to reduce the use of EDPs, and helping students improve their behaviors. PD is a barrier of leadership practices on reducing the use of EDPs and is necessary to accomplish school goals, such as teacher retention, student academic success, student engagement in learning, student instructional time, and classroom management for teachers and administrators. A policy for K-12 school principals should include guidelines from senior school district administrators on how to reduce the use of EDP to support school principals to create a positive school environment, support staff and teachers regarding student learning, implement nonexclusionary discipline

interventions, deal with student behaviors and discipline, use positive student behavioral interventions, use restorative practices to promote change in student discipline, train and support teachers and school staff on nonexclusionary discipline interventions. Senior school district administrators should support K–12 school principals in participating in PD on EDPs and to implement a policy containing guidelines to reduce the use of EDPs.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

I conducted this project at the study site. I applied knowledge of basic qualitative research design to collect data using semistructured interviews from 10 K–12 school principals. During the interviews, I used an interview protocol and asked the same interview questions to all participants. Moreover, I applied knowledge of thematic analysis to analyze the transcribed interview data. Thus, I learned how to follow IRB guidelines, collect qualitative data via interviews, analyze qualitative data using thematic analysis, and created a policy recommendation based on the conceptual framework, the literature review, and the findings of this project study. I will apply this research knowledge to conduct more research studies at the study site.

This project is a policy development for K–12 school principals and senior school district administrators. The policy recommendation can help K–12 school principals and senior school district administrators support teachers, school staff, and students by reducing the use of EDPs. I will present the policy recommendation to K–12 school principals and senior school district administrators at the study site. I will evaluate the policy recommendation to strengthen its content to help K–12 school principals reduce the use of EDPs. I will use an outcome evaluation after the implementation of the policy

recommendation to examine the long-term effects of the policy on the reduction of the use of EDPs. I will use a summative evaluation to collect responses from K–12 school principals and senior school district administrators to improve the project. The policy recommendation may result in positive social change by supporting students to improve their behaviors and graduate from school.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

I developed the policy recommendation for K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators to better support teachers, school staff, and students to reduce the use of EDP for students to graduate from school. I will present the policy recommendation to K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators at the study site. By conducting this study, I learned how to obtain IRB approval, contact interviewees, conduct interviews, schedule interviews, use an interview protocol, transcribe interview data, to apply thematic analysis, develop a policy recommendation, prepare a policy recommendation evaluation plan, and apply research knowledge. The creation of the policy recommendation for K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators to reduce the use of EDP was very important to me as a school principal who strives for student achievement. I advocate for students and believe the policy recommendation will have positive influence on the reduction of the use of EDP. Finally, by earning this EdD degree, I am ready to conduct more research to support school district leaders concerning the use of EDP.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The policy recommendation may help K-12 school principals to apply instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP. The policy recommendation may also help senior school district administrators to support K-12 school principals to reduce the use of EDP. The content of the policy recommendation was developed for K-12 school principals to use new strategies on how to apply instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP. Implications for positive social change include strategies for K-12 school principals to apply to reduce the use of EDP for students to graduate from school. Directions for future research include: interviews with more K-12 school principals familiar with the use of EDP, interviews with senior school district administrators from the same study site regarding the use of EDP, interviews with teachers regarding the use or overuse of EDP and the students' behavioral issues that lead to the use of EDP, and interviews with students and/or parents regarding the use of EDP.

Conclusion

The policy recommendation added new knowledge to the field of education regarding the use of EDP. The policy recommendation is research-based and may result in positive social change by supporting students to improve their behaviors and graduate from school. The list of strategies for K-12 school principals found in the policy recommendation may help reduce the use of EDP at the study site. The focus of this project is on students who may benefit from the implementation of the policy recommendation by being supported by K-12 school principals, teachers, and school staff to improve their behaviors and graduate from school.

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Appendix A: The Project

Exclusionary discipline practices (EDP) are a type of K-12 public schools disciplinary action that removes a student from their usual educational setting.

Restorative practices (RD) are focusing on nonexclusionary school discipline actions because are intervention programs. RD practices are used to reduce student discipline by promoting learning and respect among students and staff. EDP practices are disrupting students' learning process and these students fall behind academically because of their negative school behaviors. EDP are in-school suspensions (ISS), out of school suspensions, and expulsions. ISS is used to keep students in school to complete their academic work. Out of school suspensions require the temporary and short-term exclusion of students from the school setting.

The project site was a suburban public school district located in a southern state in the United States serving over 23,000 students in Grades K-12. More than 10% of students had ISS or out of school suspensions, or expulsions because teachers were referring these students to the principal's office for misbehaving in the classroom and school principals increased the number of ISS and out of school suspensions including expulsions. The research problem at the study site was that the use of EDP had been increasing. The purpose of this project study was to examine the perceptions of K-12 school principals regarding their use of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP.

The instructional leadership model was used to conduct this project study because based on this model K-12 school principals have an impact on instructional leadership

practices. The instructional leadership model has three dimensions: (a) defining the school mission, which requires principals to frame and communicate school goals regarding student discipline, (b) managing the instructional program, which necessitates principals to supervise and evaluate instruction, coordinate curriculum, and monitor students' behaviors and progress, and (c) promoting a positive school learning climate, which entails principals' efforts to protect instructional time, promote professional development, maintain high visibility, provide incentives for teachers and learning, and enforce academic standards including students' discipline. This model is principal-centered because school principals' instructional leadership practices are closely linked not only to academic achievement but also to school outcomes.

The project was a policy recommendation for K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators to implement at the study site. The goal of this project was to help K-12 school principals use the policy recommendation to reduce the use of EDP and help senior school district administrators to support K-12 school principals to reduce the use of EDP. I present a policy recommendation to K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators at the study site.

Background of the Project

By conducting this project study, I addressed a gap in practice. I examined the perceptions of K-12 school principals regarding their use of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP. At the study site, K-12 school principals: (a) used three forms of EDP such as ISS, out of school suspensions, and expulsions, (b) reported to senior district administrators that the rates of EDP had increased between 2016 and

2018. In the academic year 2016, senior district administrators decided to support the leadership capacity of K-12 school principals by visiting the school sites on a monthly basis to help these principals to reduce the use of EDP. Senior district administrators reported to the board of education that between 2016 and 2018 K-12 school principals did not reduce the use of EDP.

K-12 school principals received training in RD practices in the academic year 2015 to learn strategies to reduce the use of EDP. Training on RD practices comprised of inclusive discipline practices that are most effective when modeled by school leadership to learn how to reduce the use of EDPs (school district superintendent, personal communication, January 11, 2020). As shown in Table 1, K-12 school principals reported to senior district administrators that the rates of EDPs had increased (senior district administrator, personal communication, November 30, 2019). According to the District Board Minutes, between the academic years 2016 and 2018, K-12 school principals had not reduced the use of EDPs (school district superintendent, personal communication, January 11, 2020).

Rationale

K-12 school principal should ensure that the campus staff are knowledgeable and able to implement the targeted discipline practices effectively (Farr et al., 2020). Reyneke (2020) explored school disciplinary strategies for dealing with the challenging behavior of students and concluded that implementing restorative practices could lead to the prevention of exclusionary disciplinary problems. K-12 school principals ensure proper training of all staff responsible for implementation of EDP (Reyneke, 2020). EDP

programs are introduced to the school campus and their use depend on school leadership (Reyneke, 2020). Teachers and school staff contribute to a more inclusive school environment for K-12 school principals to reduce the use of EDP (Freeman et al., 2019). Wymer et al. (2020) stated that RD is an alternative way to address student behavior while reducing use of exclusionary discipline practices. The repeated use of removing a student from learning activities promotes a negative student-teacher relationship that impacts student learning (Wymer et al., 2020). An alternative approach to the use of EDPs has been made in some educational settings to reduce its use (Wymer et al., 2020). The use of soft exclusionary strategies that are not official expulsions result in a student being 'excluded' from classroom learning activities (Wymer et al., 2020). A soft exclusionary practice reduces the opportunity for a child to learn from the activity or experience they should be engaged in during the school day (Wymer et al., 2020).

Wymer et al. (2020) identified the following three key positive behavioral interventions that can be foundational to a non-exclusionary discipline intervention approach: (a) strategies that focus on relationships, (b) understanding the why of the behavior, and (c) the use restorative practices promote change in the way discipline is implemented.

Camacho and Krezmien (2019) suggested that schools and districts interested in improving school climate should adopt prevention- and intervention-focused discipline practices to decrease the use of punitive practices. RD requires the training of varied aspects of the school staff for the fidelity of implementation within the school (Fenning & Jenkins, 2018). K-12 school principals should be trained in RD and EDP (Garnett et al.,

2018). Darling and Monk (2018) stated that educators apply RD practices to decrease the use of EDP in the schools. RD is an integrated in all aspects of the school, in both academic and non-academic manners (Darling & Monk, 2018). Anderson and Ritter (2017) stated that RP can serve as an alternative to EDP for students.

According to Tookes et al. (2020), student discipline and effective classroom management is a critical part of sustaining a school environment that is conducive to student learning and overall academic success. Nese et al. (2020) posed that the traditional process does not provide an opportunity for remediation or reconciliation, denies students opportunity for academic progress and promotes deficiencies, does not address the core of the problem behavior, and promotes increasing recidivism rates. Nese et al. (2020) explained that the risk of negative outcomes is amplified for individual students due to exclusionary discipline, and the overuse of exclusionary discipline results in a cyclical series of removals. Nese et al. (2020) stated that although the overuse of exclusionary discipline has been addressed, there is still evidence of persistent overuse.

Mansfield et al. (2018) determined that taking a restorative approach to discipline was the best method to begin alleviating discipline gaps. Manassah et al. (2018) reported that federal and state agencies made recommendations for schools to reduce the use of EDPs in favor of alternative practices. Riley (2018) asserted that school principals need to inform and assure teachers that supporting students' emotional growth is a priority on the same level as academic learning. Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018) indicated that staff training and evaluation are essential components to the successful implementation of RD. According to Schiff (2018), policies based on zero-tolerance may include even

minor disciplinary violations which were not the initial focus. EDP are ineffective in reducing negative behavior by the students who receive such consequences (Schiff, 2018).

Chiedozie and Victor (2017) identified instructional supervision as an instructional leadership practice, which is defined as the act of checking and observing a teacher's activities with the goal of improving student learning outcomes. According to Mallett (2016), several programs with a prevention and intervention model have been developed within the framework for the rehabilitation of school discipline. Mallett (2016) identified RD practices, schoolwide positive behavior intervention supports, professional development, and socioemotional learning as integral aspects of this approach concerning the use of EDPs by K-12 school principals.

Positive behavior intervention supports (PBIS) is focusing on meeting the needs of the students with more serious behavior problems and provides the most intense and individualized interventions (Mitchell et al., 2018). PBIS and RD provide research-based support for the fidelity of RD as a viable addition to the repertoire of disciplinary approaches available to K-12 school principals (Gagnon et al., 2020). While PBIS provides for the reduction of the use of EDP, Kittelman et al. (2019) indicated that there is still a need for other systems and programs that will directly address the needs of students when they are removed from the classroom setting.

Short et al. (2018) identified the need for staff refresher training in intervention programs such as RD for successful implementation. Weaver and Swank (2020) said that the lack of formal training can be a limitation for integrating RD practices within the

school campus and classrooms. Horner and Macaya (2018) reported that PD and training were insufficient to ensure that the discipline intervention strategies are adopted successfully and able to be implemented by the teachers and staff. Horner and Macaya (2018) suggested that a coach could support the teacher in ways to provide instruction, to provide for the specific needs of an individual student, or to engage in effective classroom management procedures. O'Reilly (2019) noted that receiving training in structured tier systems, such as PBIS, do not ensure that implementation is done in an effective manner. O'Reilly (2019) noted that the organizational system of the school campus should provide for a designated support staff to serve in the lead capacity as a coach in order to reach a level of implementation that makes a positive impact in the achievement of its students.

Gahungu (2018) noted that the successful implementation of nonexclusionary discipline policies can only happen when principals and teachers are equally committed to its success. Wymer et al. (2020) identified the following three key positive behavioral interventions that can be foundational to a non-exclusionary discipline intervention approach: (a) strategies that focus on relationships, (b) understanding the why of the behavior, and (c) the use restorative practices promote change in the way discipline is implemented. K-12 school principal should have a formal orientation and thorough understanding about the program in order to be able to effectively train school staff. It is also very important that the school principal is involved in all critical decisions regarding the program (Garnett et al., 2018). K-12 school principals could implement instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDPs (Hashim et al., 2018). RD incorporates the

use of a whole school, multi-tiered approach which addresses more than isolated and individual student behaviors (Schiff, 2018). Short et al. (2018) reported that RD provided positive learning opportunities for students and staff. Acosta et al. (2019) indicated that RD requires actions by the K-12 school principal to support the implementation process and facilitate critical dialogue. According to Riley (2018), sharing information and providing feedback with staff is important as a leader implementing RD.

Significance and Implications of the Project Study

This project study is significant because the findings may lead to further research on the reduction of the use of EDP. This project study is also significant because it contains recommendations for K-12 school principals to reduce the use of EDP by applying instructional leadership practices. Senior school district administrators may use the policy recommendation to support K-12 school principals to reduce the use of EDP by providing funding and PD training. The policy recommendation from this project may lead to positive social change by helping K-12 school principals reduce the use of EDP. The policy recommendation may help senior school district administrators develop or revise policies on how to reduce the use of EDP. The local community may also benefit from the policy recommendation with the decrease of the use of EDP and an increase in graduation rates. Implications for positive social change include strategies for K-12 school principals to apply to reduce the use of EDP for students to graduate from school.

Data Collection and Analysis

A basic qualitative research design was selected for this project study. The central phenomenon of this project study was the perceptions of K-12 school principals

regarding their use of instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP. This project study was bounded by the perceptions of K-12 school principals on the reduction of the use of EDP. The participants were K-12 school principals who (a) attended PD on RD and (b) had been school principals at the project site for at least 2 years. I selected 10 K-12 school principals who consented to participate in interviews that occurred on a day and at a time agreed upon with each participant. The interviews were approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour in length and were audio recorded with the participants' permission. The analysis of the interviews revealed the following. K-12 school principals, at the study site, implemented instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP by: (a) building a sense of community, (b) supporting teachers, and (c) helping students. K-12 school principals: (a) said teachers need support to reduce the use of EDP, and to work with both teachers and students for students to improve their behaviors at the school by building a sense of community, which should be a school goal, (b) implemented instructional practices to support teachers to build a sense of community to manage students' behaviors because students who were suspended were dropping out of school, (c) perceived lack of professional development (PD) to be a barrier of implementing leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP, (d) K-12 school principals recommended a policy to be created for K-12 school principals to know how to implement student discipline strategies with teachers and staff at the school, (e) recommended guidelines to be developed by the school district to support school principals on how to: create a positive school environment, support staff and teachers regarding student learning, implement nonexclusionary discipline interventions, manage student discipline, use

positive student behavioral interventions, use restorative practices to promote change in student discipline, train and support teachers and school staff on nonexclusionary discipline interventions.

Policy Recommendation

The genre of this project is a policy recommendation for K-12 school principals to apply to reduce the use of EDP. This policy recommendation may help K-12 school principals to increase student achievement by implementing instructional practices to reduce the use of EDP for students to attend classes and graduate from school. The goal of the policy recommendation is to support K-12 school principals by providing them with strategies to use to reduce the use of EDP.

A school policy could affect student achievement because a policy may contain strategies for school principals to change their practices to improve student learning (Kyriakides et al., 2015). The policy recommendation focuses on the reduction of the use of EDP at the study site. I followed a process to defend my strategies found in this policy by providing evidence to school district stakeholders, such as K-12 school principals (Desouza & Lin, 2011). The strategies listed in this policy recommendation are based on evidence collected via interviews with 10 K-12 school principals (Desouza & Lin, 2011). As a novice policymaker, I justified the strategies found in this policy recommendation and will revise this policy after I evaluate it, 1 year after I present the contents to the attendees who will be K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators. (Desouza & Lin, 2011). Education stakeholders should work together concerning student achievement and a policy recommendation should involve stakeholders to make decisions

in a local setting (Cohen et al., 2018). Education stakeholders could work together to improve schools by addressing educational problems (Cohen et al., 2018).

This policy recommendation was created by applying the instructional leadership model, which focuses on the school principals who are responsible for teaching and learning. According to Hallinger and Murphy (1985), school principals define the school mission to frame and communicate school goals regarding student discipline, manage instructional programs, and promote a positive school learning climate. Regarding instructional programs, school principals supervise and evaluate instruction, coordinate curriculum, and monitor students' behaviors and progress (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Regarding promoting a positive school learning climate, school principals should protect instructional time, promote professional development, maintain high visibility, provide incentives for teachers and learning, and enforce academic standards including students' discipline (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). The instructional leadership practices of K-12 school principals are linked to academic achievement and school outcomes (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Student discipline is critical to create a safe school environment (Tookes et al., 2020). Effective classroom management is another critical factor affecting the creation of a safe school environment (Tookes et al., 2020). Both student discipline and effective classroom management are conducive to student learning (Tookes et al., 2020). The overall students' academic success is affected by student discipline and effective classroom management (Tookes et al., 2020).

K-12 school principals are responsible for student learning and should implement practices to meet school goals (Riley, 2018). Nonacademic learning processes include

strategies to teach students classroom expectations (Riley, 2018). Supporting students' emotional growth should be a priority of school principals (Riley, 2018).

Education stakeholders should work together to improve student learning (Postholm, 2018). School principals should support teachers to improve student learning, by implementing instructional leadership practices (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). School administrators should support teachers to teach students critical thinking skills through instruction to develop meaningful professional relationships with teachers and peers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). School administrators should focus on creating trusting and positive relationships with teachers and school staff by applying leadership practices to prioritize school goals (Brandmo et al., 2021) and by creating opportunities for students to succeed academically (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

School principals need to use strategies with teachers and students to create a safe school environment (Senol & Lesinger, 2018). School principals could implement leadership practices to manage instruction and create a safe school environment (Senol & Lesinger, 2018) because school principals' practices are associated with academic achievement (Marshall, 2018).

The successful use of restorative discipline (RD) practices depends on how school principals support teachers (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). RD are focusing on nonexclusionary school discipline actions (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). EDP are school discipline actions (Nese et al., 2020) that remove students from the classroom and/or school for a specified time period (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). A removal

of a student from the classroom depends on a violation of the school student code of conduct (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018).

A removal of a student from the classroom results in loss of instruction time and students fall behind academically (Nese et al., 2020). EDP negatively affect students that can lead to school dropout (Nese et al., 2020). The overuse of EDP do not only negatively affect students but also the school environment (Nese et al., 2020). According to Nese et al. (2020), EDP could result in a cyclical series of students' removals from the classroom. Repeated removals of students from school directly affect the academic success of students (Nese et al., 2020). An alternative approach to the use of EDPs has been made in some educational settings to reduce the use of EDP (Wymer et al., 2020). EDP are used to exclude students from classroom learning activities (Wymer et al., 2020). Exclusionary practices reduce the opportunity for students to learn from classroom learning activities (Wymer et al., 2020). Although the overuse of exclusionary discipline has been addressed, there is still evidence of persistent overuse (Nese et al., 2020). Federal and state agencies made recommendations for schools to reduce the use of EDPs in favor of alternative practices (Manassah et al., 2018).

RD practices are inclusionary and non-punitive alternatives to exclusionary discipline practices (Reyneke, 2020). Reyneke (2020) concluded that implementing RD practices could lead to the prevention of EDP problems. RD is an alternative way to address student behavior while reducing use of exclusionary discipline practices (Mansfield et al., 2018). RD practices allow for connectedness, the sense of being wanted, belonging, and engagement in the learning process (Baule, 2020). RD practices

could help students to practice the social-emotional skills that build a strong sense of community (Baule, 2020). The goal of RD practices is to reduce EDP in schools by reducing inappropriate student behaviors (Baule, 2020). School principals could use RD for the development of relationships between teachers and students (Baule, 2020). When a teacher or principal knows the back story of a student's life, it promotes understanding and decreases the misjudgment of responses in behaviors expressed by the student (Baule, 2020).

Positive behavior intervention supports (PBIS) are used to focus on positive responses to violations of student code of conduct and prevention and are effective in producing positive changes in student behavior and should be used by school principals (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). PBIS are used to meet the needs of students (Mitchell et al., 2018). PBIS and RD provide research-based disciplinary approaches to K-12 school principals (Gagnon et al., 2020) and could be used to reduce the use of EDP (Gagnon et al., 2020; Kittelman et al., 2019). RD and PBIS could be used to address the needs of students when they are removed from the classroom setting (Gagnon et al., 2020; Kittelman et al., 2019). PBIS could be a possible means of identifying mental health practices that are provided to the students with such needs (Kittelman et al., 2019). Students, teachers, and school principals need EDP alternatives to provide the opportunity for students to continue to learn and to receive behavior intervention supports that promote positive changes in behavior (Nese et al., 2020). Traditional discipline processes do not provide opportunities for remediation or reconciliation, and do not

address the core of the problem behavior (Nese et al., 2020). Changes in student behavior could occur by implementing PBIS (Goldin & McDaniel, 2018; Nese et al., 2020).

Teachers do not know how to promote positive behavior in students (Reyneke, 2020). Teachers need support to manage the negative student behaviors in the classroom (Wymer et al., 2020). Teachers who overused exclusionary discipline are more exhausted emotionally and less confident in their ability to manage student behaviors (Nese et al., 2020). Teachers and principals leave their jobs within the first 3 years due to issues with student behavior management (Nese et al., 2020; Reyneke, 2020; Wymer et al., 2020).

Principals and teachers need PD on discipline interventions. PD is necessary for the successful implementation of RD (Nese et al., 2020; O'Reilly, 2019; Short et al., 2018). Nese et al. (2020) reported improvements in staff retention, student engagement in learning, and student instructional time are positive results of effective PD on improving classroom management for teachers and administrators.

School stakeholders such as teachers and principals need PD on RD (O'Reilly, 2019; Short et al., 2018; Weaver & Swank, 2020). The lack of formal training can be a limitation for integrating RD practices within the school campus and classrooms (Weaver & Swank, 2020). Horner and Macaya (2018) said PD is insufficient to ensure that the discipline intervention strategies are adopted successfully and able to be implemented by the teachers and staff. PD on PBIS is beneficial to teachers and principals (O'Reilly, 2019; Short et al., 2018; Weaver & Swank, 2020). Horner and Macaya (2018) suggested that a coach could support the teacher in ways to provide instruction, to provide for the specific needs of an individual student, or to engage in effective classroom management

procedures. O'Reilly (2019) noted that the organizational system of the school campus should provide for a designated support staff to serve in the lead capacity as a coach in order to reach a level of implementation that makes a positive impact in the achievement of its students.

Social emotional learning (SEL) and RD promote a positive instructional environment without impacting the learning of most of the students (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). School administrators are incorporating SEL programs or components of SEL curricula (Riley, 2018). SEL and RD should be integrated into the school academic instructional curriculum (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). According to Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018), the use of SEL approaches improve students' abilities to regulate emotions and to understand social interactions and that social skills instruction is important for a healthy school environment. A prerequisite for academic achievement is a positive school environment (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). According to Riley (2018), the integration of RD with the SEL programs enhance the impact of these programs. Staff and teachers need to know that the school leadership has a high priority for this aspect of student learning (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Riley, 2018).

Schools with high exclusionary discipline rates had lower academic quality (Nese et al., 2020). Successful implementation of nonexclusionary discipline interventions requires the buy-in of all staff, especially those with an assigned responsibility in dealing with student behavior and discipline. Gahungu (2018) noted that the successful implementation of nonexclusionary discipline policies can only happen when principals

and teachers are equally committed to its success. Wymer et al. (2020) identified the following three key positive behavioral interventions that can be foundational to a non-exclusionary discipline intervention approach: (a) strategies that focus on relationships, (b) understanding the why of the behavior, and (c) the use restorative practices promote change in the way discipline is implemented.

This policy recommendation contains evidence from the findings. I also created this policy recommendation for education stakeholders at the project site to work together concerning student achievement because these stakeholders could address educational problems (Cohen et al., 2018). Education stakeholders at the project site could use this policy recommendation as schoolwide positive behavior intervention regarding student discipline (Mallett, 2016).

K-12 school principals could apply the strategies found in this policy recommendation to achieve school goals by supporting teachers with classroom management to help students improve their behaviors (Chiedozie & Victor, 2017). Additionally, K-12 school principals could apply the strategies found in this policy recommendation to create a safe school environment because student discipline and effective classroom management are conducive to student learning (Tookes et al., 2020) because these administrators are responsible for student learning (Riley, 2018). Furthermore, K-12 school principals could apply the strategies found in this policy recommendation to help teachers to be better prepared for classroom management (Postholm, 2018) to improve student learning (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018).

The strategies found in this policy recommendation are research-based and may help school principals implement instructional leadership to support teachers and improve student achievement (Samuels, 2018). Moreover, the strategies found in this policy recommendation may prepare school principals and teachers to improve student achievement by encouraging students to build professional relationships with teachers and learn the curriculum (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Additionally, the strategies found in this policy recommendation may prepare school principals to create trusting and positive relationships with teachers and school staff by implementing leadership practices to prioritize school goals (Brandmo et al., 2021). Finally, the strategies found in this policy recommendation may prepare school principals to create a safe teaching and learning environment by managing instruction (Senol & Lesinger, 2018).

Based on scholar regarding the practices K-12 school principals use to help students improve their behaviors in the classroom, RD practices include strategies to reduce EDP in schools (Baule, 2020). RD practices are used to reduce the number of students receiving exclusionary consequences (Rainbolt et al., 2019). Implementing RD could lead to the prevention of EDP problems (Reyneke, 2020). Moreover, RD is an alternative to reduce EDP (Wymer et al., 2020) and contain inclusive discipline practices to reduce student discipline issues (Garnett et al., 2018). RD practices provide instructional practices to promote learning among students (Garnett et al., 2018) and should be used to reduce student discipline referrals to the school office (Katic et al., 2020). K-12 school principals should implement RD practices and support teachers and

school staff to reduce EDP (Darling & Monk, 2018; Freeman et al., 2019). Thus, K-12 school principals should implement RD programs (Reyneke, 2020).

K-12 school principals could implement RD practices as a guide to reduce student discipline issues (Garnett et al., 2018) and support teachers to use RD (Baule, 2020). Moreover, K-12 school principals should support students' learning (Mansfield et al., 2018), and implement nonexclusionary discipline practices (Gahungu, 2018). Additionally, K-12 school principals reduce the use of EDP (Kennedy et al., 2017). Finally, K-12 school principals benefit from PD on the implementation of RD (Gerlach et al., 2018) because RD requires the training of teachers, school staff, and school principals (Fenning & Jenkins, 2018).

Strategies to Reduce the Use of EDP

The following strategies are for K-12 school principals to apply instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP. The focus of these strategies is on how to help K-12 school principals to better implement instructional leadership practices to work with teachers and students to improve student learning outcomes. By applying these strategies, K-12 school principals may create a school environment conducive to student academic success by reducing negative behaviors of students, and build a sense of community for students as an alternative way to address students' behaviors by implementing their leadership practices. PD for K-12 school principals may help them learn how to implement leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP because PD is vital for the successful reduction of the use of EDP and is necessary to accomplish school goals, such as teacher retention, student academic success, student engagement in

learning, and student instructional time, and classroom management for teachers and administrators. Guidelines may be developed by senior school district administrators to support school principals to: (a) create a positive school environment, (b) support staff and teachers regarding student learning, (c) implement nonexclusionary discipline interventions, (d) manage student discipline, (e) use positive student behavioral interventions, (f) use restorative practices to promote change in student discipline, (g) train and support teachers and school staff on nonexclusionary discipline interventions. I present this policy recommendation to K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators who will be the attendees at the study site.

K-12 school principals should:

- implemented instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP.
- work with teachers and students to improve student learning outcomes.
- create a school environment conducive to student academic success.
- reduce the use of EDP because these practices have negative student outcomes.
- reduce the use of EDP because these practices are ineffective in reducing negative behaviors of students.
- reduce the use of zero-tolerance because it is ineffective at the school and does not reduce disruptive behaviors.
- not overuse EDP because suspended students have academic disengagement and academic failure, and dropout rates may increase at the school.
- support teachers to build a sense of community for students as an alternative way to address student behaviors.

- use school disciplinary strategies based on state and federal school discipline guidelines to reduce the use of EDP.
- set as a school goal the reduction of the use of EDP.
- develop professional relationships with teachers and students.
- support teachers because they are leaving the school due to the negative and disruptive students' behaviors in the classroom.
- support teachers who are challenged with students' behaviors.
- support teachers to reduce the use of EDP.
- help students improve their behaviors.
- work with teachers and students to help students improve their behaviors at school to succeed academically.
- attend PD on how to reduce the use of EDP in order to accomplish school goals, such as teacher retention, student academic success, student engagement in learning, and student instructional time, and classroom management for teachers and administrators.
- attend PD to ensure student discipline strategies are implemented by the teachers and staff.

Senior school district administrators should:

- create a policy for K-12 school principals to know how to implement student discipline strategies with teachers and staff at the school.
- support K-12 school principals on how to reduce the use of EDP.

- support K-12 school principals on student discipline issues affect academic achievement and instructional time because teachers overuse EDP.
- develop guidelines for K-12 school principals to know how to implement student discipline strategies with teachers and staff at the school.
- develop guidelines for K-12 school principals to support staff and teachers regarding student learning.
- develop guidelines for K-12 school principals to implement nonexclusionary discipline interventions.
- develop guidelines for K-12 school principals to use positive student behavioral interventions.
- develop guidelines for K-12 school principals to use restorative practices to promote change in student discipline.
- develop guidelines for K-12 school principals to train and support teachers and school staff on nonexclusionary discipline interventions.
- develop guidelines for K-12 school principals to deal with student behaviors and discipline.

Conclusion

The policy recommendation contains strategies for K-12 school principals to use to reduce the use of EDP at the study site. Additionally, the policy recommendation contains strategies for senior school district administrators to support K-12 school principals to reduce the use of EDP at the study site. K-12 school principals and senior school district administrators benefit from this policy recommendation by implementing

the policy recommendation at the study site by learning specific strategies to use to support teachers and school staff to help students to improve their behaviors.

Teachers benefit from the implementation of the policy recommendation by being supported by K-12 school principals to reduce the use of EDP at the study site. Students benefit from the implementation of the policy recommendation by being supported by K-12 school principals, teachers, and school staff to improve their behaviors and graduate from school. The policy recommendation may result in positive social change by supporting students to improve their behaviors and graduate from school.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

This study is being conducted by me, Ms. ShaLonda W. Adams. I am a doctoral student at Walden University. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, I am conducting this interview via Zoom. Do I have your permission to record the interview ? (If Yes, the interview will continue; if No, thank to the participant and stop the interview).

This interview will be between 45 and 60 minutes. After the interview, I will ask you to review and revise, as needed, the transcript with your responses.

Your participation in this study is fully voluntary. You have the right to decline or discontinue participation at any time with no impact on the services at the school. There are minimal risks associated with this study such as fatigue or stress. If you feel any level of psychological distress, you may withdraw from the study at any time. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions.

I will not identify any name. I will only use your responses for any purpose of this study. Data will be kept secure for a period of at least 5 years, as required by Walden University. I have no administrative position in the school district.

You may ask any questions by contacting me via email within 3 weeks from the date, you received this form. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Gjellstad who is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210.

Interview Questions

1. What is your experience using EDP?
2. Please describe how have you been involved in EDP.

3. Can you describe how do you reduce, or plan to reduce the use of EDP?
4. How do your instructional leadership practices relate to the use of EDP?
5. Can you describe how do you use EDP?
6. How do you implement instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP?
7. Can you describe any shared decision-making process within teachers to reduce the use of exclusionary school discipline partnerships?
8. Please tell me about your role in reducing the use of exclusionary school discipline.
9. Tell me how EDP may help students at the school district.
10. Tell me how your involvement in EDP at the local district may help students.
11. How do you implement instructional leadership practices to reduce the use of EDP?
12. How do you see the benefits of implementing leadership practices on reducing the use of EDP?
13. Please describe the barriers of leadership practices on reducing the use of EDP?
14. What kind of support, in your opinion, is needed to implement leadership practices on reducing the use of EDP?