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Teacher Perceptions of Disproportionate Suspensions Between Minority and White Students

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Tanika Barr

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Walden University

2022

Abstract

Teacher Perceptions of Disproportionate Suspensions

Between Minority and White Students

by

Tanika Barr

MA, University of Bridgeport, 2006

BS, Manhattanville College, 2003

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

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Abstract

Throughout public schools in the United States, minority students continue to receive more disciplinary consequences compared to other groups of students. The problem addressed in this study was the persistence of discipline disproportionality between minority students and White students at a public U.S. middle school, even with recent efforts such as the implementation of the positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) framework. Guided by the theory of behaviorism, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate teachers' perceptions about the persistence of this discipline disproportionality between minority and White students and ways to improve the use of PBIS at a local middle school. A purposeful sample of nine teachers who had experience implementing PBIS in the local setting completed semi structured interviews. Data were analyzed using open coding to identify common themes. The themes indicated (a) various forms of disproportionality exist, (b) PBIS is effective and builds community in school, (c) professional development is needed for teachers to ensure fidelity with PBIS strategies, and (d) there is a need for consistency of PBIS implementation. The findings revealed that many teachers acknowledged that minority students receive more suspensions, and PBIS is effective, but professional development is needed. To address the fidelity of PBIS implementation and provide teachers with skills to work with students from diverse backgrounds, a 3-day professional development workshop was created. The findings of this study may initiate social change at the local level by offering strategies to narrow the disciplinary discrepancies between minority and White students and decrease student suspensions overall.

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Dedication

I dedicate this project study to my son. Throughout his life, I have taught him to work hard and anything in life is attainable if you work hard to achieve it. Cameron has shared this educational journey with me throughout his life. Although it has taken me twenty years to reach my ultimate educational goal, I have never given up. That is the message I want my son to remember in life, "Never give up!"

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
Section 1: The Problem.....	1
The Local Problem.....	1
Rationale	2
Definition of Terms.....	4
Significance of the Study	5
Research Questions.....	5
Review of Literature	6
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Literature Search Inquiry	8
Review of the Broader Problem.....	8
Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports.....	20
Effectiveness of PBIS	22
Implications.....	24
Summary	25
Section 2: The Methodology.....	26
Qualitative Research Design and Approach	26
Participants.....	27
Data Collection	29
Data Analysis	32
Data Analysis Results	34

Interview Findings	35
Theme 1: Various Forms of Disproportionality Exist	36
Theme 2: PBIS is Effective and Builds Community Within the School	38
Theme 3: Professional Development is Needed for Teachers to Ensure Fidelity With PBIS Strategies	41
Theme 4: There is a Need for Consistency of PBIS Implementation.....	45
Discrepant Cases.....	48
Implications of Findings	49
Implications Related to RQ1.....	50
Implications Related to RQ2.....	51
Summary	51
Section 3: The Project.....	57
Introduction.....	57
Rationale	58
Review of the Literature	59
Professional Development	59
Professional Development for Educators.....	61
Experiential and Transformative Learning and the Role of Leadership.....	65
Project Description.....	69
Potential Resources and Existing Supports.....	69
Potential Barriers and Solutions.....	70
Proposal for Implementation and Timetable.....	71

Roles and Responsibilities	73
Project Evaluation Plan.....	73
Goal of the Project	75
Stakeholders	75
Project Implications	76
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	77
Introduction.....	77
Project Strengths and Limitations.....	77
Recommendations for an Alternative Approach.....	78
Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change	79
Reflection on Importance of the Work	80
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research	80
Conclusion	82
References.....	83
Appendix A: Project	101

List of Tables

Table 1: Summary of Themes and Categories Created From the Research Questions	36
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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

The research problem associated with this study was the persistence of discipline disproportionality between minority students and White students at a U.S. public middle school, even with recent efforts such as the implementation of positive behavioral intervention and supports (PBIS). I used a basic qualitative study to investigate teachers' perceptions about PBIS strategies in relationship to student behavioral referrals and suspensions.

Managing student behavior problems in middle schools can be challenging for educators (Griffin, 2019; Hansen et al., 2017). Examples of such problem behaviors include chronic absenteeism and misconduct, which can be severe and affect academic performance (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2017; Rhoad-Drogalis & Justice, 2018). Many problem behaviors require disciplinary action, including out-of-school suspensions (OSS; Steinberg & Lacoë, 2017). According to 2017 policy from the State Department of Education for the study site, suspensions are categorized based on the nature of the offense, and offenses fall into 10 different categories ranging from school policy violations such as insubordination to violent crimes against another person.

The suspension categories are based on statewide criteria. During the 2016-2017 school year, suspensions in certain categories, such as school policy violations, declined by 28.5%, while other categories, such as drugs, alcohol, and tobacco use, increased statewide. Data from the 2018–2019 school year indicated suspensions in those categories have decreased by 17.4% and 13.3% in the state's public schools. However,

disproportionality remains a factor when examining suspension data between Black, Hispanic, and White students. For similar offenses, one out of 34 White students is suspended compared to one out of 10 Black students and one out of 14 Hispanic students (Felder & Traverso, 2021).

The local setting of this study was a public U.S. middle school. During the 2016–2017 school year, this school issued 66 suspensions to students for disciplinary reasons. Compared to the rest of the district, this school’s suspensions were significantly lower. The other three schools had suspension numbers of 92, 147, and 336. Nevertheless, the problem persisted, and students received suspensions and lost valuable instructional time in the classroom, even though the school had implemented PBIS for the past 5 years. During the 2016–2017 school year, of all suspensions the school issued, 12.6% went to Black students, 6.5% to Hispanic students, and 3.4% to White students.

Rationale

PBIS is used in many schools to promote acceptable behaviors and to prevent negative behaviors. However, over several decades, student suspensions continue to rise in disproportionate numbers (Baule, 2020). At the research site, despite the implementation of PBIS, the problem persisted, and minority students have continued to receive suspensions at a disproportionate rate.

Disciplinary practices such as suspensions and expulsions can have a negative impact on students’ learning and their social and emotional development (Madigan et al., 2016). Students who are repeatedly removed from the classroom due to disciplinary issues lose access to learning opportunities, and these absences may impede them from

attaining optimal academic success (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Any time students are excluded from class, it can affect them personally and harm the teacher-student relationship. This effect is especially pronounced if students are suspended at a disproportionate rate compared to other students.

Educational leaders continue to work with agencies to help improve student outcomes (McIntosh et al., 2021). Therefore, school districts are currently looking to find ways to change existing policies to those that are based more on equity in hopes to lessen the disparity (Curran & Finch, 2021). In addition to educational leaders, political officials within the Department of Education have expressed concerns regarding the high rate of suspensions and the disproportionate rates. As a result, many states have mandated that schools revise their discipline policies based on studies that have identified a correlation between exclusionary discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline (Puckett et al., 2019).

To gain more insight on the potential disproportionate OSS that minority students receive within the local school district, I conducted an informal conversation with two district school administrators. During these informal conversations, I asked each administrator the same five questions concerning the problem of the potential disproportionate discipline practices within their schools and their opinion of the effectiveness of PBIS.

Administrator A had worked in the local district for 40 years and had been an administrator for 24 years. Administrator A agreed that there is a disproportionate number of suspensions between minority students and White students. This administrator

also recognized that this trend has been apparent since he began as a teacher in the district over 40 years ago. According to this administrator,

There is a lack of understanding on the part of the staff about cultural differences and expectations...as a result, teachers may interpret certain behaviors as disrespectful and then overreact by giving consequences that may be inappropriate to the disciplinary offense.

When asked what can be done to address this problem, Administrator A spoke about comprehensive professional development programs provided to the entire staff to help them better understand the various cultures within the district as well as how to incorporate strategic behavioral interventions.

I asked the same five questions of an administrator from another school within the district. This administrator found race and culture to be less of an issue with student disciplinary issues. This administrator felt strongly that the disproportionate number of referrals and suspensions had much to do with the individual teacher and their tolerance managing the classroom and working with a diverse student body.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate teachers' perceptions about the persistence of discipline disproportionality between minority and White students and ways to improve the use of PBIS at the study site.

Definition of Terms

The following are definitions of the key terms that were used in the study:

Exclusionary discipline. Exclusionary discipline refers to the removal of a student from the classroom learning environment for disciplinary reasons (Curran, 2016).

In-school suspension (ISS). ISS is a disciplinary action that involves the removal of a student from her or his regular classroom environment and relocates to an alternative setting within the school (Morris & Perry, 2016).

Out-of-school suspension (OSS). OSS is a disciplinary action that involves the removal of a student from the school premises because of displaying inappropriate behaviors (Morris & Perry, 2016).

Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS). PBIS is a school-wide program that rewards students for displaying positive behaviors and demonstrating positive school culture values (R. J. Cook et al., 2016).

Significance of the Study

The findings of my study may be of significant value to educators in the public school district by promoting fair and equitable discipline solutions. The first step was to determine that teachers were aware that minority students from different subgroups received suspensions at a disproportionate rate to White students. Once educators were aware of this fact, teachers, school leaders, and districts could consider other disciplinary actions they could take that do not lead to suspensions.

Research Questions

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate teachers' perceptions about the persistence of discipline disproportionality between minority and White students and capture their ideas for ways to improve the use of PBIS in a U.S. public middle school. I used the following research questions to guide this study:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are middle school teachers' perceptions of PBIS as it relates to disciplinary disproportionality between minority and White students?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do middle school teachers describe ways to improve PBIS use to address the problem of disciplinary disproportionality between minority and White students?

Review of Literature

The review of literature includes sources on school disciplinary methods including exclusionary discipline, zero tolerance policies, and precorrections. I also reviewed literature on intervention support programs, such as positive behavior intervention supports and behaviorism.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was behaviorism. Behaviorist theory focuses on behavioral changes resulting from a stimulus (Dastpak et al., 2017). For this study, it is possible to look at PBIS as the stimuli that can improve students' behaviors in school. According to Watson (1924), the father of behaviorism, a response can be predicted based on the presentation of a stimulus. Behaviorism can be divided into two forms of conditioning, including classic and operant. Classic conditioning involves the pairing and continued presentation of a neutral stimulus with a biologically potent one to elicit a desired response (Watson, 1924). Operant conditioning involves the punishment or reinforcement of a particular behavior to increase or decrease its likelihood in the future (Skinner, 1957).

In the context of the current study, operant conditioning describes the role of disciplinary action in increasing desired behavior or decreasing inappropriate conduct among students (Tomcho & Foels, 2017). Operant conditioning has been used as a disciplinary strategy in education for decades, and essentially all forms of discipline are rooted in this punishment/reinforcement concept (Rajyaguru et al., 2019). However, contemporary research suggests that positive reinforcement is a far more effective strategy than punishment for promoting desirable behavior and conduct in students (Olaniyi & Hassan, 2019; Rajyaguru et al., 2019). As such, behaviorism is a useful way to explain the effects of PBIS.

If behaviorism (and specifically operant conditioning, upon which PBIS is based) is working properly, then the school should see a decrease in student suspensions. The link between behaviorism (i.e., operant conditioning) and the current study was that if the assumptions of the theory were valid, then there should be no disparity in suspensions because all individuals would be subjected to the same behavioral parameters and principles of reinforcement (Kelly & Pohl, 2018). This equity would be the case regardless of whether alternative factors influenced behavior because, according to behaviorist theory, human beings are governed by the same principles of conditioning, and social and cognitive factors do not influence the functioning of reinforcement, punishment, stimulus generalization, and all other components of a behavioral paradigm (Skinner, 1957).

Literature Search Inquiry

I researched scholarly articles using an online database available at the Walden Library. The articles were peer reviewed and current within a 5-year time frame. Search terms included *behaviorist theory, exclusions, disciplinary methods, suspensions, and zero-tolerance policies.*

Review of the Broader Problem

School Discipline

Historically, school discipline has been a response to student misbehavior. For school discipline to be effective requires support from students, teachers, and parents. All parties must have respect for the disciplinary process, the expectations, and policies set forth by the teacher, school, school district, and the potential consequences for policy violations (Weymeis et al., 2019). Students should learn expected behaviors and receive positive reinforcement for adhering to the rules. Provided there is a clear understanding of the school rules and the belief that they are fair and reasonable, resistance can be minimized (D. H. Anderson et al., 2018). Consequences for policy violations should not feel or appear random or resentment or rebellion may result (D. H. Anderson et al., 2018).

Discipline is a necessary aspect of teaching and learning. Students must be aware of the expectations of their school environment and the rules they need to follow. If a teacher does not have classroom management skills, it is likely that some students will have a difficult time learning. For students to have the best educational experience, the students need to have a certain level of discipline, and teachers need to ensure rules and

policies are followed (Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021). While discipline issues in schools vary across the world, students who respect the morals, values, and boundaries at home and in school will have a better chance performing well in school without facing punitive consequences (Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021).

Nelson (2016) referred to school discipline as the ability to adhere to a specific set of rules or codes of conduct within the school environment. These codes of conduct are often derived from classroom behavior policies that include consequences for violations. School leaders have many roles and responsibilities, and providing a safe learning environment for students remains at the top of the list (Nelson, 2016). However, within the last decade, many school districts have sought to revise many of the school codes due to high numbers of suspensions and the negative impact exclusionary practices have on students (Curran & Finch, 2021).

Truancy, skipping class, tardiness, fighting, blatant defiance, verbal abuse, and disrespect toward teachers and peers have been among the most highly and recently reported discipline issues in schools nationwide (Mason, 2015). Researchers are finding ways to address defiance and disrespect towards teachers in the classroom. A recent study featured nine faculty members who were able to identify triggers that may impact students and cause them to be disrespectful. These triggers can be reduced by implementing behavioral strategies (Bantha et al., 2020). Mason (2015) affirmed that 25% of public school in the United States reported bullying as an offense that happens on a weekly, if not daily, basis. Mason (2015) also reported that 11% of public schools have daily occurrences of verbal abuse and disrespect toward teachers. As a result of these

rising issues, administrators have adopted and employed a multiplicity of strategies to handle discipline, including punitive practices such as OSS, in-school suspensions (ISS), and expulsion (Mason, 2015). According to Nelson (2016), these zero-tolerance practices began in response to major problems, including violence and drug possession and use, in public schools, but policies have since expanded to include many other infractions such as fighting and bullying.

Early researchers reflected on the structural and institutional development of school educational theory, policy and curriculum, and school administrations. Modern historians now explore deeper into school culture and how gender, race, class, and ethnicity shape academic outcomes, school experiences, and the training and treatment of teachers and other internal stakeholders. Historians also investigated the political and social roles of parents and external stakeholders such as local businesses in and around the community (Baumann & Krskova, 2016).

Since the 18th century, formal schools have always maintained an expected pattern of conduct to be followed by students, parents, teachers, and administration. Over the years, these patterns of behavior, values, and beliefs have come to serve as evidence that good teaching exists within a school's learning environment (Mason, 2015). Today, school discipline has taken a new shape in that it promotes more self-regulation of the teachers and administrators. Certain forms of discipline also require moral regulations such as the adherence to implicit and explicit rules of conduct (Anyon et al., 2018).

Currently, disciplinary policies spell out requirements for students but also include expectations for teachers and administrators. According to Mason (2015), the

appearance of moral regulation is not that of direct physical contact or punishment, nor does it appear as an exercise of authority and power; instead, moral regulation involves the shaping of one's conscience and conduct through self-appropriation of beliefs and morals regarding what is right and wrong. The daily business of American schools is dictated by state laws, local and national funding, curriculum policies, and employment practices, which are maintained by administrators, teachers, students, and parents.

Discipline policies and procedures are intended to promote desired behavioral outcomes, but these requirements do not always correlate positively with the achievement of academic success (Baumann & Krskova, 2016). An ideal classroom would consist of all students who have open minds and are eager to learn. Also, in an ideal world, the educator would be trained to work with a diverse student body where different abilities, personalities, and cultural differences exist (Anyon et al., 2018). In the real world, however, students and educators do not always meet these ideals.

While disciplinary consequences are necessary, they may also be problematic. Many of the disciplinary consequences involve exclusionary strategies that have a negative impact on not just academic achievement, but also social and emotional development (Madigan et al., 2016). After many years of research, experts have found exclusionary discipline to have a negative impact on students' social and emotional learning (Nese et al., 2020). Recent findings indicated that when students are constantly reprimanded by teachers, a temporary decrease in disruptive behaviors is followed by an increase in future disruptive behaviors (Caldarella et al., 2021). Students who are repeatedly impacted by exclusionary disciplinary issues ultimately have less opportunity

to develop socially and academically. This deficit may impede their long-term attainment of knowledge and skills needed to function in society (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Repeat offenders are often labeled as problematic and troublesome for other students, creating a sense of stigmatization that increases the risk of dropping out of school (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017).

Problem behavior theory, theory of cognitive moral development, and Gestalian perception theory served as the foundation for this study because they provided a deeper understanding of adolescent behaviors that subsequently lead to the issuance of office discipline referrals and assignment to ISS. Because ISS is a school-based disciplinary program, I found it important to understand the relationship of student behaviors (through the theories), and the behaviors, which lead to assignment to ISS (Madigan et al., 2016). Problem behavior theory and cognitive moral development theory helped to explain the probable causes of deviance or problem behaviors that result in the assignment to ISS; as such, this background information is important to understand the purpose and intent of ISS.

Understanding the risk factors that are present in a student's family may help to explain certain challenging behaviors in the academic environment. Determining which external factors may be influencing a student's challenging behavior can aid in addressing the root of the issue if predisposition is not related to genetic factors (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). However, most existing research has indicated the strong influence of external and nongenetic factors on challenging behavior (Waller et al., 2016). Another familial risk factor that can make challenging childhood behavior more likely is maternal

maltreatment. Histories of childhood maltreatment among mothers were related to behavioral and emotional problems exhibited by their children, and this dynamic may make some educational disciplinary practices ineffective (Waller et al., 2016).

Exclusionary Discipline

Wolf and Kupchik (2017) identified various exclusionary discipline practices including ISS, OSS, and expulsions. Despite evidence demonstrating the negative impacts of exclusion as a disciplinary method, this practice continues to be used frequently in American public schools. The removal of students from the classroom environment has the opposite effect of its intention and often contributes to delinquency in racial minorities (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Educators and policymakers continue to examine the effects of exclusionary discipline and have found a negative impact on students because of its long-term contribution to continued delinquency amongst racial minorities (Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Wegmann & Smith, 2019).

In-School Suspension. ISS offers an alternative learning environment for students who have violated school rules and need to be removed from the general classroom population for a specified period. Students who are removed from the general population remain on the school campus, isolated from other students, but must remain in the school's learning environment. It is important to understand that during ISS, the learning environment does not include the home. Including the home would be considered OSS (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

Most schools follow a similar protocol for assigning ISS consequences. For example, at the local school, students who are assigned to ISS report to a common

classroom and typically receive their lunch before the rest of the student population. Except for the maximum number of days of the punishment, all decisions, such as when ISS students take their lunch and overall general policies associated with ISS programs, are made on the local level and are not federally or state mandated. Students in ISS can complete class assignments, and upon completion of their assigned term, they are released back into the general school population and allowed to resume regularly scheduled classes (Mason, 2015; Nelson, 2016). Although students are not denied their schoolwork during ISS, research has shown that when students are removed from the class multiple times for disciplinary reasons, their academic motivation decreases. Truancy increases along with drop-out rates (Islam, 2021).

Out-of-School Suspension. Student discipline issues have always been present in public schools. The use of OSS has been associated with promoting racial disparity (Morris & Perry, 2016). Ethnic minorities often experience this type of punishment at a higher rate than non-minorities (Morris & Perry, 2016). However, even as evidence grows regarding the negative impact of exclusion, schools are continuously using it to address student behavioral issues (Annamma et al., 2019). Multiple studies have demonstrated the negative effects of exclusionary school discipline, thus, providing support for alternative disciplinary strategies (Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016; Madigan et al., 2016; Morris & Perry, 2016). Students who receive more than one suspension are more likely to exhibit negative behaviors and outcomes (Losen et al., 2017).

Exclusionary discipline leads to low academic outcomes because of the student's removal from opportunities to develop cognitively and socially (Cornell et al., 2018;

Welch & Payne, 2018; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). What is more concerning is that not all students have an equal likelihood or risk of experiencing exclusionary discipline. Studies have shown that students of color, students with disabilities, poorer students, including both the homeless and those eligible for a free and reduced priced lunch, male students, and urban students experience the highest rates of exclusionary discipline (Green et al., 2019; Welch & Payne, 2018). Removing students from the classroom has become an immediate response for some teachers to eliminate disobedient students and prevent their negative influences on others, although this practice ultimately contributes to further delinquency (Cornell et al., 2018; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017).

Negative Outcomes of Exclusionary Discipline

Welch and Payne (2018) conducted a study of exclusionary discipline practices used by teachers in an alternative classroom setting and found that some teachers targeted certain groups of students more than others to address disciplinary behaviors. Several factors, including ideology of students' expectations, discipline outcomes, and culture, influenced teachers' decision-making and may have contributed to this tendency. The teachers who were observed for this study were characterized by their use of four different types of power. These characterizations were (a) normative power, (b) coercive power, (c) interactively established contracts, and (d) charm. The teachers who used coercive power were the teachers who wrote the most referrals on students (Welch & Payne, 2018). Therefore, it can be determined that the teachers have a great deal of control when it comes to students' disciplinary consequences.

Kennedy-Lewis and Murphy (2016) revealed that students who received multiple disciplinary infractions have been identified by some teachers as “frequent flyers,” a term associated with being bad and making poor decisions. This study examined 11 minority boys and girls in an urban middle school. Through qualitative research techniques such as interviews and focus group discussions, the participants of the study revealed that they had collectively received suspensions between one and six times. They had been referred to the office 28 times, with some resulting in suspensions.

Over the course of these repeated exclusionary practices, the students explained how they felt being labeled by teachers as “bad.” The researchers concluded that the students did not initially view themselves as bad kids; however, the newly acquired labels had a negative effect on their subsequent performance and behavior (Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016). This study shows how students can develop poor self-image and low self-esteem when they are singled out from the rest of their peers for behavioral reasons. Another negative effect of exclusionary discipline is the increased risk for long-term deviance and other negative behaviors. A connection exists between excluding students from the classroom and youth incarceration, a phenomenon previously defined as the school-to-prison pipeline (McCarter, 2017).

Other studies have been conducted on the same topic, and the findings on exclusionary practices were similar. Madigan et al. (2016) explained that exclusionary disciplinary practices such as OSS and expulsions can have a negative impact on students’ academic performance as well as social and emotional development. When students are suspended or expelled from school repeatedly, they lose both instructional

class time and the opportunity to develop socially by interacting with peers (Madigan et al., 2016). This study and others proved that exclusionary discipline does not necessarily improve students' behavior; in fact, it can cause additional harm to the mental health of students.

Kupchik and Catlaw (2015) also studied the long-term effects that suspensions can have on students. The researchers used a National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health data to identify the impact school exclusion can have on children as they age. Their results led to the conclusion that children who have experienced punitive disciplinary practices were more likely to become less involved in civic activities such as voting and volunteering. While voting is a right to which all Americans are entitled, youth who have experienced being suspended or removed from class for their misbehavior can grow up feeling like outsiders in the larger society. The conclusion of this study added to the literature that suspensions have a negative impact on students. Punitive and exclusionary discipline practices do not offer students the opportunity to problem solve and create other alternatives for their decisions. Therefore, they limit citizens' ability to think creatively in a democratic society.

Mendoza et al. (2019) and Steinberg and Lacoé (2017) studied how cultural norms have an impact on the way students are disciplined. Contemporary research revealed that Western principles of morality, such as those in the United States, centered more on the law and social norms, while Eastern principles of morality, such as those of India and China, were centered around maintaining interpersonal relationships, thus supporting the belief and theory that there are cultural differences when it comes to moral

reasoning (Mendoza et al., 2019). Steinberg and Lacoë (2017) suggested that a culture's code of morality can differ in terms of content and applicability in that moral code can stem from a system of rights demanded from other systems of duties owed to others. Mendoza et al. (2019) clarified this notion by stating that perceptions of moral behavior can either be viewed as an individual decision or one that is influenced by and for the sake of others, such as with peer pressure. Mendoza et al. (2019) contended that cultural differences in moral reasoning impacts what people value and how people determine what or whom to value.

Nese et al. (2020) found that exclusionary discipline tactics have a negative impact on student learning and emotional development. Other findings revealed that suspensions in American schools are characterized by racial discrepancies (Islam, 2021). Recently, some states have contemplated eliminating exclusionary discipline practices (K. P. Anderson, 2020). Baroni et al. (2020) stated that some schools throughout the country have tried to implement an alternative to exclusionary discipline, such as sending students to a cool down room or a Monarch Room as a strategy before exclusion. This strategy can offer a therapeutic approach where students can speak to adult about their actions and try to have the student reflect on their behavior before going back to class. Research has shown that The Monarch Room has been successful in reducing the practice of suspensions (Baroni et al., 2020).

Precorrection and School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports

Over time, challenging behaviors can become increasingly disruptive and affect the quality of learning for other students in the classroom. Teachers who must devote a

significant portion of their day to addressing challenging behaviors have less time to teach, lead activities, and enrich the lives of their students; thus, the consequences of problematic preschool behaviors affect both teachers and students. Punishing disciplinary practices, such as automatic office referrals, exclusionary discipline, and suspensions have not proven to be the most effective approach to student discipline issues in American public schools (Grünke et al., 2017). As a result, school officials continue to examine more proactive approaches to promoting desired classroom behaviors (D. H. Anderson et al., 2018).

Precorrection is a strategy that some educators use to prevent students from engaging in disruptive and inappropriate behaviors. This approach includes the teachers making it clear to the students what is expected of them during their classes and what behaviors are not acceptable. Proactive strategies, when used effectively, can deter or prevent undesirable behaviors and may help diminish the racial disparity in disciplinary action in contemporary schools (Kourea et al., 2016). While precorrection strategies have shown to be effective, it is important that educators are culturally aware and responsive to understanding all students based on their individual cultural norms and backgrounds.

Hunter and Haydon (2019) focused on a classroom management package for teachers to use as a precorrection method to discipline. The package consists of antecedent strategies that are designed to prevent common behavioral issues. Teachers provided prompts to remind students of instructional goals as well as appropriate classroom behaviors. Evidence indicated that good classroom management can lead to improved student learning and engagement and reduce inappropriate behaviors from

students. The final analysis of the study indicated that when the management package was used, there was a 50% decrease in student disruptions (Hunter & Haydon, 2019). Therefore, evidence suggested that precorrections and behavioral interventions are effective when executed properly.

Students With Diverse Backgrounds and Socioeconomics

Many public schools in America are ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. Students come to school with different backgrounds and varying needs for additional support and understanding. As a result, schools have started using behavioral interventions to help support the most challenging students. Griffin (2019) discovered a correlation between socioeconomics and school discipline and reported that where there were higher levels of socioeconomic inequality, there were higher levels of discipline problems.

Further, a strong association exists between students identified with behavioral issues and low academic achievement. Students who attend schools with disciplinary problems tend to have lower test scores when compared to schools with minimal disciplinary concerns in urban school settings (Curran et al., 2021). Despite the high levels of economic prosperity, students in the United States have consistently scored lower in test score performance than other countries such as South Korea and Japan, which reportedly have fewer school disciplinary problems (Griffin, 2019).

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

Sugai and Horner (2009) are the founders of PBIS. Prior to the creation of PBIS, Sugai and other researchers developed a behavioral model known as the effective

behavior supports (EBS), which significantly reduced students' discipline referrals and improved academic performance in many students over a 10-year time frame (Sadler & Sugai, 2009). EBS evolved into PBIS when instructional strategies were incorporated into daily lessons.

PBIS is an evidence-based, multi-tiered intervention program designed to increase positive behaviors by enhancing interpersonal skills. These skills include social, behavioral, and learning strategies (Garbacz et al., 2016). The framework is divided into three tiers based on the students' needs. Tier 1 is offered to all students and focuses on behavioral expectations, teacher expectations, modeling, feedback, and continual reinforcement of acknowledging students for reaching these expectations (Horner & Sugai, 2015). Tier 2 offers more strategies and typically applies to a smaller number of students. Some of the strategies consist of increased additional recognition when students reach their goal. The third tier identifies the students who require the most behavioral support. Tier 3 is applied when students are not successful with the first two tiers. This tier generally consists of 1% to 5% of the students in a school who need intense support from teachers and staff (Horner & Sugai, 2015). Some strategies for Tier 3 may include shortened time on tasks, frequent breaks during class time, or working with a one-to-one paraprofessional, progress monitoring, or wrap around services.

The program is designed to work on a school-wide basis. There are four goals involved: supporting social competence and academic achievement, supporting decision making, supporting student behavior, and supporting staff behavior (Garbacz et al., 2016). PBIS helps to reduce suspensions because it aims to address behaviors through a

rewards system instead of punitive and exclusionary tactics and suspensions (Baule, 2020). Researchers have found that the implementation of PBIS has significantly helped to reduce inappropriate behaviors that could have led to disciplinary consequences. Since PBIS focuses on keeping students in the classroom, researchers have found that through its implementation, schools have reported an increase in students' academic achievement and attendance (Baule, 2020).

Effectiveness of PBIS

One reason PBIS has been successful is the use of data. For example, attendance data could be used with the implementation of PBIS to target attendance problems (Molina et al., 2020). Schools that have used this research-based platform have been able to identify the needs of individual students. Another reason PBIS is effective is the commitment of all staff members in a school. When utilized on a school-wide basis, evidence has shown improvements in school climate (Garbacz et al., 2016). Using a proactive approach, PBIS teaches expectations, problem-solving, and good decision-making among students while tracking positive behavior with fidelity (Garbacz et al., 2016).

The intervention focuses on students' academic, social, and behavioral needs. PBIS is measured by using a tiered fidelity inventory (TFI) to determine reliability and validity (Noltemeyer et al., 2018). While there is no prescribed curriculum for PBIS, it is imperative that the entire school is on one accord to promote a positive learning environment, and it is imperative that all teachers model expected behavior. Many researchers are confident that when PBIS is implemented effectively and with fidelity,

most students will respond positively (Garbacz et al., 2016; Griffin, 2019). PBIS has lowered school-wide behavioral issues and office referrals in some settings (Scheuermann & Nelson, 2019).

Approximately 26,000 schools in the United States currently use PBIS and some plan to incorporate other components of school staff to reach optimal results of improved student behavior (Pas et al., 2019). PBIS is projected to expand throughout the country more due to Every Student Succeeds Act of 2021 (Eiraldi et al., 2019). With more funding, schools are starting to implement mental health evidence-based practices (EBAs) with Tier 2 PBIS strategies. In addition, many schools are planning to incorporate their school resource officers (SROs) as part of the PBIS team (McCurdy et al., 2019). The rationale for training SROs in PBIS is to help create a better school climate. The SROs will be able to work with students to increase their awareness of illegal activity and to improve the school community. This measure may also help reduce the negative stigma some students have toward law enforcement (McCurdy et al., 2019).

Research shows that PBIS Tier 1 interventions help reduce office referrals and behavioral issues in schools (Eiraldi et al., 2019). However, some question the success of Tier 2 strategies and teacher fidelity in different schools. Some evidence implied that Tier 2 strategies are more difficult to reach in urban low-income school districts. Some reasons for the low success rate include high teacher turnover, lack of funding for training, and shortages of overall resources (Eiraldi et al., 2019). Regardless of funding, if teachers continue to implement PBIS strategies with fidelity, students will likely show improvements in their behavior (Noltmeyer et al., 2019).

Implications

Project options for this study could have included a curriculum plan and policy recommendation. However, a professional development workshop (Appendix A) aligned more closely with the purpose of this study because a workshop would include goals and learning outcomes for teachers as they focus on reducing student suspensions. A professional development workshop could be implemented based on the needs expressed by participants of this study. A three-day workshop would focus on PBIS strategies, cultural sensitivity, mental health disorders in adolescence, and social emotional strategies for students struggling with discipline and behavioral issues. Upon completion of the professional development workshop, teachers will have gained a refresher on PBIS strategies and become more skilled on how to approach students when addressing disciplinary behaviors.

Findings from this qualitative study may indicate the need for ongoing professional development offered several times a year within the school district where the study was conducted. The literature review provided insight into different ways to reduce exclusionary discipline policies in middle schools. This information could also be shared with school administrators and paraprofessionals. Exclusionary discipline strategies such as suspensions do not necessarily improve inappropriate behaviors in some students (Annamma et al., 2019). Therefore, additional training on behavior could be a positive addition to the local school district. The implementation of professional development could help reduce student suspensions and improve school culture, which are more

effective long-term solutions for problematic behaviors in students (Annamma et al., 2019).

Summary

Section 1 of this study highlighted the persistence of discipline disproportionality between minority students and White students in a U.S. public middle school, even with recent efforts such as the implementation of PBIS during the school years 2015–2016 and 2016–2017. A review of scholarly literature covered the topics of exclusionary discipline, ISS, and OSS, precorrections, PBIS, students with diverse backgrounds, as well as the conceptual framework of behaviorism. Section 2 in this study consists of my research design and approach, setting and samples, instrument and materials, data collection and analysis. Section 3 includes details on the proposed professional development project as well as a review of literature relating to adult learning. Section 4 provides reflections on the importance of my study, directions for future research, and a project evaluation plan.

Section 2: The Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate teachers' perceptions about the persistence of discipline disproportionality between minority and White students and to ask teachers to suggest ways to improve the use of PBIS at the study site. I conducted and analyzed participant interviews to determine teachers' perceptions on students' suspensions and the use of PBIS. The results of this study may encourage more educators to examine their school's suspension data and seek alternative discipline strategies besides exclusionary discipline.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

The qualitative research design for this study was a basic qualitative design. I used this design to conduct semi-structured interviews with participants. The number of participants was a major factor when selecting a research design type. Because I selected one research site, the possibility of a small sample size was likely. As a result, my study consisted of nine participants, I decided to use a design that would suit a small sample size. A basic qualitative study does not require a large sample size. In fact, a basic qualitative design can be conducted with a single subject. The use of a small number of participants enables researchers to achieve data saturation and to solicit rich, detailed data (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

This research design included interviews as the main data source; in interviews, researchers can explore and gain understanding of individuals or human problems (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2016). Using this design also allowed me to gain in-depth information concerning the high number of office referrals and school suspensions and to

achieve a better understanding of the effects exclusionary discipline has on students. Qualitative researchers also work to identify themes through coding of data and interpretation of the results (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2016).

By contrast, quantitative studies are generally conducted by collecting empirical data, measurements, and models and then determining and/or examining the relationships or comparisons between the study variables represented by these data through statistical tests (Bell et al., 2018). I could have used a case study, another qualitative approach, as a research design for my study. However, I did not choose that design because I was not examining one specific program or group. A mixed methods design, which would have generated both quantitative and qualitative data, could have been a viable option (Creswell, 2012). However, a basic qualitative design was the best option for this study as it provided me with the opportunity to openly speak with the participants and try to determine why a disparity existed between minority and White students' school suspensions at the study site.

Participants

I used purposeful sampling to select participants for this study. Qualitative researchers purposefully select their participants based on the participants' knowledge and connections to the research problem (Bell et al., 2018). These participants were key informants with valuable knowledge of the topic of the study. Nine experienced teachers who were familiar with PBIS agreed to participate. The criteria used to select the participants for this study derived from four factors.

1. Educators who were tenured and fully aware of their school's discipline policies.
2. Educators who taught a wide variety of students with different cultural backgrounds.
3. Educators who had been trained in PBIS.
4. The participants selected for this study were educators who had taught 5 years or more and worked at the research site throughout the duration that PBIS had been implemented.

Once I received IRB approval, #06-12-20-0417889, I emailed each prospective teacher using the school's online directory and informed them of my study. I provided a personal explanation of the selection criteria, and if the teacher qualified for the study, I mailed them a formal consent form before any interviewing took place. I made no exclusions based on demographic factors, as indicated above.

To protect participants' privacy and keep data confidential, I adhered to the security method of de-identifying all data collected in the study to conceal the identity of the school and the participants. Interview transcripts and coded notes will remain in a locked file cabinet in my home office. I did not reveal any parts of this study in a public setting, such as my school of employment, nor did I discuss any material of this study with any persons other than the participants.

Participants' actual names do not appear in this study; instead, I referred to them by alphanumeric codes to protect their identities. All participants of this study were notified that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw from study at any

time. It is imperative that participants do not feel compelled to continue their involvement in a research study if for some reason they want to withdraw. Participants should have the freedom to remove themselves from a study at any time without consequences, feelings of guilt, or fear of retribution (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2016). Once all participants indicated their understanding of their rights, they provided informed consent to take part in the study. No data collection began until informed consent was in place. These steps were necessary before data could be collected.

Data Collection

I developed five interview questions for the data collection instrument. Most of the questions centered on teachers' perceptions of PBIS and minority students' suspensions. Previous research findings provided the rationale for the questions. For example, Interview Question 1 was "In your opinion, is PBIS effective in your school? What gives you that impression?" Clayton et al. (2020) conducted a PBIS study in five different schools. Some of the findings indicated that teachers found PBIS to be beneficial, but at the same time, some school discussed challenges with PBIS. Therefore, it is important to get buy-in from teachers as well as their impressions of the program, since they are the ones to implement PBIS strategies in their classrooms.

A case study conducted by Fetterman et al. (2020) showed that a school implementing PBIS for the first year had an increase in positive perceptions from teachers. These results confirmed that teachers are an essential part of PBIS, and their opinions are important to the success of the program. Teacher buy-in and implementation

of PBIS are connected to behaviorism in that teachers will continue to implement the necessary strategies as long as students' behavior improve.

Another interview question used for this study addressed minority students and disproportionate suspensions. Interview Question 3 was "Do you think minority students are suspended at a disproportionate rate compared to White students? Why do you think this occurs? Please explain." This question was relevant to my study because PBIS is intended to reduce behavioral issues that could lead to suspensions. More than 25,000 school worldwide use PBIS, and the methods have shown a significant impact on reducing the number of behavioral issues in schools (Gage et al., 2020). However, while overall school suspensions have decreased within the past decade, Black students are still twice as likely to receive a suspension compared to other students (Lacoe & Manley, 2019).

The raw data in this qualitative study consisted of responses to interview questions. The study participants contributed to online interviews via the Zoom online platform and shared their perceptions of student discipline and the implementation of PBIS within their middle school. In-person interviews were not possible because of COVID-19 restrictions. The interviews consisted of semistructured, open-ended questions and optional follow up questions. I also used a personal journal to record my thoughts on each participant's responses.

Using a device on my cell phone, I audio-recorded all interviews to ensure accuracy and consistency. I followed an interview protocol that helped me maintain a consistent procedure for each interview. The five interview questions were researcher-

produced and related to RQ1 and RQ2. Because I limited the number to five open-ended questions, participants could speak freely, and I worked to eliminate biased language from the questions to avoid influencing the participants' responses (see Creswell, 2012). Before creating my questions, I reviewed sample questions from other sources to get an idea of how other researchers formed their questions. Thus, I learned to design questions directly related to the problem of high suspension rates and teachers' perceptions of PBIS.

The participants in the study received information regarding future interviews and each person agreed upon a date and time for their interview. I began each interview with the same introduction, indicating the interviewee's name, interviewer's name, place, date, and time. Participants also received detailed instructions before each interview. Each interview began with an icebreaker related to summer vacation. Following the ice-breaker question, I asked each participant the prepared open-ended questions created for the interviews. When appropriate, I asked probing questions to gain more detail and insight from the participant's perspective, such as "Please explain why you feel that way" or "Why do you think that has occurred?" I concluded the interview with a question such as "In your opinion, who should I contact to learn more about my questions?" Finally, I thanked the participant for taking their time to conduct the interview. Each interview lasted 15 to 25 minutes. I preserved data verbatim by audio and video recording the interviews.

Gaining access to the participants was not difficult. I was familiar with all the teachers because I taught at that school 15 years ago. I now teach at a high school, which

is across the street from the study site. I have maintained a relationship with many teachers at the middle school since their students feed into the high school where I mainly teach ninth grade students. I was involved in several PBIS committees when I taught middle school for nine years. Because I am very familiar with the goals of PBIS, I thought it would be a good fit to focus my study on teachers' perceptions of PBIS. For this study, I interviewed a total of nine educators comprised of teachers, two assistant principals, and one school principal. Each participant was asked five open-ended questions.

Data Analysis

Once data collection was complete, I transcribed the audio recordings into Word documents. I took notes in the margin to summarize responses and formulate ideas from the participants to gain a deeper understanding of their responses. Taking notes helped me in the process of coding and finding similarities within the data. I chose not to use software applications so that I could better understand how codes, categories, and themes could be generated by hand. As a visual learner, it is important for me to understand the process manually instead of using computer generating programs. Through this inductive approach, I studied small pieces of information for analysis and then identified the connections that bound them together in a process Bell et al. (2018) described. I identified common themes from the data collected and organized those themes into sections, thus making connections between participants' responses.

I followed Saldana's 3-cycle coding method to analyze my data. Once the interviews were complete, I carefully transcribed each interview verbatim. Step 1 of

Saldana's 3-cycle method consisted of dividing detailed information from the interviews in common themes. At this time, I identified four themes:

1. Various forms of disproportionality in students exist.
2. PBIS is positive and builds community within the school.
3. Professional development is needed for teachers to ensure fidelity with PBIS strategies.
4. There is a need for consistency of PBIS implementation.

In Step 2, I highlighted information different colors from each transcription that pertained to a certain theme. I also made additional notes in margins as I tried to identify exactly what the participants were saying during each interview. In Step 3, I sorted the highlighted information into categories. I used open coding to develop relationships and common themes from each interview. Once these three steps were complete, I wrote a narrative for each and included direct quotes from participants to further support each theme.

Patten and Newhart (2017) noted that in qualitative and quantitative research, it is important to make certain the data collection and analysis are both reliable and valid. While it is not possible to compare the validity and reliability of the two methods interchangeably, both research methods follow specific guidelines. To establish qualitative reliability, I reviewed the transcripts to make sure they were accurate based on each audio recordings. Once the transcripts were coded into themes, I used member checking to establish accuracy. Member checking involves providing participants with a final version of their transcript and asking them to confirm that their words were reflected

accurately (Creswell, 2014). Upon review, participants granted consent to continue the study with their data as represented in the transcripts. Experts recommend that the coding consistency reach 80% to establish reliability (Patten & Newhart, 2017).

Another strategy I used was to include rich descriptions of the findings. The purpose of incorporating detailed descriptions was to include many perspectives about specific themes; also, this approach improves validity in qualitative research (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2016). Participants gave their opinions and rationale for the disproportionate numbers in students' suspensions. They commented on how PBIS is used in their school, gave descriptions of their school community, and described effective and ineffective behavioral strategies used in their school. Similarly, to ensure reliability, I made certain that my research approach was consistent throughout the entire data collection and analysis procedure. This process consisted of checking transcripts thoroughly, ensuring that the coding was consistent throughout the data, and cross-checking codes.

To avoid any type of researcher bias, I asked each teacher predetermined interview questions and recorded their responses with fidelity. In addition, as recommended by Patten and Newhart (2017), I made sure to use unbiased language regarding participants' race, gender, and sexual orientation. Despite knowing all the participants, I conducted each interview in a professional manner and asked and recorded all the responses using the same process.

Data Analysis Results

The major finding of this study indicated teachers' perceptions of disproportionate suspensions between minority and White students and PBIS strategies. The interview

responses by the participants included information that I could effectively analyze data to determine the findings of my study. This process led to discovery of new information, which I applied in the design of a professional development workshop to address a problem in education and create ways to help improve it.

Interview Findings

Once the transcripts were finalized, I used a 3-cycle data analysis method that allowed me to become familiar with the interview summaries, identify themes, and then code the information into categories. Codes are parts of the participants' responses to the research questions. When trying to identify codes, it was important to go back and reflect on the initial problem of the study and each RQ. Once these codes were grouped with similar patterns, they could be formed into categories. The categories were ultimately placed into themes. The thematic analysis of the nine in-depth interviews resulted in the development of four major themes: (a) Various forms of disproportionality in student discipline exist, (b) PBIS is effective and builds community within the school, (c) Professional development is needed for teachers to ensure fidelity with PBIS strategies, and (d) There is a need for consistency of PBIS implementation. Themes 1 and 2 align with RQ1 and Themes 3 and 4 align with RQ2. Data from the nine interviews proved to be valid as all data collection and protocols were followed (see Table 1).

For each RQ, I identified how each participant answered the questions by creating bullets and associating the participant's number next to each code. RQ1: What are middle school teachers' perceptions of PBIS as it relates to disciplinary disproportionality between minority and White students?

Theme 1: Various Forms of Disproportionality Exist

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis was that various forms of disproportionality exist. This theme is directly connected with RQ1. Once the first theme was identified, categories were created to further understand the participants' perceptions. Categories associated with Theme 1 include gender related to suspensions, socioeconomics, and students of color.

Table 1

Summary of Themes and Categories Created From the Research Questions

Themes and Categories	No. of Occurrences	% of Occurrences
1. Various forms of disproportionality exist.		
• Gender	4	44%
• Socioeconomics	2	22%
• Minority students	5	66%
2. PBIS is effective and builds community within the school.		
• Positive for students and teachers	8	88%
• Students enjoy PBIS incentives and rewards.	2	22%
• Students want ownership in reward activities.	2	22%
3. Professional development is needed for teachers to ensure fidelity with PBIS strategies.		
• Include other programs to work with PBIS	6	66%
• Teachers need to reflect and understand students' behaviors.	3	33%
• Teachers should be objective without personal bias.	4	44%
4. There is a need for consistency in PBIS implementation.		
• Teacher buy-in	2	22%
• Clear expectations need to be established.	2	22%
• PBIS rewards need to be consistent.	4	44%

Category: Gender Related to Suspensions

Four participants acknowledged that gender was related to the suspensions that occurred in their school. Some participants focused more on gender than race. Participant 1 stated,

The Hispanic household is very male dominated. When you see a lot of the issues with the ELL [English language learners] subgroup, it is behavioral issues that emanate with the male mentality, and they feel superior to the female teacher.

Participant 8 agreed,

I think the subgroup that has the most suspensions are actually boys. Not any particular boys, but just boys in general. I think it happens because in my experience working with middle school students is that generally boys' conflicts are more physical than girls.

Participant 3 admitted, "To be honest with you, what I've seen over the years is that it's more girls that are getting into trouble. I don't know why, but it's more girls."

Category: Students from Certain Socioeconomic Backgrounds

Two participants identified socioeconomics as a reason some students receive disciplinary consequences more often than others. Participant 1 shared,

I think a lot of it comes from the home life. When you look at a lot of the kids that we have frequent suspensions from, it deals with how their daily home life is like. A lot of the times, these kids come from broken homes, single parent families, and the parents are always working, and the kids are left to fend for themselves.

Participant 7 agreed, “I think socioeconomic backgrounds plays into it at times, I think it is a combination of those things where the suspension rate is higher.”

Category: Students of Color

Five out of nine participants identified that minority or students of color to receive suspensions more frequently than other groups of students. Some participants also asserted gender and race added to the suspension numbers. Some participants acknowledged that while they did not know why this phenomenon occurs, they were able to identify Black and Hispanic students were suspended more than White students. Participant 4 stated, “Yes, I have seen subgroups. Groups that are suspended more than others. My first year here, it was more African American boys, but this past year, it has been more Hispanic boys.” Participant 5 agreed,

Well, if you look at the data in my school, certainly students of color, Black or Brown, are suspended more frequently than White students are. Whether it is from a teacher perspective or administrative perspective, I do feel like more students of color are suspended.

Participant 9 admitted, “The reason we have begun the PBIS work is because there is a difference in suspensions. In my building, most of the suspensions are from Hispanic and African American students.”

Theme 2: PBIS is Effective and Builds Community Within the School

A second theme that emerged from the interview data was that teachers saw PBIS as a positive factor in their school and that the program improved the school community.

Categories derived from this theme include PBIS is positive, students enjoy PBIS activities, and allow students to have ownership in activities.

Category: PBIS is Positive

Eight out of nine participants had positive perceptions of PBIS. Participants explained that PBIS promotes a positive culture that focuses on positive rewards rather than negative consequences. By focusing on positive behavior, these participants indicated that students and teachers are brought closer together, and collaboration between the two parties becomes more likely. Certain schoolwide events were often mentioned as a way to motivate students. Other participants believed that the rewards system was effective and similarly implied that a decrease in suspension rates was proof that PBIS is effective.

An important condition, however, was that students must know exactly what is expected and what is not allowed. Thus, transparent guidelines within a framework that focuses on positive behavior would likely be most beneficial and effective in decreasing suspension rates. Participant 4 shared,

I think PBIS has come a long way. I think we are working hard to continue to be effective in addressing student behaviors. I feel like it is effective for students who already have some of the skills to regulate themselves to make good choices.

Participant 6 stated,

I think overall PBIS is effective at my school, and I say that because when we've looked at our suspension data specifically over the past three years, we have seen a reduction in the number of students suspended. Three years ago, I think we were

in the 80s, and two years ago, it decreased significantly. I want to say that at least to 20 something a year.

Participant 7 agreed,

I think PBIS is effective. We've been working on it since its inception, and I think it keeps getting better. I know that the number of suspensions has been reduced.

There haven't been as many suspensions as 10 years ago in the past. PBIS promotes positive school climate through different events—[reward tokens], dances, Kindness Breakfast, dodgeball tournament, and Spirit Days.

Category: Students Enjoy PBIS Activities

Two participants shared that students enjoy the PBIS activities. PBIS activities are meant to be inclusive, and students who have shown respectful and appropriate behavior are allowed to be involved. Disruptive behavior may be punished by not allowing students to participate in certain activities, and since many students like the activities organized through the PBIS program, negative behavior is discouraged. Furthermore, the results suggested that the system increases students' morale and motivates them to show their best behavior. Participant 2 shared, "I think the events that we do, the kids really enjoy. The school store that we have is an opportunity to hand out [reward tokens]. I think that a lot of the kids really enjoy that as well." Participant 7 agreed,

I feel like it does bring excitement to the students at times when they normally would not be excited. The way we do it, we try to plan quarterly events, and those quarterly events pique the interests of the kids. That enables us to use the PBIS strategies to implement them with the whole school.

Category: Allow Students to Have Ownership in the Activities

While some of the participants suggested the possibility of allowing students to be involved in the decision-making process of scheduling PBIS activities, two participants explicitly suggested student involvement. These participants thought it would be a good idea to find out what students were interested in and then plan the activities based on their interests. Participant 2 shared,

I think we should get the student body more involved in terms of things that they are interested in doing. I think that when we ask those questions, we asked the Student Governance Council. I think we could start to tap into some different things that kids would be interested in. Not sure, but I feel like if we took a survey. So, if we were to take a survey of things you are truly interested in, as a whole school we can work towards them and then maybe we would have a better outcome.

Participant 3 agreed, “Students need to take more and more ownership and have more of a say in the school. By doing that, our PBIS programs will be more effective at schools.”

Theme 3: Professional Development is Needed for Teachers to Ensure Fidelity With PBIS Strategies

Participants mentioned a variety of reasons PBIS is effective, but some maintained that the school would benefit if teachers had more training on PBIS strategies so they could implement the strategies with fidelity. Teachers recognized the positive impact PBIS can have on the school and students, but they asserted that if incorrectly implemented, the interventions will not work. The teachers suggested other ways to

ensure fidelity and improve effectiveness of interventions overall: adopt other programs that work with PBIS, support teachers' efforts to reflect and understand students' behaviors, and offer training to help teachers be objective without personal bias.

Category: Utilize Other Programs to Work With PBIS

Often schools have multiple initiatives they work on during the school year. Three of the participants indicated that PBIS should be used in combination with other strategies, such as Restorative Practices and other research-based programs, to address student behavior. Participant 1 explained,

I just think we need to have clear expectations, and if you have that with PBIS, this is your reward system. This is going to be your consequence system, which needs to be in line with Restorative Practices if this is the way we are going.

Participant 4 shared,

We have been able to use PBIS coupled with our Restorative Practices—the reflection sheet was one that was very helpful. We took characteristics from [our restorative practice program] and created a reflection sheet: How to be respectful? The kids would write down what they did, and it opened a door for a conversation and a dialogue that focused on the behavior and not the actual student. So, I am not judging you, let's talk about what you did and let's talk about how to make it right, which is a restorative approach, but PBIS guided the conversation because it gave us what we were looking for—like being respectful.

Participant 9 agreed,

I think teachers and staff could certainly help by having open minds by really being involved and more professional development opportunities. Some of the things we've been doing lately has been around Restorative Circles. Restorative Practices—that has really helped staff and students having conversations about behavior.

Category: Teachers Need to Reflect and Understand Students' Behaviors

Six of the participants acknowledged that teachers need to be reflective in their daily routines. These participants also shared that teachers need to understand students' behaviors that could lead to disciplinary consequences. This type of reflection and awareness could be enhanced through professional development. Participant 6 shared,

A lot of the times, the same names come across my desk. It really varies, at least on who the teacher is, who the kid is, and what types of behaviors they exhibit. I think a lot of issues could be prevented by really trying to get to know and understand your kids. Kids who are having behaviors in one classroom sometimes have them in all, and often they do not have them in any other room. There is something about that relationship that is lacking. I would want to do more with building relationships with the kids.

Participant 8 explained,

I think teachers individually should let students know if they have frustrations or they're concerned about a student. It is not the student that is being reprimanded; it is the behavior. I think when students know that an adult teacher or staff truly

likes them and is not negative towards them as a person, but toward their behavior, I think students are not as defensive.

Participant 9 contributed,

Not giving consequences to students but discussing what could be done to improve behaviors. So not to give consequences immediately because of the behaviors, but to really understand why students are behaving the way they are and try to find ways to change behavior. Staff needs deeper training in professional development on how to deal with certain behaviors and to come up with alternatives to suspensions.

Category: Teachers Should be Objective Without Personal Bias

Four participants mentioned or alluded to personal biases in their interviews. Based on several responses, participants made clear that teachers need to reflect on the ways they approach each student in school. Children have different modalities of learning, and students react differently based on the way they are treated or approached by a teacher. Participant 3 mentioned,

A child learns only what they live. The teacher is responsible for the mood of the classroom. If the teacher is negative, then the energy in the room will reflect that. If a teacher only calls on certain students and not the entire class, then some students may become disengaged and not feel as though they belong to the classroom community.

Participant 6 acknowledged,

Teachers have their own personal biases, and unfortunately, those biases enter the classroom. Teachers need to identify their own subconscious biases because I do think a lot of teachers think they do not have them, and it shows up when students get poor grades, have more suspensions, referrals, or just complaints about behaviors.

Participant 9 shared, “Staff needs better training and understanding on how to work with students of diverse backgrounds.”

Theme 4: There is a Need for Consistency of PBIS Implementation

The fourth theme from the interview data focused on a need for consistency among the teachers who implement PBIS. Most of the teachers agreed that PBIS works, but certain factors need to be in place for the program to reach optimal results. The participants’ suggestions of ways to achieve consistency were teacher buy-in, clear expectations, and consistent rewards.

Category: Teacher Buy-In

Two participants described the importance of teacher buy-in for new and old initiatives. Teachers and staff members are the adults who will implement PBIS strategies, so it is necessary that they understand the program and believe that it will help improve student behaviors. Participant 1 shared,

It is all about buy-in. If you do not buy into it, it is not going to work. So, if you think it is a stupid idea, then it’s never going to work. If you have 100% buy-in from every teacher, then the sky’s the limit. It’s all about teacher buy-in. If the

teachers don't agree with what's going on with the administration, no type of program is ever going to work.

Participant 7 agreed,

I think PBIS has a clear plan, and I think our school we try to implement that plan. Even if you are a little skeptical, try to stick to the script, and give it a fair chance. I think having teacher buy-in, and if teachers can do that, we'll be very beneficial.

Category: Clear Expectations Need to Be Established

Two participants talked about the importance of establishing clear expectations for PBIS to be effective. They agreed that it is difficult to conduct a school-wide program if some teachers do not enforce the rules or set clear expectations regarding behavior.

Participant 1 stated,

There needs to be clear parameters. I think we circumnavigate all these different things without clear expectations. You need to have clear expectations. Especially with middle schoolers, because if they don't know—and you've been there, you know. So, when middle schoolers do not have clear guidelines, they are going to go in 15 million different directions. So, to guide them and keep them focused, you must have clear expectations. So that there is no room for interpretation, because you are always going to have that one kid to try and find a loophole.

Participant 4 commented,

Teachers need to be intentional in the PBIS language, and it should be immersed in whatever the teacher is doing in the classroom. Always making a reference to

those characteristics by identifying the behaviors when it is happening. The language should be woven throughout everything, including home, school, and the curriculum.

Category: Teachers Need to Be Consistent With Routines and Rewards

Four participants mentioned the importance of teachers being consistent with student rewards. Since PBIS is a positive behavior program with an embedded rewards system, it is necessary that students receive the rewards when deserved. Otherwise, it is likely that program will lose its effectiveness. Participant 3 shared,

We need to continue to always improve and increase the celebrating and the rewarding and showing our students and our staff here how important they are as pieces to the school to get that family feeling and continue to always create ways of making them feel important.

Participant 5 agreed,

We get caught up in our own—whatever we are teaching, whatever we are doing. Sometimes when the kids come in, and I am teaching—you completely forget that we should be rewarding kids for good behavior. I think as teachers, it must be really part of our everyday routine.

Participant 6 commented,

I think a lot of times, we use PBIS to reward kids who are having positive behaviors, but normally there are students who we see a lot of behavioral incidents from. So, I think that we could a better job of rewarding the kids who always do the right thing because it is the right thing.

Discrepant Cases

Upon the completion of the data analysis, I did not find any discrepant cases of major significance. However, I found two differing viewpoints related to minority students' disproportionate suspensions and the effectiveness of PBIS. The first differing viewpoint appeared in a response to Interview Question 3. This question asked participants if they thought minority students were suspended at a disproportionate rate compared to White students. Five out of nine participants answered *yes* to this question.

While suspension rates have decreased overall, according to archival data for the 2016-2017 school year, Black students in the state where the study took place represented the highest number of suspensions but were not members of the majority population. To assess disparity, educators must consider the percentage, as well as the number, of minority students who receive suspensions: Discipline disproportionality occurs when students from certain racial/ethnic groups are overrepresented in suspensions and expulsions but underrepresented in population (Paul & Araneo, 2019). This differing viewpoint substantiated a need to ensure educators understand the difference between disproportionality and disparity and the negative effects these inequities may have on students if they are not addressed or acknowledged.

Another differing case was based on Interview Question 1. This question asked participants if PBIS was effective in their school. Eight out of nine participants agreed that PBIS was effective; therefore, it was interesting to uncover one participant's differing opinion. According to Participant 5, PBIS did not effectively change behavior in students. In fact, this participant found PBIS to be a calculated system and asserted that

students would only behave when they knew a reward, such as a schoolwide sports activity, was scheduled. Participant 5 provided an example: “When there is a specific event, and I’ll say a dodgeball tournament, students tend to be more conscientious of their own behavior because they want to earn the rewards to enable them to participate.” This response suggested that consistency is not the only factor that determines successful implementation of PBIS. The mechanisms of the program itself may give rise to other complex behavioral responses.

Implications of Findings

The problem this study sought to address was persistence of discipline disproportionality between minority students and Whites students in a U.S. middle school, despite recent efforts to implement PBIS. This basic qualitative study investigated teachers’ perceptions about PBIS strategies in relationship to student behavioral referrals and suspensions. While overall suspensions have decreased at this school, it was important to understand why certain groups of students receive higher suspensions compared to others and whether teachers perceived PBIS to be effective in changing students’ behaviors.

I interviewed a total of nine educators consisting of teachers and educational leaders. From the interviews, I then used a 3-cycle coding process to conduct the data analysis. Based on the analysis, four themes emerged each with three categories. Through the data analysis, I discovered that most participants found PBIS effective, many found minority students to receive more suspensions than White students, and participants expressed their belief that professional development would be helpful in the areas of

reflecting and understanding student behaviors and maintaining consistency with PBIS rewards. I also learned that the participants might not have fully understood the definition of disproportionality when answering one of the interview questions. If there were a way to determine that all participants understood disproportionality, the findings might have been different.

The interview questions aligned with the research questions and were designed to elicit in-depth responses from the participants. The responses from the participants were consistent with the behaviorism framework as well as the initial review of literature. I used the findings from the data to guide the creation of my professional development project. The aim of this project was to examine discipline and suspension data by race to determine if disproportionality exists, confirm use of PBIS strategies since most teachers agreed that it is an effective system, design training on understanding students' behaviors, and find ways to consistently reward students.

Implications Related to RQ1

RQ1: What are middle school teachers' perceptions of PBIS as it relates to disciplinary disproportionality between minority and White students? Data indicated that more than half of the teachers identified minority students were suspended more frequently than White students, and most of the teachers found PBIS to effective.

Based on some responses to RQ1, it is important to identify if teachers understand disproportionality. If teachers fully understand the definition and agree that PBIS is effective, then it is likely that additional factors could be added to PBIS such as equity, cultural norms, and teaching students with diverse backgrounds. If teachers are not able

to recognize disproportionality, then it might be difficult to change the mindset of teachers and ultimately the way they address students and discipline.

Implications Related to RQ2

RQ2: How do middle school teachers describe ways to improve PBIS use to address the problem of disciplinary disproportionality between minority and White students? Data reflected several ways to improve PBIS. However, the data did not specifically address PBIS and discipline disproportionality.

Some suggestions to improve PBIS included teacher reflection, understanding of students' behaviors, incorporating other research-based discipline models such as Restorative practice with PBIS strategies, setting clear expectations and consistent rewards, and eliminating personal biases. Addressing minority discipline disproportionality can only be addressed if everyone understands what it means and acknowledges that it exists. Some teachers made references to students' cultural backgrounds and the need to understand students who have recently arrived in the country, but there were limited responses regarding ways to improve PBIS as it related to the disproportionate number of suspensions minority students receive compared to White students.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the persistence of discipline disproportionality between minority and White students and ways to improve the use of PBIS in a U.S. public middle school. Most teachers perceived that minority students were suspended more frequently than White students and believed

PBIS is effective but could be improved. The thematic analysis of the nine in-depth interviews resulted in the development of four themes: Various forms of disproportionality in student discipline exists, PBIS is effective and builds community within the school, professional development is needed for teachers to ensure fidelity with PBIS strategies, and there is a need for consistency of PBIS implementation.

Through the data analysis, Theme 1 revealed 66% of the participants acknowledged that minority students receive exclusionary discipline practices more often than White students. However, data may have been impacted by limitations because all participants might not have fully understood the definition of disproportionality. Forty-four percent of the teachers perceived suspensions occurred because of students' gender, and 22% attributed suspensions to factors outside of school such as socioeconomic conditions. These concerns parallel others that have arisen in U.S. schools. In certain parts of the United States, Black students are seven times more likely to be suspended, and Black and Native American students are two to three times more likely to undergo testing for emotionally disturbed students (Bal et al., 2019). PBIS experts are now taking a closer look at racial disparities when it comes to discipline and looking for ways to incorporate equity and racial bias training to schools in many states (Payno-Simmons, 2021).

A second theme was that most participants had positive perceptions of PBIS and believed that since they had implemented such strategies, suspension rates had decreased. Common reasons for the effectiveness of PBIS, according to participants, included the promotion of a positive culture and the stimulation of positive behavior through

anticipation of fun activities. This theme was consistent with previous literature related to students' success in school. The goal of PBIS is for the school to provide a safe and positive environment between teachers and students. This positive relationship can help students reach their optimal level of academic success and decrease the number of disciplinary issues that occur during the school day (Garbacz et al., 2016). If programs are implemented to help reduce disciplinary issues, students are likely to have a more enjoyable time in school and build trusting relationships with friends and adults in the building. When everyone is aligned with a common goal, it is more likely that the initiatives will be successful and bring the school community closer (Judkins et al., 2019).

Data analysis also revealed that some areas of concern could be addressed using professional development. Such training would give teachers an opportunity to refresh their knowledge of PBIS strategies, identify ways to be more consistent, set clear expectations throughout the school, and find ways to decrease suspensions for all. Research indicated that schools that offer a year-long professional development on PBIS show great improvement in reducing exclusionary discipline and an improvement in school climate compared to other schools that did not participate in similar professional development (McIntosh et al., 2021).

Professional development may also help teachers implement effective PBIS classroom strategies while establishing clear expectations, learn how to incorporate students' suggestions for certain activities, and be mindful of personal biases so that all students have a sense of equity when they are in school. Teachers must be knowledgeable

when it comes to PBIS strategies. The professional development should also focus on topics such as cultural awareness, equity, and multi-language learners. Clark-Louque and Sullivan (2020) identified a need to educate school building staff to promote equity and fairness for all students.

Many schools have experienced success in decreasing suspensions using PBIS combined with other components. For example, schools have recently started incorporating an equity-focused approach to the PBIS framework (McIntosh et al., 2021). This additional layer of support can help build relationships with students from diverse backgrounds. When using an equity focused approach, teachers receive training in cultural competencies, which may help minimize racial stigmatization and improve relationships and communication between students and staff (Clayton et al., 2020).

A third theme was that PBIS needs to be implemented with fidelity to reach the full potential of fostering positive teacher-student relationships. Most of the participants noted that the school staff needs to be invested in the program for it to work effectively. Staff buy-in to the PBIS program was noted to be an important aspect to the success of the program. Other researchers concluded that buy-in from stakeholders, training, and professional development are important aspects of the success of PBIS in schools (Scaletta & Tejero Hughes, 2021). While many agree staff buy-in is important to school-wide initiatives, other researchers reported different results. Carriere et al. (2020) concluded that staff buy-in was not a high priority in implementing PBIS successfully. However, the researchers recognized that support and guidance from administration was

necessary to carry out new policies and school-based strategies to improve behavior (Carriere et al., 2020).

Theme 4 indicated the need for consistency of PBIS implementation. Additional training and consistency of program implementation were other areas teachers thought needed improvement. If the whole school is working towards a common goal of school community through evidence-based strategies, then all stakeholders should comply and fully understand how to implement the strategies. Understanding how to implement the strategies takes time, training, and modeling. If teachers are not using the same structured strategies from one classroom to another, the students receive mixed messages. This type of inconsistency goes against the purpose of school-wide strategies to improve behavior.

This theme also established the need to provide teachers with resources to ensure they are effectively implementing PBIS strategies. This level of expertise can be accomplished through professional development for the entire staff. Research showed that PBIS reminders and symbols placed throughout the school will be a constant reminder to students and staff members that PBIS is a schoolwide initiative to improve community, and it should be woven into the climate of the school (Clayton et al., 2020). Furthermore, PBIS's effectiveness can be improved through professional development, knowledge of staff members on the topic, support from administration, and the time that is dedicated to learning activities (Palmer & Noltemeyer, 2019).

The findings of my study were consistent with the behaviorist theory in that behavior can change due to stimuli; in this context, the stimulus was PBIS (Dastpak et al., 2017). Indeed, a variety of reasons emerged to explain the perceived effectiveness of

PBIS in changing negative behavior to positive behavior. By using PBIS with fidelity, all teachers could model expected behavior and reward students when they have demonstrated that behavior. Based on the theory of behaviorism and operant conditioning, if students are rewarded for good behavior, it is likely they will continue to demonstrate that behavior rather than negative behavior that would result in punishment (Krieger, 2018).

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

I created a professional development model based on an analysis of interviews from the study participants. Professional development was appropriate for this project because such a model offers training and resources to participants, helping them build skills that can later be applied in their classrooms. Overall, the purpose of the professional development workshop is to provide information on disproportionality, offer teachers an opportunity to refresh on PBIS strategies, identify ways to be consistent, set clear expectations throughout the school, and find ways to decrease suspensions for all at a U.S. public middle school.

Three goals make up the purpose of the workshop. The first goal is to offer a PBIS refresher training to teachers. Additional practice in implementing PBIS may remedy the lack of consistency in its application throughout the school, and additional training may improve teachers' ability to reduce students' behavioral issues. The second goal is to allow participants an opportunity to reflect on personal biases and find ways to incorporate culturally responsive practices into their daily planning. Improving teachers' cultural awareness and sensitivity towards students from diverse backgrounds could help decrease the disproportionality in suspensions at the school. Goal 3 is to provide the participants with resources to create a school-wide behavior rubric for the upcoming school year. These resources will ensure that everyone at the school can administer the program with fidelity so the whole school can work together to achieve a school-wide positive climate (see Appendix A for complete professional development project).

Ongoing professional development that reflects scholarly support is a critical part of being an educational professional. Based on the findings of this study and the professional development project, district leaders will be able to identify the positive effects of the project and the need for continuous PBIS training. This program and training could be made available to other schools in the district to help reduce disproportionate suspensions and improve school climate.

Rationale

The professional development genre was appropriate for this project because it became apparent through the data analysis that many of the teachers might not fully understand disproportionality. Many teachers indicated a need for consistency across the school when implementing PBIS strategies. Although it was not included as a theme, some teachers mentioned cultural differences and personal biases because it could lead to miscommunication between students and teachers. I considered other project genres for this project; however, professional development seemed to be most appropriate.

When educators are asked to participate in professional development, they sometimes exhibit resistance because new knowledge often requires teachers to change or transform their perceptions on certain topics (Martin et al., 2019). However, incorporating interview feedback to guide the professional development may prove to be successful. According to Mezirow (1995), adults are reflective and base new information and experiences on previous ones. Therefore, facilitators of this professional development must present new information and offer participants an opportunity to reflect and take part in discussions that may lead to transformed beliefs and instructional practices.

This genre proved to be a purposeful way to address the concerns and needs of the staff members. Creating a professional development project aligned to the data analysis provided the opportunity to focus on the participants' responses which then guided the direction of the professional development. Activities related to raising awareness of disproportionate student suspensions may increase participants' cultural awareness and teach effective PBIS strategies that could decrease the high rate of student suspensions.

Review of the Literature

The literature review in this section features material related to professional development. I located peer-reviewed and scholarly articles in the Walden University library's electronic databases, including ERIC and EBSCO Host, as well as Google Scholar. I used the following terms to identify relevant research articles to support this literature review: *professional development*, *andragogy*, *professional development programs*, *professional development for educators*, *professional development learning process*, *professional development best practices*, *professional development outcomes*, *continued education*, and *effective professional development*. Excluding some older seminal and theoretical works, most of the research discussed in this review was published within the past 5 years to ensure its current relevance to the professional development project.

Professional Development

Individuals in nearly every professional role benefit from consistent and purposeful professional development. Professional development takes many forms, including workshops, interventions, conferences, forums, mentorship, and continuing

education courses. The primary goals of professional development efforts are to contribute to the maintenance of professional skills and licensure and to help workers develop new skills and knowledge that will benefit their careers (Korthagen, 2017).

While the nature of professional development varies significantly in different professions, certain features, including collaboration between peers, problem-solving, and experiential learning, are common across many industries (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Most professional development efforts and programs are rooted in a theoretical foundation or approach and empirically supported strategies. Effective programs require an approach that is uniquely tailored to helping adult professionals acquire and retain new or previously learned knowledge and skills (Kelly, 2017; Metcalf, 2019). Continued assessment and evaluation of professional development programs are also essential to ensure that the intended professional progress or improvement is achieved in line with program goals (Erickson et al., 2017).

Professional development can be formal or informal. Most extant literature centered on formal professional development efforts, programs, and interventions. However, informal interactions with mentors and peers can also be a significant source of professional knowledge. An example of informal professional development is online communities of professionals who are all involved in the same profession or career field (Macià & García, 2016). Online learning communities can connect individuals from around the globe who would not be able to interact with each other in person and communicate about professional matters. The social and collaborative nature of informal online learning communities can be a source of innovation and problem-solving among

colleagues. It can offer valuable and fresh professional perspectives; further, some professionals are more likely to be open-minded and motivated to communicate honestly in informal learning communities because they do not experience the added pressure of evaluations or monitoring by employers (Macià & García, 2016).

Technology has significantly shaped the landscape of professional development in recent years (D. A. Cook et al., 2018). For example, online professional development programs and resources offer increased access to professional development in many industries. Organizations in some sectors use online simulations to impart experiential, real-world knowledge in a way that was previously only attainable through in-person programs. Social media and professional networking websites have also benefitted many professional communities, as these virtual options make it easier than ever before to connect with peers, mentors, and experts from all around the globe (Donelan, 2016).

Professional Development for Educators

Education is one of the career fields that is the most synonymous with professional development. Recent research on professional development for educators describes methods of improving educators' ability to employ evidence-based disciplinary practices in a way that produces favorable academic performance outcomes (Fischer et al., 2018). Fischer et al. (2018) analyzed and applied structural equation models to data from 7,434 teachers and 133,336 students in a large-scale quantitative study of U.S. public schools.

Results revealed that disciplinary practices were the mechanism by which the professional development of teachers influenced student performance (Fischer et al.,

2018). In turn, teachers' instructional practices were a significant predictor of student performance. The results reinforced the importance of continuous professional development for educators and the thoughtful selection of practices and strategies that contribute to positive student outcomes (Fischer et al., 2018). The importance of educator professional development was also evident in a study conducted on 454 seventh graders' performance in algebra. The results of Tanisli et al.'s (2020) study proved that the experimental group of students taught by the educators who participated in the professional development scored much higher than the other group of students taught by teachers who did not receive the professional development. Based on these two studies, it is important to identify the connection between teachers' professional development and students' academic performance. In most cases, professional development provides teachers with resources to implement in the classroom to make improvements in the classroom.

Research on teachers' professional development is often classified in terms of stages of development (Coenders & Verhoef, 2019). Teachers' levels of experience determine their stage of development as either new/beginning or expert/experienced. Professional development programs for new teachers typically center on subject knowledge and the elimination of gaps between knowledge and classroom practices, while professional development for experienced teachers frequently centers on addressing performance concerns, collaborating with peers, and developing new skills (Coenders & Verhoef, 2019).

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of effective professional development to student learning. Today's students need to learn complex skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, technology, and collaborative learning strategies. For educators to teach these skills, they must be able to identify the needs of all students and provide them with the instruction that will help them reach their individualized goals. To ensure professional development is conducted in an effective manner, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) formulated a condensed list of seven elements for educators. According to the researchers, effective professional development

- is content focused
- incorporates active learning utilizing adult learning theory
- supports collaboration, typically in job-embedded contexts
- uses models and modeling of effective practice
- provides coaching and expert support
- offers opportunities for feedback and reflection
- is of sustained duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, para. 4).

These criteria apply to professional development for educators in particular. If teachers of the same discipline participate in professional development together, the meeting time can focus on specific content and strategic outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Active learning and modeling for students are important features for teachers to experience during professional development. Teachers benefit from the opportunity to interact with and ask questions of their colleagues. Feedback and reflection allow teachers to adjust their instruction, and these revisions could lead to improved pedagogy

and a positive impact on students' learning and engagement. Finally, professional development needs to be intentional to be effective. It is less likely that professional development will be of great use if it occurs sporadically. If meetings take place regularly with focused content, teachers have an opportunity to analyze data, assess, reassess, and create goals focused on improved student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Korthagen (2017) noted several inconvenient truths that have an impact on adult learning and educator learning. Namely, the researcher noted that educator learning takes place at different levels across “cognitive, emotional and motivational dimensions” (Korthagen, 2017, p. 388). For this reason, many educators need to share a personal connection and a sense of understanding with professional development leaders for their behavior, performance, skills, or base of knowledge to have a positive impact on learning.

Factors such as experience and knowledge of methods of self-development also impact educators' openness to developing their skills. Irgatoglu and Peker (2021) detected limited use of teacher self-development. While some educators expressed an interest in self-development, limited evidence indicated that educators practice this type of self-improvement. A recent study showed that self-development can be gained through observation, self-reflection, research, and notetaking. In their study, teachers aged 41 to 60 were aware only of observation as a measure for self-development. Many had limited knowledge of the other development activities. Additionally, the results indicated that the more experienced the teachers were, the less likely they were to employ development

activities such as observing colleagues, researching new classroom strategies, and practicing self-reflection (Irgatoglu & Peker, 2021).

For professional development efforts to truly benefit teachers, a certain degree of self-awareness is required on the educators' part. Teachers should have continuing goals for how they can improve and grow as educators and some awareness of their strengths and weaknesses (Rhode et al., 2017). This type of self-awareness can improve the process of professional development because teachers' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses can increase the impact of personalized approaches such as instructional coaching.

One remedial option is to incorporate teacher self-assessments into professional development efforts. Rhode et al. (2017) supported the use of preliminary teacher self-assessments as a tool to inform the development of professional development. Results from another study of 529 teachers revealed the needs of ongoing professional development and individualized teacher plans (Özer et al., 2020). This three-stage research study consisted of surveys, interviews, and scholarly research pertaining to professional development activities. Özer et al. (2020) concluded that teachers need continuous professional development as well as individualized training.

Experiential and Transformative Learning and the Role of Leadership

Designing effective professional development programs and curricula requires more than addressing all key knowledge subject areas and/or skills participants are expected to develop. Certain cognitive conditions must be established in order for learned information to be retained and for participants to learn how and when to apply what they

have learned in the appropriate context and circumstances. Adults learn differently than children in many ways; thus, theories and models that have been developed to describe how adults learn can ultimately be used to improve learning processes in adult education and professional development (Franco, 2019).

Knowles's (1989) notion of andragogy, or adult learning, is rooted in six assumptions: the need to know, the learners' self-concept, the role of experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation. The need to know indicates that adults must believe that what they are learning will have value and utility in some facet of their life (Ozuah, 2016). The learners' self-concept refers to adults' need to have autonomy and self-direction; this need stems less from a desire for freedom and more from a desire for educators and institutions to see them as capable of directing their own educational paths. The role of experience describes how life experiences serve as an educational resource that can be fostered through experiential learning. Readiness to learn refers to how adult learners' eagerness towards educational topics or subjects can vary and largely depends on how relevant they believe the content to be in real-world scenarios. Orientation to learning describes how pedagogy, or childhood learning, differs from andragogy in terms of how learners approach the subject matter. Lastly, motivation refers to understanding what drives the motivation to learn among adults. Extrinsic motivation, in addition to "internal pressure, motivation, and the desire for self-esteem and goal attainment," are all associated with adult learning motivation (Ozuah, 2016, p. 84).

Researchers have used experiential learning and transformative learning perspectives to frame and explain the learning that occurs during professional development. Experiential learning describes how experiences can transform into, or produce, knowledge (Kolb, 1984). While experiential learning is not a concept associated with learning only among adults, researchers have emphasized the importance of experiential learning for adult learners, who must understand the real-world utility and value of learned information (Kolb, 1984).

Adults are also able to adapt to changes in learning environments. During the COVID-19 shutdown, adults transformed and shifted their traditional styles of learning to a complete digital platform. Chandran et al. (2021) conducted a study of teachers' professional development before the pandemic in 2020. The results revealed that the teachers were able to adapt and transform their learning to complete the workshop and rated its outcome at the same level as of in-person training. The experiential learning model includes four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (McCarthy, 2016).

Concrete experience and abstract conceptualization are two opposing means of grasping, or understanding, experiences, while active experimentation and reflective observation describe two opposing ways of transforming, or interpreting, experiences (McCarthy, 2016). Based on how learners grasp and transform their experiences into knowledge, they may be classified based on one of four learning styles: converger, diverger, assimilator, or accommodator. These categories are applicable to all professions as adults have different learning styles (McCarthy, 2016). For example, if a teacher has

an accommodator learning style, they may implement plans with little experimentation or reflection. Conversely, if a teacher has an assimilator, converger, or diverger learning style, they will be likely to reflect on their experiences and create solutions to problems in the classroom.

A prominent education-to-practice gap exists among new teachers, largely because it can be difficult to prepare new teachers to teach effectively because of significant variation in student-related factors, educational context, and other influences (Amolloh et al., 2018). One study of new teachers focused on critical inquiry, collaborative learning, and self-reflection (Bilican et al., 2021). The results of the semester-long study revealed the need for teacher reflection and collaborative learning opportunities to help teachers identify new learning from different perspectives. Therefore, continuous professional development, self-reflection, and professional collaboration are necessary in the field of education (Bilican et al., 2021). Professional development efforts that are rooted in experiential learning offer new and experienced teachers alike the opportunity to learn through holistic experiences that apply to teachers' job responsibilities and interactions with students (Amolloh et al., 2018).

Transformative learning is another approach to understanding the process of learning within the context of research on teachers' professional development (Mezirow, 1991). A transformative learning perspective focuses on how learning occurs through the transformation of learners' perspectives. Mezirow (1991) focused on transformative learning as a constructivist teaching approach. This type of learning emphasizes the impact of students' interpretation of learned materials and how they derive individualized

meaning from their interpretations. Transformative learning is rooted in the influence of learners' two-dimensional frames of reference, which influence how individuals transform information.

Effective professional development for educators requires successful planning and leadership (Metcalf, 2019). In educational settings, principals often serve as instructional leaders to design professional development programs and guide their trajectory. For optimal professional development outcomes, the program curriculum must align with evidence-based practices and learning. The educational leaders who guide professional development efforts must adopt research-based teaching strategies and understand the nature of adult learning. The professional development strategies and knowledge of principals and other professional development leaders can also affect professional development outcomes indirectly by influencing the perceptions and beliefs of the training participants (Metcalf, 2019). With the support of the building principal, it is likely that participants will be receptive to engage in the intended professional development project.

Project Description

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The building principal will need to give prior approval for the professional development, which will likely take place in the school's library. Should the professional development be implemented, this location will provide necessary resources such as laptops, table space, a multi-media projector for videos, and space for participants to move around when dispersed into groups. Handouts of the professional development

overview, along with light breakfast refreshments, would be available for participants as they enter the library.

The local research setting is a district where PBIS training has already been offered by the state. However, within the last 5 years, many teachers have retired, and new teachers have been hired. Therefore, existing supports from outside resources would be used to further train teachers in PBIS strategies. Social emotional learning (SEL) is taught in the local school as well. The district has purchased ReThink Ed, a program that supports teachers in daily planning, to meet the needs of students within their classrooms. While these existing supports are available, the training would be available for all teachers so that the consistency with which strategies are implemented could be improved.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

Implementation of PBIS has been a district-wide initiative, but additional training is needed to decrease student suspensions. A potential barrier to the success of the professional development may be teacher buy-in. Based on the interview data from this study, most of the participants found PBIS to be effective, but not everyone agreed. Another barrier to implementation of the professional development could be support from the administration. If the administrative leadership team does not continue to support PBIS strategies, a lack of interest from the participants may result. A third potential barrier is that students may not respond well to PBIS strategies during the school year. In that case, teachers may become discouraged and resist continuing to implement these strategies. If teachers do not use the intended strategies, there is little hope for behavioral

improvement. Other potential barriers could be budgetary. Teachers would need to be compensated for the time they spend in the workshop.

A solution to low levels of teacher buy-in could be to involve more teachers with PBIS training and provide them with data that shows positive impact on student discipline and leadership opportunities when PBIS is implemented. This increased participation and empirical evidence could encourage teachers to become active participants. If teachers identify the importance of PBIS strategies and utilize those strategies with fidelity, it is likely that those barriers would decrease. Administrative support would potentially increase when the leadership team notices that school climate has improved and written referrals from teachers have decreased. Last, the professional development should be scheduled during regular school business hours; this provision would not require additional funding.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The proposed professional development would take place over 3 days. This professional development is intended to provide knowledge that the participating teachers may later apply to make more informed classroom decisions, particularly those that relate to student discipline. Since this professional development would be scheduled during other workshops, teachers would have the option to select which workshop best fits their needs. However, the principal may require all teachers and staff to attend the first day of the workshop.

The first day of the proposed workshop centers on identifying the difference between disproportionality and disparity while analyzing suspension data. The purpose of

the suspension analysis is to present teachers with data separated by gender and race to determine if teachers understand disproportionality after the term is introduced. The data should also be used to inform teachers on how many students were suspended and the common disciplinary infractions that precipitated the suspensions. Gaining an overview of the school's discipline and suspension data may provide the participants an opportunity to reflect on their personal approach to discipline. During the second part of Day 1, the focuses of activities will be cultural sensitivity and awareness.

Day 2 consists of learning about the PBIS framework and strategies. Teachers who are interested in becoming PBIS coaches for the building would have an opportunity to sign up during this portion of the workshop. During the second part of Day 2, participants would address implicit/explicit biases and self-reflection. Teachers would be asked to contemplate how they view themselves and others. The third and final day centers on developing a school-wide rubric for PBIS. The intentions are for this rubric to foster teacher buy-in and to become a resource to which both students and teachers can refer during the school day. A discussion of final thoughts and reflections about the workshop will conclude Day 3, and then participants will complete an open-ended survey evaluating the overall workshop.

The participating teachers would not be asked to complete any additional work or otherwise participate outside of the six hours allotted for each day of the workshop. Participating teachers would be asked to actively participate by taking part in discussions, listening to presentations, and completing activities associated with project goals. The professional development should take place within the first week of school when other

professional development is offered within the district. This timetable would allow teachers time to process and reflect on new learning and time to implement changes within their classrooms at the beginning of the school year.

Roles and Responsibilities

The director of equity and inclusion, a multi-media specialist, two instructional coaches, and I would conduct the proposed workshop. The director of equity has access to the district's suspensions data within the last 5 years. They also have extensive knowledge and experience conducting workshops on these topics. They would lead Day 1 of the workshop by explaining in depth the difference between disproportionality and disparity through a PowerPoint presentation that features equity and inclusion activities. This presentation will also incorporate material about cultural sensitivity and awareness.

The building multi-media specialist would ensure all chrome books are charged and working for the participants of the workshop. They would also set up other needed technology such as interactive white boards throughout the library. The two instructional coaches and I will actively participate as facilitators, assisting the director of equity and inclusion by handing out paper copies of the presentation to the participants and answering questions that may arise.

Project Evaluation Plan

The evaluation plan for the proposed professional development includes an open-ended survey in which participating teachers will be asked to provide their opinions of the deliverable project. The evaluation questionnaire will include items aimed at determining if and how participants plan to shift their disciplinary strategies. Participants

will also have an opportunity to elaborate on the strategies, activities, and information that proved to be most helpful during the professional development workshop. Before the proposed workshop, I would meet with the administrators, director of equity and inclusion, and the two instructional coaches to review the data and ensure there is consistency and accuracy before the project is delivered. According to a recent study, when teachers evaluated professional development workshops, many of their recommendations revealed that non-experts should not give direct instruction, the information needs to attract the audience, and certain activities did not reach their level of understanding because the material presented was more theoretical than practical (Ekinci & Acar, 2019).

Results of another study revealed that teachers are less likely to have positive experiences with professional development that is mandated by government (Martin et al., 2019). In other words, teachers are more receptive when they have the option to select topics of interest related to professional development. Inviting the district's director of equity and inclusion to conduct part of the workshop will be of added value because he has a wealth of experience and knowledge on the topics. The instructional coaches and I have previously conducted professional development programs in the district as well. Therefore, the presenters of the proposed workshop will not be viewed as non-experts, and the information that will be provided will be attractive to the participants as it was generated based on the results of interviews for this study.

Goal of the Project

The goal of the professional development is to provide teachers with information regarding disproportionality and disparity in relation to minority and White students' suspensions. The second goal is to offer teachers PBIS strategies that could be used in the classrooms. The last goal of this project is to create a school-wide rubric that would help to ensure consistency and improve school climate throughout the school with an attempt to reduce behaviors that lead to students' suspensions.

Stakeholders

The main stakeholders are the school district's administrative personnel, the building principal, assistant principals, and all staff members at the research site. Discipline is a major portion of the assistant principals' responsibilities; thus, they are responsible for generating reports on student referrals and suspensions. The assistant principals would share these reports with the building principal and the director of equity and inclusion. While the director has access to this information for the entire district, a specific report from the individual school would be helpful as individual teachers might not know where to access this information on the state's website.

At the research site, teachers received training in PBIS approximately 10 years ago. Since then, many teachers have retired, new teachers have been hired, and some teachers might have forgotten how to successfully implement PBIS strategies. Basic tenets of PBIS include that teachers should use multiple strategies to redirect negative behaviors in students before sending them to the office or writing a behavior referral. Also, teachers should give positive reinforcements to students when they exhibit positive

behaviors. The school's administrative team should continue to maintain a safe educational environment and ensure teachers are applying PBIS strategies in their classrooms during instructional observations. They should also provide opportunities during the school year to celebrate students' accomplishments by incorporating school-wide activities that focus on positive school climate.

Project Implications

Potential implications for social change associated with this project are significant. Specifically, the information provided through the professional development can make teachers and staff aware of disproportionate discipline and suspensions within their school. It can also encourage teachers to use culturally relevant pedagogy, and other schoolwide initiatives along with PBIS strategies to help improve school climate.

Beyond the immediate research site, this workshop could be implemented to improve disciplinary decisions at other schools and across different grade levels. More broadly, projects such as this professional development project could contribute to enhanced knowledge of the context and systems of student discipline in U.S. schools. Over time, faithful implementation and increased knowledge and skill among teachers concerning disciplinary strategies could lead to a decrease in student suspensions and the overall improvement of school climate.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The topic of this qualitative study was teachers' perceptions of PBIS in a middle school and disproportionate suspension between minority and White students. Through interviews, nine educators described their experience with PBIS and shared their thoughts about minority students suspended at a disproportionate number compared to White students while PBIS was used schoolwide to reduce behavioral problems and suspensions. I created a professional development workshop to provide teachers with information on disproportionate suspensions because the data analysis revealed that most of the participants did not have an accurate understanding of disproportionality.

The workshop also includes additional training on PBIS strategies to ensure continuity between the teachers at the local site. Another facet of the professional development was to train teachers to use different classroom strategies to help reduce the number of students' suspensions and improve teacher-student relationships. This section describes the strengths and limitations of the project as well as recommendations for alternative approaches. I also reflect upon my own journey as a researcher and scholar. Finally, this section includes a discussion of the potential impact for positive social change, applications, and directions for future research.

Project Strengths and Limitations

One strength of the proposed project is to inform and bring awareness to teachers that they might not have been cognizant of disproportionate suspension numbers within their school. As part of the resulting workshop, teachers will be asked to review student

suspension data from their school. They will have the opportunity to work collaboratively to identify and discuss the problem of disproportionate high suspension rates and brainstorm ways to reduce suspensions. A second strength of this workshop is that it will include a variety of strategies that can provide teachers with effective PBIS strategies and best practices related to student discipline. Some of the strategies include establishing clear expectations in the classroom, providing direct instruction that focuses on student engagement, building in opportunities for feedback during lessons, and allotting time for students to reflect. Through collaboration, the teachers will be able to generate new ideas to bring into their classrooms and mindful ways to approach all students from a culturally responsive perspective. Last, this workshop would provide teachers the opportunity to create individual road maps with strategies and newly learned information to implement in their classrooms.

A potential limitation that could impact this project is that I developed it from data from a single study site. The professional development may only impact a limited number of teachers rather than the entire school district. Another limitation may be the amount of allocated time. The proposed professional development will consist of a 3-day training. Studies of professional development have shown that the most effective adult trainings take place over a longer period (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015).

Recommendations for an Alternative Approach

Another option to address the research problem was a program evaluation of PBIS. This process would have required individual teachers to meet in small groups to conduct PBIS inventory score sheets to determine their effectiveness in implementing

PBIS strategies with fidelity. However, this type of data analysis would require additional time, and teachers would have to allot more than the time they spend in the workshop, so that they could make further recommendations and design tiered interventions.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Throughout my learning experience at Walden University, I learned patience, perseverance, knowledge, and skills that I will be able to use in the future. Through conducting academic research, I learned the process of identifying a problem, how to efficiently complete a literature review, and analyze data while avoiding implicit biases. Throughout my academic journey I changed the direction of my study from quantitative to qualitative because I realized I was more concerned about understanding the problem and not just knowing that the problem may exist. I had to learn how to accurately paraphrase the work of others and properly cite scholarly articles using APA style. Throughout this process I have acquired knowledge from reading scholarly sources that became part of several literature reviews.

The leadership qualities required to successfully conduct a professional development workshop include strategic planning. I needed to assess where the teachers were and develop a vision of where I could see them going. As a change agent and educational leader, I needed to be able to facilitate the importance of change and I achieved this task by communicating with the teachers initially through interviews. While the qualities mentioned above were instrumental in conducting a successful project, I learned the most important qualities to conduct a professional development workshop are to be personable, persuasive, and have a vision for the intended outcomes.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The overall work of this study centered on the problem of disproportionate suspensions between minority and White students and teachers' perceptions of PBIS. The nine interviews generated the information I used to develop the proposed professional development project. The lessons learned from this study included ensuring participants are familiar with various terms used in the interview questions prior to conducting the interview. It became apparent through the data analysis that some of the participants might not have understood the difference between disproportionate suspensions and disparity of suspensions. This possible misunderstanding could have skewed the interview data. However, the information from the interviews was helpful and appropriate to share with other educators to provide awareness and consistency in schoolwide procedures.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Teachers are important players in determining effective instruction, interventions, and classroom management. They are the ones responsible for conducting these procedures with fidelity to promote students' academic growth (Nevenglosky et al., 2019). The requirements for developing this project allowed me as a researcher to carefully focus on the responses from the teachers. The findings from this study established a need to further investigate teachers' input on PBIS and students' high suspension rates. If the district's stakeholders find value in the teachers' responses, then additional professional development can be developed for middle schools. In addition to

further workshops on PBIS strategies, other research-based programs could also be considered to coincide with the implementation of PBIS.

Teachers' responses from individual interviews indicated that PBIS is effective when implemented with fidelity. However, new teachers and veteran teachers alike require ongoing training in the methods for implementing the program. The review of literature on adult learning theory revealed that adults need to know why they are learning something new. Unlike students, teachers need to know that training is going to be beneficial to their daily pedagogy. It was important to provide teachers collaboration time so they could become actively engaged in the learning process. One major component of the professional development would be to engage the building administrators' support of the implementation of the workshop. It is necessary to secure buy-in from all teachers and administrators to effectively carry out initiatives that involve staff and students.

Considering all the factors that comprise a successful professional development, the teachers are likely to be receptive and appreciative of the workshop as it is tailored to address a problem within their school. While this professional development includes the necessary components for teachers to be successful, the need for a continuous focus on the problem of student suspensions will require attention throughout the school year. The PBIS committee that has been established at this school site would need to work with the administration to ensure regular meetings and updates occur throughout the course of the school year and beyond. The significance of this study is to bring awareness to teachers about disproportionate suspensions by race and the negative consequences exclusionary

discipline has on students and to fully embrace effective PBIS strategies when addressing discipline issues. PBIS is effective and students learn best when they are engaged in the classroom. Finally, exclusionary discipline such as OSS creates a divide between the teacher and student, disrupting their rapport.

Directions for future research could include other discipline strategies such as restorative practices training combined with the reward system that PBIS offers. However, because I conducted this study at one school, additional researchers could collect data in multiple schools to ensure more participants and a broader sample of data.

Conclusion

The middle school in this study had disproportionate numbers of minority student suspensions compared to White students. To better understand the problem and possibly identify a solution, nine teachers shared their assessments and perceptions of PBIS regarding whether the program was effective in reducing student suspensions. Data analysis revealed that teachers perceived PBIS to be effective in reducing student suspensions but that a need persisted to improve the program at the local site. Based on participants' interview responses, a professional development project was developed targeting their main concerns at the local school site. Reducing student suspensions can lead to positive social change and ensure that students are engaged in learning.

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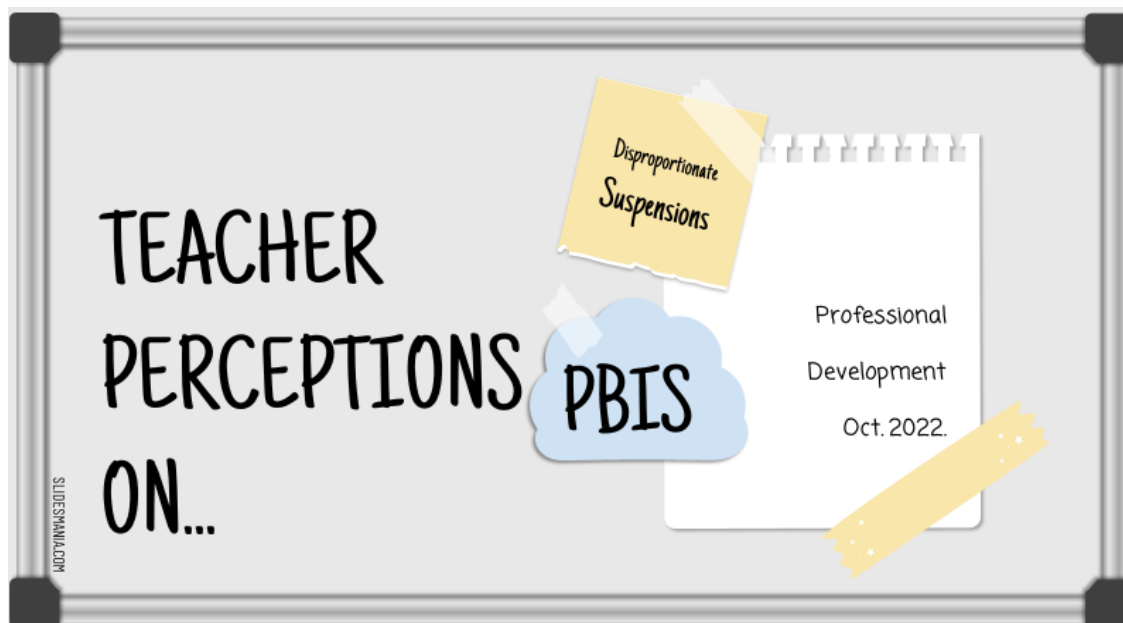
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Appendix A: Project

Workshop Day 1: Understanding the Difference Between Disproportionality and Disparity in Student Discipline


Time	Activity	Outcome
7:30-8:00	Coffee and Meet and Greet Responsible Leader: PD Coordinator	Teachers will have the opportunity to talk with colleagues before the workday begins.
8:00-8:30	Overview of the day: A school district administrator with knowledge on equity and inclusion will provide information on the difference between disproportionality and disparity as it relates to students' suspension. School suspension data will be shared and analyzed with participants. Responsible Leader: District Administrator	Teachers will have the opportunity to view the agenda for the day and ask any questions before the workshop begins. Slides 1-4.

Slide 1



Slide 2

3 Day Professional Development Workshop Overview



Day 1: Understanding the difference between disproportionate and disparity in student suspensions. View and analyze suspension data along with cultural sensitivity activities with the director of Equity and Inclusion.


Day 2: PBIS Framework and strategies. Implicit/Explicit biases and self reflection

Day 3: PBIS Framework, strategies, and develop schoolwide rubric



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Slide 3

What is the goal of this workshop?



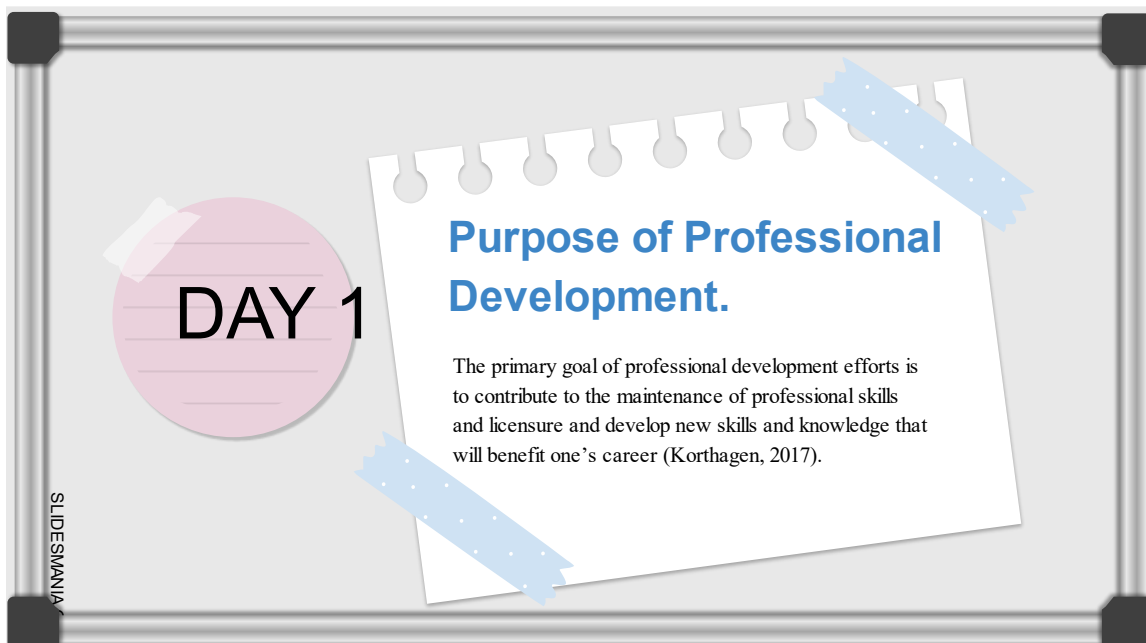
Collaboration

- Review school suspension data
- Create a school-wide climate rubric
- Identify effective PBIS strategies to implement in the classroom
- Reflect on our individual pedagogical practices

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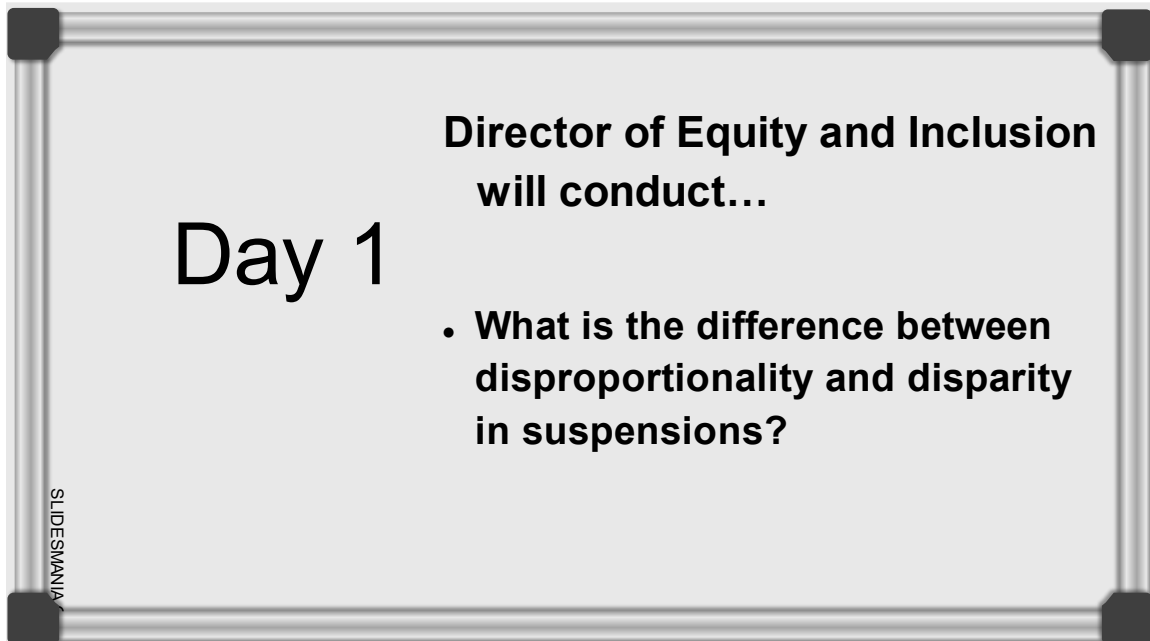
Slide 4



Workshop Day 1: Understanding the Difference Between Disproportionality and Disparity in Student Discipline

Time	Activity	Outcome
8:30-10:00	Discussion on disproportionality vs disparity in student suspensions will begin.	Teachers will be asked to respond to the question on Slide 5 . Along with their responses, they will be able to discuss and pair share ideas with participants at their table.

Slide 5

A rectangular slide with a light gray background and a dark gray border. The text is centered and right-aligned. On the left side, there is a vertical watermark.

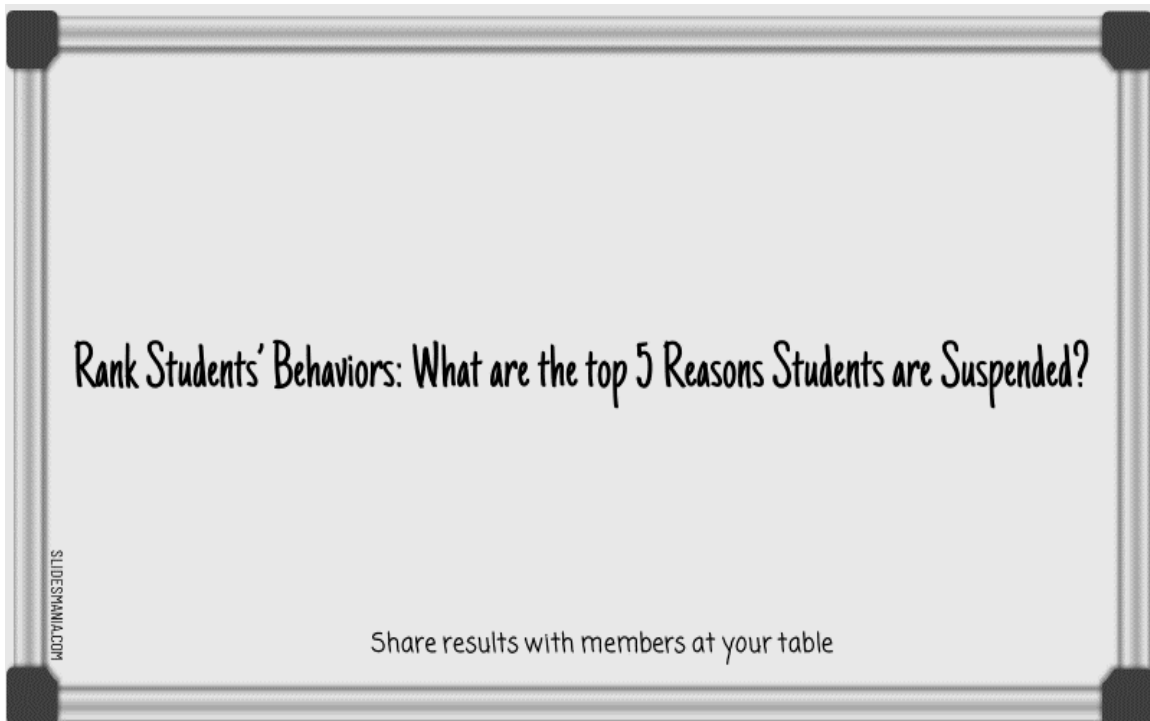
Day 1

**Director of Equity and Inclusion
will conduct...**

- **What is the difference between disproportionality and disparity in suspensions?**

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Slide 6

A rectangular slide with a light gray background and a dark gray border. The text is centered. On the left side, there is a vertical watermark.

Rank Students' Behaviors: What are the top 5 Reasons Students are Suspended?

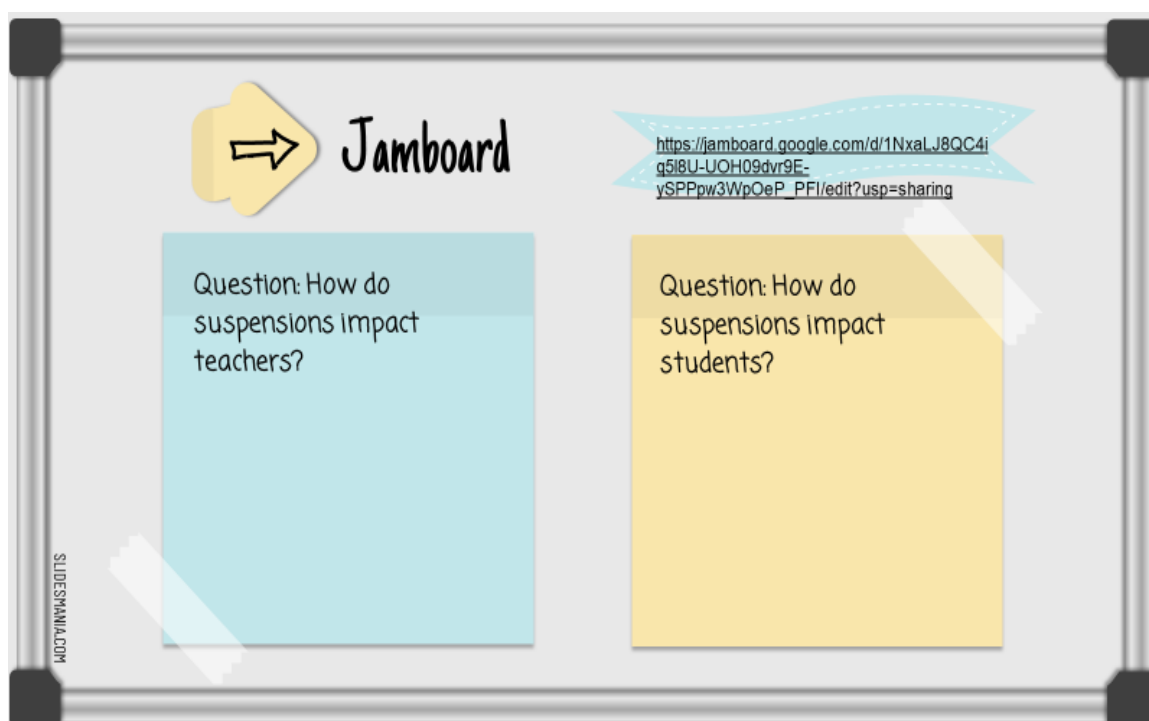
Share results with members at your table

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Workshop Day 1: Understanding the Difference Between Disproportionality and Disparity in Student Discipline

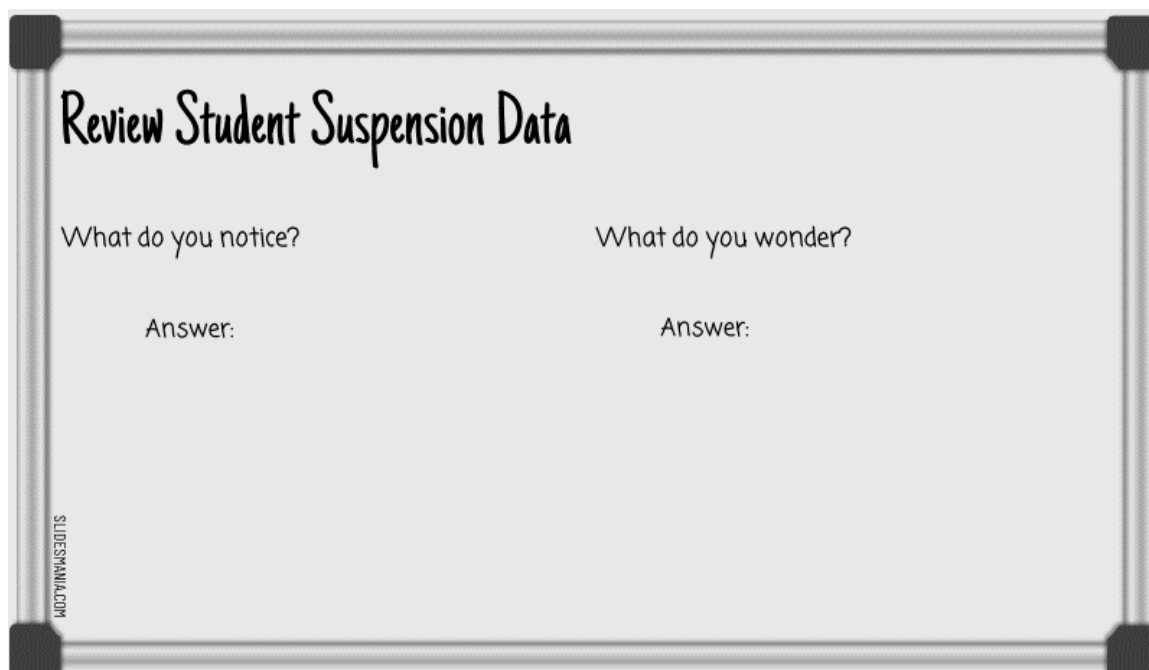
Time	Activity	Outcome
10:00-10:15	Break	
10:15-12:00		<p>Teachers will be given time to reflect and share their thoughts about the information from the presentation.</p> <p>The presenter will ask teachers to rank top five reasons students get suspended and then discuss with other teachers at their table.</p> <p>Slide 6.</p> <p>Slide 7 will require teachers to log into Jamboard. At this point, participants will interact with other participants by reading responses from others.</p> <p>At the table where teachers are sitting, teachers will break into two separate groups consisting of three teachers per group</p> <p>Teachers will then be asked to write out their thoughts about how suspensions impact both students and teachers. Slide 7</p>

Slide 7



The image shows a Jamboard interface with a yellow arrow icon pointing to the word "Jamboard". A blue banner at the top right contains a URL: https://jamboard.google.com/d/1NxaLJ8QC4jq5l8U-UOH09dvr9E-ySPpw3WpOeP_PFI/edit?usp=sharing. There are two sticky notes: a light blue one on the left and a yellow one on the right. Both contain the question: "Question: How do suspensions impact teachers?" (left) and "Question: How do suspensions impact students?" (right). A vertical watermark "SLIDESMANIA.COM" is visible on the left side of the board.

Slide 8



The image shows a Jamboard interface with the title "Review Student Suspension Data". Below the title are two columns of text. The left column contains the question "What do you notice?" followed by "Answer:". The right column contains the question "What do you wonder?" followed by "Answer:". A vertical watermark "SLIDESMANIA.COM" is visible on the left side of the board.

Workshop Day 1: Understanding the Difference Between Disproportionality and Disparity in Student Discipline

Time	Activity	Outcome
11:00-12:00	Presenter will share suspension data by school, district, and state to demonstrate disproportionality in suspensions.	<p>After reviewing the suspension data, the presenter will ask teachers to reflect on the data. Teachers will write out what they notice and what they wonder and pair share at their table. Slide 8.</p> <p>Participants will watch a Ted Talk video by Rosemarie Allen (2016) on school suspensions.</p> <p>When teachers have finished viewing the video, they will spend 10 minutes sharing their reflections of the video and comparing their initial top five reasons students get suspended.</p>
12:00-1:00	Lunch Break	
1:00-2:00	<p>Presentation and activities will be conducted on cultural sensitivity and awareness.</p> <p>Presenter responsible</p> <p>PD Coordinator</p>	<p>Teachers will break into groups of three to discuss the presentation on cultural awareness. Slide 9</p>
2:00-2:30	<p>Wrap Up</p> <p>Closure for the day</p> <p>Evaluation/Reflection</p> <p>Slide 10</p> <p>Responsible Leader: PD Coordinator</p>	

Slide 9

Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness

Discussion will be led by the
director of Equity and
Inclusion



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Slide 10

Workshop Evaluation (please complete at the end of each day's session)

Day 1 - You may answer: yes/no and then explain or use open ended answers

- 1. Was the information provided on disproportionality and disparity helpful?
- 2. Did you find the suspension data useful?
- 3. Were today's presenters knowledgeable when delivering information?
- 4. How likely are you to use today's information in your future pedagogy?

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Workshop Day 2: PBIS Framework & Strategies
Implicit/Explicit Biases and Self Reflections

Time	Activity	Outcome
7:30-8:00	Coffee and Meet and Greet Responsible Leader: PD Coordinator	Teachers will have the opportunity to talk with colleagues before the workday begins.
8:00-8:30	Overview of the day: Teachers will review the 12 Elements of PBIS and discuss different PBIS strategies. Responsible Leader: PD Coordinator and Instructional Coaches Second half of the day will be a presentation on implicit/explicit biases and self-reflection Responsible Leader: PD Coordinator	Teachers will gain a refresher on the PBIS Framework. Slide 11
8:30-8:40	Icebreaker: Are there any questions from yesterday's workshop? Responsible Leader PD Coordinator	Teachers will be asked to reflect on yesterday's workshop and share any questions they may have.


Slide 11

Day 2

Instructional Coaches will conduct...

- Review of PBIS Framework and strategies

Directory of Equity and Inclusion will conduct implicit and explicit biases and self reflections



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Workshop Day 2: PBIS Framework and Strategies and Implicit/Explicit Biases

Time	Activity	Outcome
8:40-9:15	PBIS Scenarios	Teachers will get into groups of three. They will read and act out each PBIS scenarios on Slide 12 . Teachers will then reflect on their experiences and discuss different ways the scenarios could have played out.
	PBIS: Framework and Strategies	Using chart paper, teachers will discuss and record ways they reward students for positive behavior.
10:00-10:15	Break	

Workshop Day 2: PBIS Framework and Strategies and Implicit/Explicit Biases

Time	Activity	Outcome
10:15-12:00	Gallery Walk	<p>Teachers will create a list on chart paper for each of their responses to the previous activity. How do we reward our students for good behavior in our individual classrooms and as a whole school?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Slide 13</p> <p>Teachers will discuss their answers at their tables. Teachers will then post their chart paper on the wall next to their table and begin a gallery walk.</p> <p>Each teacher will walk counterclockwise until they reach a new table and read the lists created by other tables.</p> <p>Each teacher will post a sticky note with a comment on things they noticed, wonder, and learned.</p> <p>Once teachers have traveled to each table, they are to return to their original table and complete a final group share out by selecting a table speaker.</p> <p>Teachers will then create a list of the five most common ways that students are rewarded in their school.</p>

Slide 12

Day 2: PBIS Scenarios

<p>Scenario: 1</p> <p>Marcus arrives late to class everyday. How do you approach this situation?</p>	<p>Scenario: 2</p> <p>Alicia talks to other classmates during direct instruction. This has an impact on your lesson. How do you address this behavior?</p>	<p>Scenario: 3</p> <p>Alex is often loud when speaking to classmates and this can often disrupt your class. When you speak to him, he does not look you in the eye and you find this behavior to be disrespectful. How do you address this situation?</p>
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Slide 13

Day 2: PBIS Strategies

Review PBIS:

Identify 3 PBIS strategies you currently use.

Role play: Scenarios

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**Workshop Day 2: PBIS Framework and Strategies and
Implicit/Explicit Biases**

Time	Activity	Outcome
12:00-1:00	Lunch Break	
1:00-1:30	Implicit Biases Presentation Responsible leader: PD Coordinator Questions generated by the presenter.	Teachers will engage in activities based on implicit biases. Teachers will pair share their reactions to the presentation.
1:30-2:00	Complete questionnaire	Teachers will complete a questionnaire then pair share their responses. Slide 14
2:00-2:30	Wrap Up Closure for the day Evaluation/reflection: Slide 15 Responsible Leader: PD Coordinator	

Slide 14

Implicit Bias Questionnaire

Answer each question using open ended answers and examples when possible.

- 1. Do you find it easier to teach girls or boys? Why?
- 2. Do you have a difficult time communicating with someone who does not speak English or has a strong accent?
- 3. Do you believe in "Colorblindness?"
- 4. Do you design your lesson plans to include diverse learners? If so, how frequently? (Daily, weekly, or monthly?)
- 5. Do you feel certain groups of students are more behaved than others?
- 6. Do you feel certain groups of students follow classroom directions better than others?
- 7. Do you prefer teaching certain classes over others? (Example: Algebra or Academically Talented)

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Slide 15

Workshop Evaluation (please complete at the end of each day's session)

Day 2 - You may answer: yes/no and then explain or use open ended answers

- 1. Was the information provided PBIS strategies and framework helpful?
- 2. Did you find the presentation on implicit biases impactful?
- 3. Were today's presenters knowledgeable when delivering information?
- 4. How likely are you to use today's information in your future pedagogy?

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Workshop Day 3: PBIS – Develop PBIS Rubric

Time	Activity	Outcome
7:30-8:00	Coffee and Meet and Greet Responsible Leader: Instructional Coaches	Teachers will have the opportunity to talk with colleagues before the workday begins.
8:00-8:30	Overview of the day PBIS rewards, 12 Elements of PBIS, and refresher on creating a PBIS rubric. Responsible Leader: PD Coordinator	Teachers will review the purpose of a schoolwide rubric and discuss key elements that makes for an effective rubric. The goal will be for all teachers to reach a consensus and create a rubric for their classrooms and one for the school. This will allow teachers to have an opportunity to be involved in the language used in the rubric and create consistency throughout classrooms. Slide 16
8:30-9:00	Cost of referrals and suspensions	Teachers will use referral and suspension data to calculate how much instructional time is lost due to referrals and suspensions for both teachers and students. Teachers will reflect on the cost of referrals and reflect on day one's suspension data. This exercise should encourage teachers to use PBIS strategies and find ways to reduce behaviors that lead to referrals and suspension, and ultimately loss of instructional time.

Workshop Day 3: PBIS – Develop PBIS Rubric

Time	Activity	Outcome
9:00-10:00	<p data-bbox="505 365 818 611">PBIS Strategies</p> <p data-bbox="505 436 818 611">Teachers will identify effective PBIS strategies and vote on 5 strategies that everyone will use during the school year.</p> <p data-bbox="505 789 760 852">Responsible Leader: PD Coordinator</p>	<p data-bbox="878 365 1425 506">Teachers will read and reflect on the 12 Elements of PBIS and identify areas that their school needs to improve upon. Slide 17</p> <p data-bbox="878 548 1425 653">Based on day 2 and 3, teachers will create a list of PBIS strategies they are currently using in their classrooms.</p> <p data-bbox="878 684 1425 747">Teachers will then share their list with their table.</p> <p data-bbox="878 789 1425 894">New teachers and teachers that need a refresher on strategies will work with teachers that have been trained in PBIS.</p> <p data-bbox="878 936 1425 1146">Teachers will brainstorm and each table will create five strategies that everyone agrees on at their table. Following the same format from Day 2, teachers will post their five strategies on chart paper and then begin a gallery walk.</p> <p data-bbox="878 1188 1425 1325">After the gallery walk, teachers will collaboratively decide five strategies they will use in their classrooms to establish consistency within the school.</p> <p data-bbox="878 1367 1425 1465">Reflection/feedback on how those strategies could be used in each classroom.</p>
10:00-10:15	Break	

Slide 16

Day 3 - Overview

PBIS Continued...

- Reflections

Begin to develop schoolwide rubric and classroom rubrics

- How can we make expectations more consistent within our school?

Wrap-up

- Open ended survey of workshop

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Slide 17

12 Elements of PBIS ("PBIS Foundations Training," 2021)

Steps 1-4

- PBIS Team
- Schoolwide expectations - using common language
- Behavioral Instruction
- Classroom Systems and Routines

Steps 5-8

- System for Recognition of good behavior
- Professional Development
- Staff Buy-in
- Consistent Implementation

Steps 9-12


- Evaluation and Reporting
- Discipline Procedures
- Data Collection
- Students and Stakeholders involved

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Workshop Day 3: PBIS – Develop Schoolwide Rubric

Time	Activity	Outcome
10:15-12:00	Create classroom and school-wide rubrics	<p>Based on the disproportionate suspension data, PBIS framework and strategies, and implicit biases questionnaire, teachers will begin to brainstorm and draft ideas to create a school climate rubric that students and teachers will refer to in the future. Slide 18</p> <p>To help improve school climate and hopefully reduce behaviors that may lead to student suspensions, teachers will create classroom rubrics that display expectations and respectful behaviors. Slides 19-21</p>
12:00-1:00	Lunch Break	
1:00-2:00	Continue rubrics	<p>Teachers will create rubrics.</p> <p>Teachers will be asked to share ideas that will be recorded for next steps they would like to follow the PD workshop.</p>
	<p>Responsible Leader: PD Coordinator</p> <p>Next Steps:</p> <p>Teachers will be asked to provide input for next steps to continue the work started in this workshop.</p>	

Slide 18



Team Building Activity
Create School Climate Rubric

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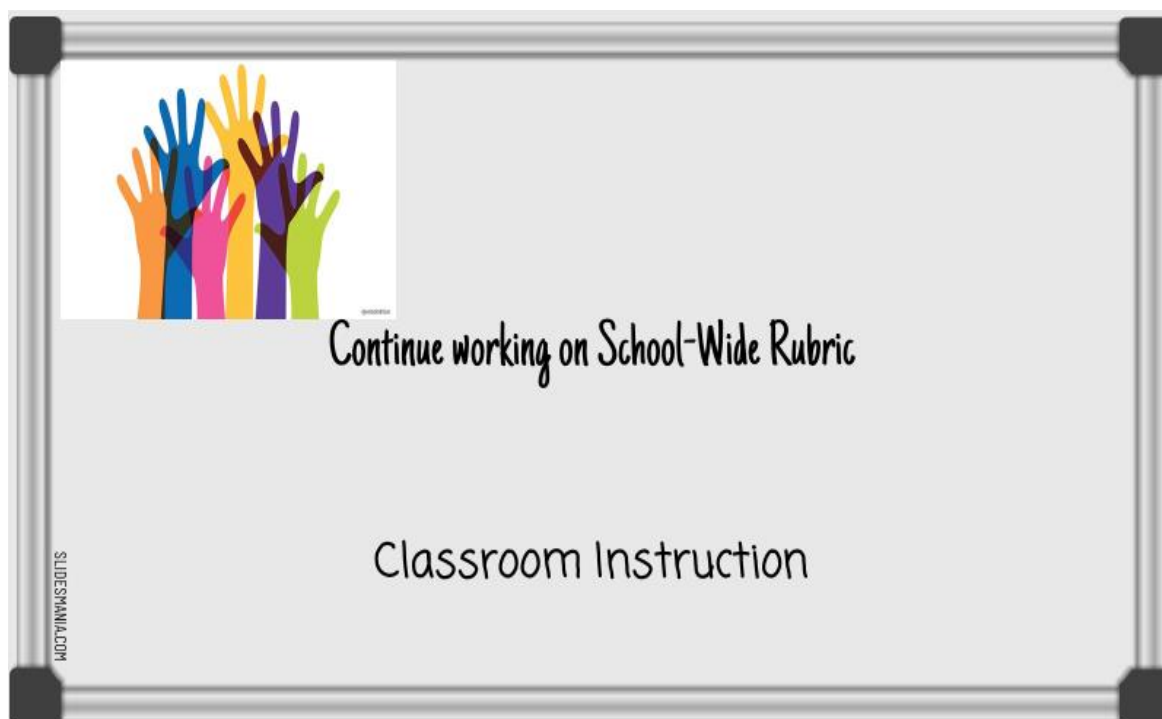
Slide 19

Bring it all together!

School-Wide Environment	How can our school climate affect staff, students, and parents?
Classroom Environment	What is the optimal learning environment for our students?
Classroom Expectations, Instruction and Discipline	How do we get students to actively engage in learning and respect others?

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Slide 20



Continue working on School-Wide Rubric

Classroom Instruction

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Slide 21



Exit Slip

Please complete the open ended survey at the end of each session.

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Workshop Day 3: PBIS – Develop Schoolwide Rubric

Time	Activity	Outcome
2:00-2:30	Wrap up Closure for the day Responsible Leader: PD Coordinator	Teachers will reflect on the 3-day workshop and complete an evaluation consisting of five open-ended questions. Slide 22

Slide 22

Workshop Evaluation (please complete at the end of each day's session)

Day 3 – You may answer: yes/no and then explain or use open ended answers

- 1. Did you feel actively engaged in the activities during today's session?
- 2. How likely will you use the classroom PBIS rubric?
- 3. Overall, did your knowledge increase from this 3-day workshop?
- 4. How would you rate the overall 3-day workshop? (1-5, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest).
- 5. What recommendations do you have for future workshops on these topics? (Open ended answers)

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