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Disciplinary Practices Among High School Administrators

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

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by

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MA, Webster University, 2012

BS, Charleston Southern University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

School administrators are responsible for the safety and physical well-being of the students. Although school disciplinary policies are in place, there is a problem with school administrators' practices and decisions when administering discipline for students' inappropriate behavior. The purpose of this mixed-method study was to explore the disciplinary processes used by school administrators when administering student discipline to determine the relationship between levels of offenses and the gender and race of students. Guided by the theory of justice, this study investigated the relationship between the level of offenses and disciplinary processes that reflect the level of offenses, as described in the school district's code of conduct, by gender and race. The quantitative method, with a chi-square analysis, was used to examine disaggregated archival data from all high schools in one school district during the school year of 2016-2017. A qualitative phenomenological approach was conducted to explore school administrators' lived experience with administering disciplinary punishment. The results of the data analysis revealed that Black males received more disciplinary actions than females. Also, Black males were disciplined at a higher rate than White males and received harsher punishment than White males. This study may contribute to positive social change as school administrators and district personnel look at their disciplinary action policies and procedures in the future and evaluate how to make modifications that would be fair and equitable for all students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In the role of school administrators, daily interactions with diverse student groups require multiple decisions to be made to maintain a positive school climate. High school administrators face ethical discretionary decisions which may often lead to disciplinary disparities according to race and gender (Payne & Welch, 2010). However, to eliminate bias, educators can create codes of conduct and school-wide disciplinary policies to support the decisions of school leaders meant to guide the behaviors of students (Gilbert, 2006; Nance, 2019). Codes of conduct and school disciplinary policies are a part of the disciplinary process. The disciplinary process involves the procedures used by school administrators when administering discipline for inappropriate behavior of students (Kinsler, 2013). However, when administering consequences for misconduct by students, school administrators with good intentions may or may not make morally sound disciplinary decisions (Ispa-Landa, 2018). School administrators face such ethical concerns as they serve as moral managers on behalf of the students.

In the search for a better understanding of school disciplinary actions, the behaviors of school administrators and students committing the infractions are both a challenge and an opportunity needing further investigation (Ispa-Landa, 2018). Both gender and race include the social dimensions necessary for understanding their impact on school environments, to varying degrees (Heriot & Somin, 2018; Kinsler, 2013). Blacks are most often disciplined for being disrespectful and threatening, loitering, and excessive noise, whereas their White schoolmates are more likely to be referred to school discipline officers for less subjective offenses, such as tobacco, leaving school,

vandalism, and profanity (Brownstein, 2015). Disproportionate expulsions and suspensions concerning gender and race of students is a social change matter because of the possibility of discrimination in institutionalized responses.

This mixed-method study was conducted to better understand the roles race and gender discrimination play in administrators' disciplinary practices. In this chapter, I include the background of the research related to this study, the problem and purpose of the study, and the research questions and hypotheses. In addition, Chapter 1 provides the theoretical framework, the nature of this study, and definitions related to the research. It concludes with the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

Although there have been numerous school discipline studies of race, ethnicity, sex, and gender that focused on suspension and expulsion rates, since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act, researchers continue to learn more about the decision-making processes of school principals to close the gap in discipline disproportionality (Bottiani et al., 2018). Presently, the literature that examines race and gender in discipline is mostly restricted to the elementary school level and not to the behaviors of the principals (Shirley & Cornell, 2011). DeMatthews et al. (2017) discussed the disciplinary disparities according to key factors such as race, gender, grade, age, and codes of conduct. The intended purpose of the codes of conduct offered direction for students to establish good behavior. Such codes should minimize the possibility of disparities when administering punishments for disciplinary actions. Yet, Brownstein (2015) provided

insight on school discipline policies that are discriminatory toward Black children and highly destructive to society.

Actions of the school principal or leader when administering punishments for disciplinary issues have led to varied negative outcomes. According to DeMatthews et al. (2017), disciplinary measures administrators take toward students, particularly punitive policies, oftentimes result in inequities that reflect systematic racial disparities. Additional studies showed disciplinary actions taken by high school principals were influenced by cultural backgrounds, race, and skin color of students (Skiba et al., 2014). Elias (2013) and Mallett (2016) found that policies and procedures lead to incarceration over education when school leaders employ discipline policies that push students out of the classroom and into the criminal justice system, known as the school-to-prison pipeline study. Such studies provided facts, perceptions, and statistics that showed how school systems disciplined Black and Hispanic students at higher rates than White and Asian students which led to unintended but discriminatory consequences (Shaprio, 2019).

There is a gap in knowledge regarding the level to which the overall characteristics of students could be linked to types of disciplinary actions and the decisions of the school administrators at a county school district. Significant phases of the race- and gender-based disciplinary disparities remain unexplored, mostly due to data limitations. Beginning in the 2013-2014 academic year, the federal Office of Civil Rights (OCR) reported biennial data on disparate disciplinary outcomes by student race for all schools and districts in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). There is national coverage with data provided by OCR; however, the data cannot be disaggregated

to the grade level, student, or evaluated across a longer period. Furthermore, the data does not include an extensive set of covariates that would further explain variation in student suspensions and expulsions. To address these gaps in the literature, I used both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the disciplinary processes of high school administrators to explain potential racial disparities in school disciplinary outcomes that have escaped the literature thus far. This study highlights the initial appearance of Black-White-gender disciplinary disparities across several school disciplinary outcomes (length of suspension or expulsion) and the spread of these disciplinary disparities regarding decisions made by administrators in high school. By addressing discriminatory actions, school administrators might provide ways to increase adequate discipline practices that do not vary by race or gender.

Problem Statement

School leaders' disciplinary decisions reflect disparities in punishment based on race and gender (DeMatthews et al., 2017, Skiba et al., 2014). Specifically, suspension and expulsion data show a disparity based on race and gender, as well as other factors (Heriot & Somin, 2018). Research showed that Black students, especially males when compared to males of other races and ethnicities, are more severely punished through school suspensions and expulsions (Rudd, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Goodman (2006) found that school disciplinary policies are ineffective for delivering moral messages. Goodman maintained that disciplinary policies are poorly justified and fail to distinguish moral violations. As such, punishment is applied without distinction to moral and nonmoral wrongdoing.

Although school disciplinary policies are established, there is a problem with school administrators' practices and decisions when administering discipline for students' inappropriate behavior (Barrett et al., 2019; Brooks & Erwin, 2019; Ushomirsky & Williams, 2015). The identified problem is not isolated within the school district that informs this study; a review of the literature also showed disparities in disciplinary practices are systemic. For example, Hannon et al. (2013) conducted a study utilizing data from a national survey and learned that students of color are more likely to be suspended than White students. Black students account for roughly half of all suspensions and expulsions, even though they represent less than a quarter of the students in public schools. Not only is the problem apparent in high schools across the United States (Ganao et al., 2013; Hannon et al., 2013; Losinski et al., 2014), but evidence of the problem exists as early as the elementary school years (Losinski et al., 2014; Smolkowski et al., 2016). The current study filled a gap in the literature on expulsions and out of school suspension based on race and gender of students by recognizing how the decision making of the administrators was specific to students of different races and gender in the school district that may have led to expulsion and out of school suspensions of these students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to explore the disciplinary processes used by school administrators when administering student discipline to determine the relationship between levels of offenses and the gender and race of students. To address the gap in the research discussed previously, the approach used was the mixed-method

paradigm. An examination of the level of offenses and disciplinary processes in relationship to a school district's code of conduct in conjunction with interviews of school administrators provided an understanding of the decision-making process school administrators make when administering punishment to high school students for inappropriate behaviors.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The mixed methods research design and rationale for this study are based on the following research questions and hypotheses:

Research Question 1 (Quantitative): What is the rate of concordance between actual level of offenses and disciplinary process for levels of offenses in 2016/2017 as described in the district's code of conduct?

Research Question 2 (Quantitative): Do race and gender differences exist in actual level of offenses and disciplinary processes for levels of offenses in 2016/2017 as described in the code of conduct by the gender and race of students?

$H_1$2: Actual level of offenses and disciplinary processes reflect the level of offenses described in the code of conduct by gender and race.

$H_0$2: Actual level of offenses and disciplinary process do not reflect the level of offenses described in the code of conduct by gender and race.

Research Question 3 (Qualitative): What is the lived experience of school administrators who administer disciplinary punishment?

Research Question 4 (Mixed-Method Question): How do the interviews with school administrators help to explain any quantitative differences in disparities that exist in levels of offenses and disciplinary processes by gender and race?

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for this study was Rawls' (1971) theory of justice. The theory of justice provides a universal system of fairness and a set of procedures for achieving it. Rawls's justice theory contains three principles and five procedural steps for achieving fairness (Rawls, 2001). The principles are the original position, the veil of ignorance, and unanimity of acceptance. Rawls' original position principle addresses rational people making decisions that are agreeable (Gilbert, 2006). The principle of the veil of ignorance addresses conditions that reduce bias and self-interest when there is a color blindness identity regarding age, sex, ethnicity, education, income, physical attractiveness, or other characteristics (Nance, 2019). The unanimity of acceptance principle requires an agreement of all stakeholders. In the case of most school systems, all would have to agree to abide by the codes of conduct. Understanding the literature on the application of Rawls' justice theory provides a minimum guarantee of rights and liberties for all school stakeholders including Black students (Mills, 2009). Rawls' theory of justice relates to the current study in the examination of how school administrators make disciplinary decisions that are fair and just for all students (Rawls, 1971). Previous data exist that show disparities in how discipline is administered based on race and gender. The decisions regarding how discipline is administered directly link to judgment calls by school administrators and the fairness of those decisions.

Nature of the Study

This study used a mixed-method approach to integrate both quantitative and qualitative data to address the research problem. The qualitative paradigm was used because the process suggests that there are multiple realities for researching constructs. Utilizing qualitative research provides the focus on the participants' view of the problem. The focus was on understanding the participants' decisions regarding the process and procedures associated with the discipline processes when administering punishments to high school students. Semistructured interviews with school administrators in the district were used to collect the qualitative data and then classified into themes. The quantitative method, with a chi-square analysis, was used to examine disaggregated archival data from all high schools in one school district during the school year of 2016-2017. The archival data were provided to me by the school district when writing the prospectus. In addition, the school district provided information on the codes of conduct for students and references for procedures and policies that address disciplinary actions. It was important to study all students in relationship to expulsions, suspensions, and office referrals to determine if there were unequal disciplinary practices among students who had not been previously identified.

Definition of Terms

Code of conduct: The rules that all students are expected to adhere to and consequences for violations (Kinsey-Wightman, 2019).

Disciplinary process: The procedures used by school administrators when administering discipline for inappropriate behavior of students (Kinsler, 2013).

Level of offenses: The severity of the offense is broken into three levels based on the infraction according to the school district's code of conduct where the study was done: Disorderly Conduct (Level 1), Disruptive Conduct (Level 2), and Criminal Conduct (Level 3).

School administrator: A principal or assistant principal at a school who administers disciplinary punishment (Harper, 2018).

Assumptions

There are several assumptions related to this study. First, I assumed that the school administrators identified for this study all had administered punishment to students at the school they were assigned to within the school district. Second, I assumed that the school administrators in this study used the codes of conduct and disciplinary policies and procedures identified for this study. Third, I assumed that the responses to the interview questions were honest and based on the school administrators' lived experiences. Last, I assumed that the archival data were true and accurate. Archival data were used to examine discipline data information for the entire school district.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study is on the decision-making processes of school administrators who administer punishment to students for disciplinary infractions. The specific focus was chosen because oftentimes school administrators think their decisions are consistent because the same code of conduct is used to guide dispositions. However, it has been found repeatedly in the literature that disparities in discipline exist based on race, ethnicity, and gender (Brooks & Erwin, 2019; Ispa-Landa, 2018; Riddle & Sinclair,

2019). This study was comprised of preselected school administrators in a school district in the Southeast United States. This study only focused on those school administrators who administer punishment to students at the school level. Only high school administrators within one county school district were interviewed for this study. School administrators in other school districts and grade levels were excluded because they are not specific to the gap in the current literature. The qualitative data results should be transferable to school administrators across different school districts. However, the quantitative data was archival data from one school district.

Limitations

Potential research limitations existed for this study. First, the current study involved only high school administrators in one school district. There are numerous school districts within the state in which this study took place. Another limitation was the time constraints placed on the school administrators to participate in an interview within a specific time. Further, conducting the interviews was a potential barrier because it required me to recruit participants. For the quantitative archival data, I deemed the data as an accurate account of disciplinary actions. The code of conduct described the school district's disciplinary process and included a description of the levels of offenses, which is a field included in the archival data.

In addition, my knowledge of the subject matter might add bias to the research (Creswell. 2013). To limit researcher bias, the quantitative data was archival data from the school district and no changes were made to the existing data. The qualitative data was collected through recorded interviews with school administrators who administer

punishments for disciplinary infractions. The verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews ensured higher accuracy of the data collection and ensured the internal validity of the information. In addition, the participants had the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the audio recordings and transcriptions for accuracy.

Significance

The significance of this study is to provide information on the process by which school administrators make ethical decisions for students' discipline behaviors that could reduce the disparities among Black male students and other racial and gender groups. Addressing recurring patterns in disciplinary processes specific to students of different races and gender will contribute to how administrators make decisions in school discipline. The study is timely because the findings could contribute to what Smith (2011) described as a literary gap involving the disciplinary philosophies, values, and related practices of school administrators. The results of this study can be useful to schools and districts as they look at their disciplinary action policies and procedures going forward, to include how they can make modifications that would be fair and equitable for all students. Furthermore, the school district can consider monitoring discipline patterns and policymakers could compel school districts to provide a monthly or annual report of all disciplinary actions.

The current study presents the opportunity to make potential contributions that advance practice throughout the local school district involving ongoing professional development and training for school administrators. Another area of significance that may be derived from the study is that of positive social change. Analyzing the archival

data could give administrators reasons to establish intercession, review existing policies, and choose the most suitable procedures that could decrease disparities in disciplinary practices.

Summary

School administrators are responsible for imposing discipline for the behavioral misconduct of students. Codes of conduct and school disciplinary policies guide the disciplinary processes to support decisions by school administrators. The disciplinary process is the procedure used by school administrators when administering discipline for inappropriate behavior of students (Kinsler, 2013). Previous research reflects disparities in punishment based on race and gender (DeMatthews et al., 2017, Skiba et al., 2014). The current study fills a gap in the literature on expulsions and out of school suspension based on race and gender of students by recognizing how the decision making of the administrators was specific to students of different races and gender in the school district that may have led to expulsion and out of school suspensions of these students. Chapter 1 introduced this research study.

Chapter 2 details the literature search strategy and provides a thorough literature review for this study. I discuss the theoretical foundation, Rawl's theory of justice, and how the theory relates to the current study. A review of the current literature is related to key variables, race, gender, and level of offenses. The chapter concludes with a summary of the reviewed literature and a justification of the gap in the literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to explore the disciplinary processes used by school administrators when administering student discipline to determine the relationship between levels of offenses and the gender and race of students. School leadership has become a priority in education policy throughout the United States because they play a significant role in improving school climate (Hansen, 2016; Pont et al., 2008). The responsibilities of the school administrators range from academic leadership to school discipline and everything in between. There is a problem with the practices and decisions made by school administrators when administering discipline for inappropriate behavior of students (Barrett et al., 2019; Brooks & Erwin, 2019; Ushomirsky & Williams, 2015). In the review of literature, data demonstrate that disparities exist in how suspensions and expulsions are administered to students, particularly to students of certain racial and ethnic groups (Brooks & Erwin, 2019).

During the 2013-14 school year, the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) division raised awareness on the extent to which exclusionary discipline practices were being utilized in schools. They found that disparities existed in the United States that show Black students and Black male students in particular are administered harsher punishment in public schools at much higher rates than their peers. This point is further supported by data compiled by the U.S. Department of Education (2016) Office for Civil Rights. While the existence of these disparities is not disputed, how to interpret the disparities is very disputed (Barrett et al., 2019). Some research found that differences in punishment resulted in higher rates of punishment for Black students because Black

students are more likely to be seen by administration as problematic (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). Other research demonstrated racial bias as a determinant for the disparities in the discipline based on race (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019; Okonofua, 2016). The 2013-14 CRDC documented those Black students, who make up 16% of enrollment, accounted for 40% of suspensions nationally (Gordon, 2018).

The first section of Chapter 2 details the literature search strategy. Next, the theoretical foundation, is Rawls' theory of justice, is discussed regarding its use as a way to understand fairness for administering behavioral management fairly and equitably. Next, literature is presented as it relates to key variables and concepts, and supported by related qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research studies. This extensive review of literature was conducted to gain background information on disciplinary policies and practices, the disciplinary decisions of school leaders, educational inequities associated with disparities in disciplinary outcomes, and the success of emerging alternatives to exclusionary disciplinary approaches. This comprehensive review of the existing literature focuses on racial and gender disparities in disciplinary outcomes and alternatives to exclusionary disciplinary approaches. An examination of the level of offenses and disciplinary process in relationship to a school district's code of conduct is also examined, in addition to related studies and concepts. Chapter 2 concludes with a summarization of the main points of the chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

The databases and search engines searched for this review included Academic Search Complete, Education Full Text, Education Source, Educational Administration

Abstracts, ERIC, EBSCO Information Services, Google Scholar, ProQuest Central, and PsycArticles. An initial keyword strategy and combination of the following search terms were used to identify relevant materials: *discipline, classroom management, dispositions, suspensions, truancy, justice theory, expulsion, disparity, racial disparity, failure in school, school administrators, school principals, disciplinary decisions, school discipline, race, inner-city school, ethnicity,* and *alternative schools*. Materials reviewed and summarized resulted from relevant journal articles, books read and/or summarized, school resources, articles, data, research studies, and other pertinent information found on websites. The scope of current literature reviewed was from 2009 to 2022 of peer-reviewed literature and seminal literature. Literature prior to 2009 were reviewed when necessary to make a connection or to better understand a concept.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for this study was based on the theory of justice that hinges on the belief that justice is equivalent to fairness (Rawls, 1971). In 1971, Rawls devised a theory that could systematize people's judgments about justice. The source of Rawls's theory of justice revolves around the acceptance of two fundamental principles of justice which guarantee a just and morally acceptable society (Rawls, 1971). The first principle guarantees the right of each person to have the most extensive basic liberty compatible with the liberty of others. The second principle states that social and economic positions are to be (a) to everyone's advantage and (b) open to all. He viewed the political societies of the 1970s as disorderly resulting from what he considered disagreements about justice (Schaefer, 2017). According to Schaefer, Rawls' theory of

justice hinged on the belief that fairness needed to be agreed upon so that there are no disappointments surrounding legitimate expectations. The principles of justice, as well as the methodology of Rawls' study (justice as fairness and the considered judgment), became part of my research on how school administrators make decisions that are fair and just for all students (see Rawls, 1971). Rawls' theory of justice was used as the foundation for the study to better understand justice when examining the potential disproportionalities of discipline as it related to race and gender.

The study of ethical ideas of the past was of great importance for Rawls because the thinking from the past allowed those in the present to better understand contemporary problems of governance and justice (Nitu, 2013). The theory of justice provides a universal system of fairness and a set of procedures for achieving it. Rawls's justice theory contains three principles and five procedural steps for achieving fairness (Rawls, 2001). The principles are the original position, the veil of ignorance, and unanimity of acceptance. Rawls' original position principle addresses rational people making decisions that are agreeable (Gilbert, 2006). The veil of ignorance principle shows a level of color blindness that addresses bias and self-interest regarding disparities based on age, sex, ethnicity, education, income, physical attractiveness, or other characteristics (Ispa-Landa, 2018).

One major theoretical proposition rest on the unanimity of acceptance principle that requires an agreement of all stakeholders. In the case of most school systems, all would have to agree to abide by the codes of conduct. The rationale for using the application of Rawls' justice theory is that it would provide school stakeholders with the

perspectives for examining alternative to exclusionary disciplinary approaches regarding the rights of all students (Mills, 2009; Welsh, 2018).

Rawls' theory of justice relates to the present study because data exist that show disparities in how discipline is administered based on race and gender. The decisions regarding how discipline is administered directly link to judgment calls by school administrators and the fairness of those decisions. The principles of justice proposed by Rawls suggest that part of the search for moral grounds regarding judgment and fairness can be associated with the idea of dignity (Rawls, 1971). The idea of justice can be seen as the specification of a more general idea of dignity associated with the characteristics of the societal structure (Rawls, 1999).

There are critiques to Rawls' concept of colorblindness. In society, people are identified based on their race. In 1990, Peeler wrote an essay to address critical race theory in which critical race theory recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of American society (Surovtsev & Syrov, 2015). According to Peeler (1990), race consciousness asserts that a person is aware of their skin color and the color of the skin of others. Peeler felt that the refinement of race consciousness or color consciousness in many critical race theory studies relates to how one sees and experiences the world. Further, Bonilla-Silva's (2015) conceptualization of color-blindness as color-blind racism demonstrates the negative impact of a focus on egalitarian considerations. Oktay (2019) argues that Rawls's theory of justice cannot be a guide to rectifying or even addressing racial injustice. While critics of Rawls's theory do not particularly focus on colorblind discourse, Oktay's (2019) critique builds on this problematic feature of Rawls's account.

A central element of the motivation for Rawls's ideal account is constructed from a color-blind perspective. In the case of racial injustices, any ideal drawn from a color-blind perspective cannot be of any help, since it emphasizes equality and sameness of all human beings (Oktay, 2019). This serves to cover up the deep causes of racial inequalities and contributes to the maintenance of racial structure in society. In truth, Rawls's conception of a perfectly just society is ideal. Regarding the theory of justice, Rawls (1999) maintained primarily that justice is a fundamental structure of society and nested in how the majority administers rights and responsibilities to the people.

Titelbaum (2008) noted two types of arguments for adding an ethos to Rawls's description of the just society. First, citizens must have an individual ethos that shows a strong moral character if they are to live in a just society. Secondly, Rawls believed that when credibility is absent within a society, then the mutual respect necessary to live in a just society would not exist. As such, a community of people who fail to have good moral character would not be credible or just.

It should be noted that Rawls embraced the idea of political legitimacy resulting from the assumption that rational citizens have the right not to obey the law within an unjust administration; while rejecting the notion that the social contract imposed a veil of ignorance and thus it depends on historical contingencies or factors external to the original position (Nitu, 2013). As this notion relates to racial disparities in school discipline, Rawls would suggest that the students subjected to unfair and unjust treatment should not follow the rules due to the inequity of the application. Nitu (2013) described Rawls' 1971 study, in which a dependency clause suggested that history was on the side

of the leader and when a person violates the rules, thus punishment was necessary. Rawls' theory of justice also shares an interest in equality, fair opportunities, and the benefits to the least advantaged and and those living in poverty (Anderson, 2010). Rawls confessed that his ideal social contract, developed based on Rousseau's doctrine, tended to have consequences of inequality regarding the issues of stability and fairness of basic structure (Nitu, 2013).

Further, Rawls' maintained that only human behavior can be described as worthy or unworthy, whereas institutions can be interpreted only as the conditions and methods of providing, or not providing, dignity. Rawls did, however, assert that the "laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust" (Rawls, 1999, p.3). The assumption is made that the theory of justice, according to Rawls, was the only conceivable kind of compromise between the demands of the poor and the whole society built on the principle of competition on the one hand, and the principles of morality on the other, based on the priority of values of respect for each person (Surovtsev & Syrov, 2015).

Rawls' theory of justice as fairness also relates to the present study because it is of the highest importance for administering behavioral management fairly and equitably. A series of studies were conducted to examine the characteristics of the adversary and inquisitorial systems of decision making as they related to the justice theory. In 1974, Walker et al. (1971) conducted a study with 96 male undergraduate students utilizing a business simulation to examine the effects of the adversary and nonadversary procedures and the favorableness of the judgments made about perceptions of the adjudication. There

were two groups in the simulation, one-third of the participants served as defendants, and two-thirds were observers who had no prior information about the defendants. In a five-point Likert scale ranging from *most fair* to *least fair*, both groups found the adversary procedure as most fair and were satisfied with judgments resulting from the adversary procedure. The reactions of participants were measured with the ultimate objective of determining which of the two ideal systems provided the more just decision-making procedure. In a similar study conducted in 1980, 111 male undergraduate students participated in a simulation in which they were led to believe they had been charged with wrongdoings of which they knew they were innocent. It was found that the participants saw the adversary procedure as fairer than the nonadversary and more accurate and unbiased because there were multiple opportunities for challenges and to allow their voices to be heard (Lind et al., 1980). Both studies demonstrated Rawls' concept of the veil of ignorance method for evaluating the degree of justice incorporated in legal procedure.

This study benefitted from using the theory of justice, particularly as it relates to a discipline policy that disproportionately punishes Black boys. Utilizing a theory of justice that focuses on equal outcomes, the discipline policies used in schools today are unjust, particularly in school systems where Black boys are suspended from school at rates three times that of White boys (The Presidents and Fellows of Harvard College, 2020). Conversely, the discipline policy may be ideally just as a procedural matter. That is, if the behavioral expectations are reasonable, and the penalties are applied to all students equally then the demands of procedural justice are met. In such cases, the disparate

outcomes may be unfortunate, but they do not violate the norms of procedural justice (The Presidents and Fellows of Harvard College, 2020). Using the theory of justice was beneficial in helping to determine what is fair and just.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

Although research has been conducted specific to school discipline on race, ethnicity, sex, and gender, there remains a gap in the literature as to practices and decisions made by school administrators that lead to racial disparities in discipline. Researchers in education have approached the problem associated with school discipline from multiple perspectives. Particularly, educators have conducted studies and implemented practices to gain a greater understanding of school discipline, school rules specific to discipline, and actions for disciplinary infractions. Further, a greater understanding of approaches used by school administrators and those charged with administering dispositions for infractions were studied. Throughout the review of literature, studies to better understand the disparities in discipline were examined for quantitative and qualitative components that related to key variables and concepts (Barrett et al., 2019; Brandon, 2013; Hudley, 2013; Kadıoğlu et al., 2016; Payne, 2018; Sadik and Öztürk 2018; Ushomirsky & Williams, 2015).

Discipline in Schools

Disciplinary issues in schools date back to the 1940s and continue today (Rothstein, 2014). Yet, to understand discipline it is important to understand the meaning. In Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary (2009), discipline was defined as (a) control gained by enforcing obedience or order; (b) orderly or prescribed conduct or pattern of

behavior; (c) self-control; and punishment. By definition, one may see discipline as a means for gaining control by punishment. Today, school discipline is often characterized as punishment for a rule that was not followed (Amstutz & Mullet, 2015). Strother (1985) viewed discipline as the enforcement of school rules by punishment to minimize disruption within classrooms. Dreikurs (1968) in his model of democratic discipline posits that discipline is assistance to children to improve their behavior. Others see discipline as a means of teaching children to follow rules in life (Amstutz & Mullet, 2015; Dreikurs & Cassel, 1972).

Regardless of how discipline in schools is defined, individual schools need to follow one fair and consistent process and just for all students. Amstutz and Mullet (2015) highlight the importance of those administering discipline in schools to share the common expectations with all stakeholders while ensuring those directly involved are charged with a high level of understanding of the rules and consequences for violating such rules. Students, teachers, and day-to-day school personnel must be trained to consistently follow, model, and administer the rules because of the multiple factors which influence discipline (Amstutz & Mullet, 2015).

Schools throughout the United States tend to have one set of rules for all students. Rules are written with the explicit purpose of ensuring a positive school climate, and that all students, regardless of their learning potential, benefit from structure and guidelines. However, many researchers believe that discipline in schools remains problematic because educators do not believe and understand that rules and expectations have different connotations based on cultural discourse (Mendler, 2009). School

educators who realize the importance of understanding culture take time to recognize the true meaning and purpose of rules to address behaviors. Mendler (2009) defined rules as what a student was permitted to do in an educational setting, and what was not acceptable for a student to do. Students should be educated on why specific procedures are used. Further, students need to understand that rules are written to know behaviorally what is expected, and procedures are in place to know how to carry out the rules. Marshall (2007) explained that when we used the term rule, it was a negative connotation, but when we used the term expectation, it was a more helpful word. Therefore, school leaders have expectations of students for facilitating the rules within the school's environment. These student responsibilities are usually laid out in codes of conduct and discipline policies and procedures.

Discipline: Research Finding

In 2019, Fordham Institute research staff and the FDR Group convened two focus groups of teachers in Washington, D.C. and New York City to conduct a quantitative survey research study on the impacts of suspensions or alternatives to suspension. The participants comprised White and Black teachers who taught grades 3–12. There were five significant findings. Teachers in high-poverty schools reported higher rates of verbal disrespect, physical fighting, and assault. Most teachers said discipline was inconsistent or inadequate and that the recent decline in suspensions was at least partly explained by a higher tolerance for misbehavior or increased underreporting. Although many teachers valued newer disciplinary approaches, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and restorative justice, most said suspensions can be useful and

appropriate in some circumstances. Most teachers said the majority of students suffer because of a few chronically disruptive peers. Additionally, Black teachers advocated positively for suspensions, expulsions, and other forms of exclusionary discipline (Griffith & Tyner, 2019).

Code of Conduct

School Boards of Education are committed to providing safe and orderly environments for their students and employees to deliver a quality education (National Education Association, 2019). Responsible behavior by students, district personnel, and other stakeholders is essential to achieving this goal. Professional codes of conduct are contracts written for school children to encourage positive behavior and to present misconduct (Kent County Public Schools, 2019; Polk County Public Schools, 2019). Codes of conduct share common provisions and common goals that help to define rules, regulations, procedures, and protocols for schools (Kinsey-Wightman, 2019). The components of a typical student code of conduct are student expectations, prohibitions, pledges, and discipline (Findlaw, 2019).

Guidelines for positive behavior are established in schools with the expectation that students will follow the rules and behave morally. Although research indicates that expectations should be developed in conjunction with students, the codes of conduct in school districts are created by school boards and administrators (Project IDEAL, 2019). According to Findlaw (2019), discipline policies specify those forbidden behaviors that schools do not allow students to participate in while on campus. Examples of forbidden behaviors are fighting, cussing, disrespect to teachers, weapons on campus, etc. A pledge

is included in most codes of conduct as a commitment to abide by the rules. This is required in most codes of conduct. While the discipline process is a separate component from the codes of conduct, the process is guided by the codes of conduct. The discipline process outlines how and when students are disciplined along with the consequences for their actions.

The codes of conduct are written for the intended purpose of ensuring the school environment is conducive to learning and ensuring students receive a quality education (Kinsey-Wightman, 2019). Based on the codes, policies are written to establish the rules and procedures that create standards of quality for learning, safety, expectations, and accountability (Carpenter, 2015; National Education Association, 2019). Without these, schools would lack the structure and function necessary to provide for the educational needs of students. Ultimately, policies are necessary to the success and safety of a school.

Disciplinary Policies and Procedures

The standards of student conduct are regulated by a uniform system of minimum disciplinary enforcement (Department of Education, 2019). School districts that previously have adopted discipline policies that are consistent with and contain the elements included in this regulation may retain their local policies as adopted. The implementation of these disciplinary policies and procedures varies from school district to school district. School policies are in place for multiple reasons, but mainly policies establish rules and regulations to guide acceptable behavior. Whereas, procedures are the mechanism for carrying out the policies that in the end ensure a productive learning environment (Carpenter, 2015). The local school board usually creates the policies for

that district that are aligned to the state and federal district policies. These policies determine procedures for how student operations in that district are handled but are not transferrable should a student relocate to another district (Carpenter, 2015; Kinsey-Wightman, 2019). While the codes of conduct are written to carry out discipline policies and procedures, it is important to note that other policies and procedures are created to establish safety standards for the physical environment and mental state of students and staff (National Education Association, 2019).

Discipline policies and practices in public schools have gained increased attention among researchers because of the disproportionalities regarding educational equity (Bottiani et al., 2018; Welsh, 2018). Educators and other stakeholders are aware that schools cannot allow unacceptable behavior to interfere with the learning process (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Therefore, some school districts adopted zero-tolerance discipline policies and practices that mandate predetermined consequences for severe infractions (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011). The U.S. Customs Agency originally created zero-tolerance policies to combat drug trafficking in the early 1980s (Henault, 2001). However, the state and federal judicial systems have since abandoned zero-tolerance policies, while school districts continued to implement such policies in the early 1990s (Mongan & Walker, 2012).

Zero Tolerance Policy

Zero tolerance is a policy that is also directly linked to school discipline. In 1994, under the federal Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA), schools were required to adopt zero-tolerance policies that called for the automatic one-year expulsion of students bringing

firearms to schools. Failure to comply with the Act would result in loss of funding under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Mongan & Walker, 2012). While specific zero-tolerance policies vary by school, at least 79% of schools nationwide had adopted these policies towards alcohol, drugs, and violence by 1997 (Casella, 2003; DeVoe, Peter, Kaufman, Ruddy, Miller, Planty, Snyder, Duhart, & Rand, 2002). It gained greater popularity in the aftermath of the Columbine shooting (Boccanfuso, & Kuhfeld, 2011).

Zero Tolerance: Research Studies. A systematic literature review of interventions and alternative options to zero-tolerance policies in schools was examined and found negative impacts on students of color, including the "school to prison pipeline" where students of color are being funneled from schools into the criminal justice system (Pitlick, 2015). The intent was to identify the impact of school discipline on minority students. Quantitative and qualitative empirical studies based on program effectiveness were included as well as both peer-reviewed and nonpublished literature. A meta-analysis was conducted on a set of 14 empirical studies that met the inclusion criteria and were sorted in levels of prevention and interventions. The prevention was divided into primary, secondary, and tertiary level categories. The findings indicated that the effectiveness of the interventions presented was inconsistent at each level and pointed out a significant need for more research at all levels of prevention. While zero-tolerance discipline policies disproportionately affect minority students, limited research is available on the effects of alternative policies on these students (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018).

Although zero-tolerance policies have been implemented nationwide, limited research exists that examines the impact of such policies. Two reasons for the limited

research are the varied ways the policy is carried out among school districts, and the sensitive nature of school discipline practices and incidents makes it hard to perform experimental research (Civil Rights Project, 2000). However, much of the research found negative outcomes linked to the types of punishment associated with suspension and expulsion (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Osher et al., 2010). Zero tolerance cases that led to automatic suspensions found a significant increase in the likelihood of subsequent suspension. Further, students who are expelled due to the zero-tolerance policy are less likely to graduate on time and more likely to drop out (Balfanz, & Boccanfuso, 2007). Further, research has consistently indicated that disproportionate percentages of Black, Hispanic, and poor students are suspended and expelled in schools with zero-tolerance policies (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Skiba & Losen, 2016). Higher suspension rates have also been found to be related to lower school-wide academic achievement and standardized test scores, even when controlling for factors such as race and socioeconomic status (DeVoe et al., 2002; Raffaele-Mendez, & Knoff, 2003).

In 2016, Curran conducted a quantitative study that explored the implications of state zero-tolerance laws that require school districts to adopt zero-tolerance policies. The study was conducted to determine if the adoption of such policy contributed to increased use of suspensions and if they led to racial disparities. National data collected by the U.S. Department of Education (2016) Office for Civil Rights division and schools and staffing surveys were studied with a sample population of thousands of school districts and principals spanning the late 1980s to the mid-2000s. The study revealed three findings:

(a) State laws requiring schools to have zero-tolerance policies increased suspension rates for all students; (b) Suspension rates increased at a higher rate for Black students; and (c) Principals reported few decreases in problem behaviors in schools. Like any policy, there are supporters for and against zero tolerance. Those in favor of the policy believe the no-nonsense policy is designed to teach accountability and maintain order in some high-crime schools (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). While those opposed to zero tolerance say that academically disadvantaged children are given no other option than to return to the streets with limited education (Fergus, 2019; Gonsoulin et al., 2012; Henderson, 2018; Skiba, & Losen, 2016). As such, the students removed from school based on the zero-tolerance policy are less likely to return to school, and more likely to become a school drop-out, and potentially resort to criminal behaviors (Fergus, 2019; Henderson, 2018). As such, codes of conduct and disciplinary policies are written and usually used to determine the actions taken for disciplinary infractions.

Common Disciplinary Sanctions

When it comes to school discipline, the goal of educators is to create an environment conducive to a positive learning environment (Bear, 2010). As such, disciplinary sanctions are used for students who fail to follow rules. Although time out of class or school has huge implications for student success, actions must be taken to maintain order and to create a safe and orderly school environment. To address student misbehavior consistently, the state compilation of school discipline laws and regulations is used to determine the type of punishment (Department of Education, 2019). Three

levels of student misconduct are identified: behavioral misconduct, disruptive conduct, and criminal conduct.

Level I behavioral misconduct addresses the least severe misbehavior. While Level I is the least severe, it still tends to impede orderly classroom practices. Actions of behavioral misconduct may include tardiest, cheating, lying, abusive language, failure to comply, cutting class, truancy, and others. While much of this misbehavior may be addressed in the classroom by the teacher, possible consequences may include but are not limited to verbal reprimand, withdrawal of privileges, and possible detention (Department of Education, 2019). Level II behavioral misconduct address those actions where student misbehavior is directed against persons or property that could threaten the safety of others. Acts of disruptive conduct may include but are not limited use of drugs or alcohol, fighting, stealing, threats, abuse, and repeated refusal to comply with directives from school personnel. Level II misconduct includes sanctions ranging from temporary removal from class to expulsion. Level III misconduct includes sanctions ranging from out-of-school suspension to appropriate action within the criminal justice system. Level II and Level III infractions were addressed in this study (Department of Education, 2019).

Suspension is the most widely used infraction, yet, research shows that "being suspended even once in ninth grade is associated with a twofold increase in the likelihood of dropping out of high school, from 16% for those not suspended to 32% for those suspended just once" (Losen & Martinez, 2013, p. 1). Moreover, when behavior techniques such as counseling or mentoring were used appropriately, they helped with the growth and development and building of self-discipline and integrity (Bear, 2010).

However, there are strategies other than suspensions used by school administrators to address misbehaviors. Disciplinary actions for inappropriate behaviors may happen with teachers and other school officials without ever coming to the office. For the purposes of this study, disciplinary actions and processes taken by school administrators to address inappropriate behaviors were investigated. Those disciplinary actions are in-school suspension and timeout, out-of-school suspension, expulsion, and alternative school (Bear, 2010; Losen & Martinez, 2013). It should be noted that in most schools, principals or the school's disciplinarian can only make recommendations for expulsion or assignments to alternative schools, the final decision for these dispositions rests with the hearing officer or the school board.

Expulsions and Out of School Suspension

Exclusion from school is the most common form of suspension and expulsion used in today's schools, although it has been used in various forms throughout the history of the nation's schooling (Skiba & Losen, 2016). While expulsion can last up to a year, out-of-school (OSS) suspension is for a shorter period. OSS is the temporary removal of a child from the school environment to the home as a punishment for a disciplinary infraction. Out-of-school suspension extends from one school day and up to 10 days (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). One of the most severe forms of discipline used in American schools is out-of-school suspension. When a student commits a serious grievance, such as possession of an illegal substance or engaging in a fight, out-of-school suspension demands a student be absent from school and away from school grounds for a specified number of days.

School leaders have used expulsions as an option for students to be removed from school who exhibit serious violations of school rules. Expulsion with educational services is an action taken by the local educational agency removing a child from his/her regular school for disciplinary purposes, with the continuation of educational services, for the remainder of the school year or longer in accordance with local educational agency policy. Expulsion with educational services also includes removals resulting from violations of the Gun Free Schools Act that are modified to less than 365 days (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

The adverse effects of expulsion on the student can be profound. The student is separated from any formal learning and most times are left at home unsupervised because, in most instances, the school does not have an obligation to provide any further services (Wraight, 2010). Data suggest that students who are involved in the juvenile justice system are likely to have been suspended or expelled (Skiba et al., 2014). Further, students who experience out-of-school suspension and expulsion are as much as 10 times more likely to ultimately drop out of high school than are those who do not have such experiences (Kirsch, 2019; Wraight, 2010). Also, expulsion has an adverse effect on society. Students who are suspended or expelled from school are more likely to commit crimes, abuse drugs and alcohol, and spiral into low academic achievement and delinquency (Kirsch, 2019). High school dropouts can expect to earn considerably less over a working career and to have far fewer employment opportunities. If the student's parent(s) work, there may be no one at home during the day to supervise the student's activity, making it more likely that the student will engage in more inappropriate

behavior (Civil Rights Project, 2000). It should be noted that one-third of U.S. students are suspended at some point from kindergarten to 12th grade (Kirsch, 2019). Kirsch further notes that expulsions are less common, and most likely have more severe consequences, but most studies do not differentiate between the two, instead, studies group them under the umbrella of school exclusion. These adverse effects associated with expulsion are similar to those found for students assigned out-of-school suspensions.

Expulsions: Research Findings. The most widely accepted explanation for racial disparities in suspension and expulsion is between-school sorting (Welch & Payne, 2010). According to this argument, schools serving minority and low-income students are more likely than other schools to adopt zero-tolerance policies for dealing with student misbehavior. In their study of 294 public schools, Payne and Welch (2010) use principals' judgments about "how often" their school uses various punitive or nonpunitive approaches to handle student misconduct and found that schools with large enrollments of Black students are more likely to use zero tolerance and other exclusionary discipline practices than schools with large enrollments of White students (Payne & Welch, 2010). The evidence indicates that the higher rates of exclusionary discipline experienced by Black students may not have been the result of higher rates of misbehavior or these students engaging in a greater variety of infractions or more severe infractions, but the zero-tolerance policy that required removal of the students from the schools.

Out-School Suspension: Research Findings

Research shows that out-of-school suspension is ineffective for improving student behavior and often is associated with negative outcomes Cholewa et al., 2018; Noltemeyer, 2015; Wraight, 2010). Further, research shows disparities based on race and gender among students receiving the punishment (Cholewa et al., 2018). According to data from the U.S Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, between 2011 and 2012, 3.45 million students received out-of-school suspension and 3.5 million received in-school suspensions. Yet, school officials continue to make decisions based on the rationale for suspensions that the punishment will decrease the likelihood of further violations because it is thought that the child would prefer to be in school (Noltemeyer, 2015).

Cholewa et al. (2018) examined numerous studies published on negative outcomes of out-of-school suspension and found that such punishment resulted in lower achievement scores, higher rates of repeating a grade, and higher dropout rates. The demographics of students receiving out-of-school suspension have also been well documented, and show that students who are Black, male, of lower socioeconomic status, or who qualify for special education receive out-of-school suspensions at a higher rate than their peers (Cholewa et al., 2018). Research findings of OSS continue to reveal a consistent trend of students involved with drugs, gangs, and violence living in high poverty areas (Blomberg, 2003). Additional research focuses on insubordination and defiance of classroom instruction as major causes of suspension (Skiba et al., 2014).

A study conducted in Philadelphia Public Schools over two years 2011/2012 and 2013/2014 found that suspension was linked to lower test scores. The quantitative study

examined test scores of third through 12th graders and found that students' test scores are lower in the years that they were suspended. The results suggest students' chances of scoring proficient on the state math exam fall by about two percentage points if they were suspended. And the more days a student was suspended, the more their test scores fell. Lacoe and Steinberg (2018) called these effects educationally significant. It should be further noted that there was no effect on test scores in the year following a suspension or on absences the month after.

A study of a large school district in Florida found that insubordination and other nonviolent offenses comprised the majority of OSS (Mendez et al. 2002). Skiba et al. (2014) examined the disciplinary histories, office referrals, and punishment of two separate school district's middle school population. They found that most offenses that led to office referrals were nonviolent. Out of 17,045 disciplinary incidents that led to an office referral during the 1994-1995 school year for the first school district studied, there were 5,673 OSS, the most prevalent disciplinary method used. Other research supports that OSS is the most frequently used discipline method for schools at the administrative level (Adams, 1992). Skiba's study also found that there was rarely a strong correlation between student misbehavior and an appropriately weighted punishment. In other words, variability among the teachers, staff, and students seemed to affect the severity of the punishment. This is a troubling finding because it suggests a lack of uniformity about how severe punishments are applied.

The need for disciplinary consequences to address serious student misconduct is undisputed. What research has questioned is why some students seem to be suspended

more often than others, what effects suspension has on students, and whether or when alternatives to suspension might be more effective practices than suspension itself (Iselin, 2010). Dupper et al. (2009) reviewed findings from research conducted on the effects of suspension and found suspension to be effective at removal of a problematic child from school; temporary relief for frustrated school personnel; and raising awareness of the child's misconduct to the parent. The finding also revealed that the zero-tolerance policies that often lead to OSS were not straightforward; implemented arbitrarily; frequently used as discipline for minor infractions; do not improve overall school safety and are associated with lower academic performance, higher rates of dropout, failures to graduate on time, increased academic disengagement, and subsequent disciplinary exclusion (Achilles et al., 2007; Dunbar et al., 2009; Dunbar & Villarruel, 2002). In a paper published in School Psychology Quarterly, Cholewa et al. (2018) discussed findings that should raise caution about the use of in-school suspension as an alternative to out-of-school suspension.

In-School Suspensions and Best Practices

Suspension, by definition, refers to students being removed from the act of doing something for a temporary period (Shirley & Cornell, 2011). Traditionally, suspension most often refers to being removed from school for a specific time. However, schools have found alternative ways to keep students in school and engaged in the learning process. In the l980s, in-school suspension, commonly called ISS, began to increase in popularity. Time-out spaces began to replace the former chair outside the classroom, and teachers or teacher assistants were soon hired to continue some instruction for the

students. The thought for educators was that learning would continue for students who were removed from the classroom for misconduct (Chin et al., 2012). Research has shown that in-school suspension was given most often in elementary and middle schools (Shirley & Cornell, 2011).

In 2013, DiMino conducted research on the best practices for successful in-school suspension programs. She found four models of in-school suspension programs that were widely used in school. Morris and Howard (2003) described the models as punitive, academic, therapeutic, and individual. Most educators use the punitive model as a method for students to understand there are consequences for all actions and an opportunity for reflection on the inappropriate decision. The punitive model does not have a counseling component or a plan to prevent academic failure (Bertrand & Pan, 2011). This model is usually in a timeout space that is most often in an in-school suspension room with either an uncertified teacher or instructional assistant (Pokorski, 2010). While this form of in-school suspension is a better alternative than out-of-school suspension, there is still a negative impact on the students' academic achievement.

The academic model for in-school suspension differs from the punitive model because it assumes that disciplinary problems are linked to academic gaps (Morris & Howard, 2003). Oftentimes, students misbehave in front of their peers when called upon by the teacher and they do not know the information. It is believed that when students are taught missing skills while serving an in-school suspension, they can return to class and continue with instruction without being behind (Pokorski, 2010). The relationship between suspension and academic achievement may be explained by missed instructional

time, school disengagement resulting from the suspension, preexisting student academic or behavioral difficulties that resulted in the suspension and concurrently influenced achievement (Arcia, 2006)

The therapeutic model is designed to determine the social and emotional problems of the student that contributed to the misbehavior (Arcia, 2006). The assumption is that something is going on in the child's life that causes the inappropriate action and that is out of the control of the child (Graff, 2013). Such actions could be the death of a family member, parents' divorce, family medical issues, poverty, or violence. The therapeutic approach provides the opportunity for the child to learn coping strategies and often support for the family. The model is not often used in high schools since students at this age tend to not want to share. The in-school suspension room for the therapeutic model is usually commanded by a school counselor or social worker. Students engage in role-playing with their peers to help them think about coping strategies. These methods promote a new or improved behavior pattern in the student (Morris & Howard, 2003).

Finally, the individual model promotes a process for determining the ultimate cause of the students' misbehaviors. This model requires some form of counseling and assessments to determine support. The individual model is a component of the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) programs that are growing in popularity. This program looks at the child's behavior through a different lens (Fetter-Harrot et al., 2009). During the process of uncovering the source of behavior, an eventual behavior goal is set that differs from the previous replacement behavior. The individual model looks at the behavior

specific to the person and not a formula. This model assumes that there is a reason for the inappropriate behavior (Graff, 2013; Ryan & Zoldy, 2011).

Two different lines of research provided answers to the question of what discipline strategies worked best in schools. First, time-outs and the in-school suspensions were an option for students being excluded from the classroom environment for disruptive behaviors (Noltemeyer & Ward, 2015). In-school suspension and time-outs allowed students the opportunity to remain in school and off the streets during the school day (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). This option allowed the students who were not taking part in negative behavior to continue their academic learning, without the interruptions of students that were disrupting the environment and causing the teachers to focus more on the disruptions, than educating students that wanted to learn (Peters, 2012).

The second line of research was more consistent with emphasizing actions taken by educators to change observable student behavior (Burns, 2011). Using a time-out or in-school suspension to discipline students for disrupting the educational environment seldom led to a lasting change in the student (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). Most of the time, while sitting in timeout the students were focused on the unfairness of why they were being singled out and placed in a timeout or school suspension. By using this method, students were not making the connection that their behavior had caused them to receive a specific consequence for their actions (Thompson, 2015). This line of inquiry was related to the social and emotional intelligence of the learner, and the obligation of the teacher in assisting the student in processing their behavior. The second line of research was more

consistent with the emphasis on actions taken by educators in changing student behavior. Teachers who are clear and consistent about class rules and consequences tend to have fewer class disruptions (Hymowitz, 2000). Further, students who are given strategies to address inappropriate behaviors are more successful in the classroom (Hymowitz, 2000).

In-School Suspension: Research Findings. Numerous qualitative and quantitative research studies have been conducted on in-school suspension since its beginning in the mid to late 1990s. To facilitate ISS, many public schools use timeout rooms, Saturday School, or after-school detention. Prior and Tuller (1991) conducted a qualitative case study in a large school district in Iowa with ten middle schools and five high schools to determine the effectiveness of ISS. The district's goal was to severely reduce the OSS suspensions. Their students were placed in a time-out room during the school day. The study found that the faculty and staff were positive about the plan and the effort to have students in school as opposed to suspension. Another finding was the students' desire to receive counseling that was associated with ISS. Further, students had a more positive attitude about discipline.

In another study conducted in the Houston public school district, the effectiveness of student referral centers (SRCs) was examined as a means of dealing with discipline problems. The SRC was a centralized district room for students who misbehaved in school and was considered an ISS option (Opuni, 1991). In this study, there were 14 SRCs for the 19 participating Houston middle schools. The study surveyed teachers and principals and examined the raw data of the SRC. They found that the program had a positive impact on the attitudes of the teachers, who felt that they had another discipline

option available to them while they tried to control their classes. However, the study also revealed that a lack of resources offered to the centers made their mission less effective. Many of the teachers who ran the SRC stated that there were too many students in their centers and that this hurt the effectiveness of the SRC. The district had recommended a maximum enrollment of 20 students per center when they had created the program. The study found that five of the 14 centers had a mean enrollment for the 2000-2001 school year exceeding the recommendation, with the most crowded center averaging 25 students each day. The SRC data shows that approximately two-thirds of the students attending the SRC were sent for truancy, tardiness, or disruptive behavior.

In 1997, Leapley conducted an experimental study in advocating the use of ISS. Leapley matched 20 school districts with similar suspension rates in Michigan, Leapley studied the effect that an ISS program would have on the rate of violent acts committed by students. This study is important because it examines the modification of behavior caused by an ISS program and not merely the drop in OSS. After matching new ISS schools with control schools that had similar suspension rates, he observed that the intervention offered by a trained teacher in ISS helped to reduce the number of violent acts when compared with the control schools. In fact, all the experimental schools noted a significant change for the better. This study, although limited, offers potential evidence for the power that a rehabilitative model of ISS can offer schools.

In 2013, Graff conducted an exploratory study on the effects of in-school suspension programming by examining alternatives to out-of-school suspensions. A cross-sectional survey was used to ask school professionals to describe their school

suspension programming and to what extent they are using it. Twenty-eight participants indicated results similar to what was found in the literature review. Findings revealed that in-school suspension lacks consistency, documentation, outcome data, and enough funding to be successful.

Examining the most effective methods to address misbehaviors in schools while continuing the learning experiences are being researched throughout the nation. Dupper et al. (2009) believed that models such as the therapeutic and individual provided the most proactive method for changes in school discipline because they looked at the reason for the misbehavior. When the cause is addressed, then the behavior is sure to be minimized or eradicated. Specifically, school leaders, counselors, and those who make disciplinary decisions need to be aware of research findings and interventions that focus on eliminating problematic behaviors rather than on the elimination of students themselves (Dupper et al., 2009).

School Leader's Decision-Making Process and Supporting Research

The responsibilities of the school leaders range from academic leadership to school discipline and everything in between. However, strategies of how effective leaders make decisions have changed over time. In the 1940s, principals were faced with discipline as well as how to ensure students were learning. However, the problems were minimal, the school populations were smaller, and distractors such as technology, cars, and the like were not competing issues. Further, the requirements that school principals are faced with today were not issues in the 1940s.

Today, school administrators have a difficult job because of the multiple

responsibilities that are not academically related. The challenges school administrators face can be placed in multiple categories (Harper, 2018). For the purposes of this literature review, they were placed in two categories: educational demands of a school and school management. Educational demand ranges from the day-to-day task of monitoring the instructional program to the awareness of changing laws and best practices to the meetings and developing faculty and staff. Whereas, school management overlaps the educational demands and adds a healthy component of disciplinary issues. In addressing these major responsibilities, various administrative factors influence the decision-making process of principals (Ruby, 2006). With regards to leading a school, the role of the school principal cannot be separated when discussing discipline and academics.

Simultaneously, over the years schools have more heavily relied on law enforcement and courts to deal with problem students, creating the so-called "school-to-prison pipeline" that for many perpetuate into adulthood (Osher et al., 2012). In fact, districts throughout the state of North Carolina have acknowledged that suspending children from school for violations of school rules should be a last resort. The zero-tolerance policy, once widely used, was one of the main reasons for rethinking its policy. Many districts reconsidered their approaches to student discipline due to evidence that a zero-tolerance approach and suspension were less effective and potentially harmful not only to the students receiving the suspension but to the broader school community (Owen et al., 2015).

According to Ruby (2006), circumstances can affect the decision-making process, both the context in which the decision is made, such as the expectations of peers and the clarity of the goals involved. A major facet of a school principal's role is to make discipline decisions. Discipline consumes a large amount of a principal's time especially when there are individual discipline plans created by teachers (Meador, 2019). Schools that do not operate using a school-wide plan tend to have greater discipline issues and disparities in how consequences are administered. However, school-wide programs such as PBIS allow the principal to focus on bigger problems, and teachers to address problems specific to classroom issues.

When making decisions regarding discipline, it is important for school administrators to understand that each discipline decision is unique and that many factors come into play. School administrators should consider factors such as the grade level of the student, severity of the issue, history of the student, and how they have handled similar situations in the past (Meader, 2019). Understanding the disciplinary procedures and the codes of conduct are necessary when investigating each situation and making a disciplinary recommendation. School administrators who are inconsistent in handling disciplinary issues are often charged with making decisions regarding discipline with disparities based on race, gender, socioeconomics, and ethnicity.

School leaders who communicate their expectations tend to have fewer disparities when they support discipline and positive school culture (Carey et al., 2018). Effective leaders understand the importance of allotting enough time to follow up with students, families, and teachers when dealing with disciplinary matters. Furthermore, principals

suggest that the successful implementation of discipline systems is dependent on clear and transparent communication between students, teachers, families, and administrators (Spearman, 2019). Additionally, the International Institute of Restorative Practices (2019) provides recommendations for principals to operate via participatory learning and effective decision-making to reduce crime, violence, and bullying, and improve human behavior.

Another challenge that leaders of some public schools face is understanding diversity and living in poverty. Schools in high-poverty areas tend to also have a high concentration of crime (Ushomirsky & Williams, 2015). Poverty rates among children are higher in urban locations than in the surrounding suburban or rural areas, which translates into higher concentrations of poor students in urban public schools (Ushomirsky & Williams, 2015). Poverty-disciplining belief is the assumption that poverty itself is a kind of "culture," characterized by dysfunctional behaviors that prevent success in school (Fergus, 2016). In effect, it pathologizes children who live (or whose parents lived) in low-income communities. And while it does not focus on race per se, it is often used as a proxy for race and to justify racial disparities in disciplinary referrals, achievement, and justifications for harsh punishments for certain behaviors (Fergus, 2019).

Leaders also need to be aware of their decision-making skills as it relates to the harsh school discipline policies and practices that have a disproportionate impact on students of color, poor students, and students with disabilities (Gonsoulin et al., 2012; Osher et al., 2012). Principals are charged with operating a safe and orderly building that

is conducive to high academic achievement. As such, policies and practices are created to ensure that safe learning environments happen for all students. However, the unintended consequences and disproportionate impact on some of our most at-risk children are worth taking a closer look at these policies. Some of the decisions made by school administrators have unintended consequences that move children of color from school to prison.

School Leaders Decision-Making: Research **Findings**

Several research studies were conducted to examine the views of school administrators about discipline, but few were conducted on the decision-making of school leaders. However, Findlay (2015) conducted a qualitative study on elementary principals' decision-making as it related to discretion in student discipline. The purpose of the study was to lend insight, through description and explanation, into current knowledge of how principals make meaning of their exercise of discretion in their disciplinary decision-making processes. The findings of the study revealed insight into the principals' understanding of the nature of discretion in general, the influences upon their discretionary decision making, their understanding of their legislated role, and their understanding of their exercise of discretion in their disciplinary decision-making. The principals in the study used discretion in decision-making related to disciplinary situations. To support students and maintain school safety, the principals exercised discretion to impose fair and just disciplinary decisions. Discretion was the principals' ability to make decisions as they saw appropriate. Likewise, other researchers examined decision-making by school leaders.

In 2017, Sadik and Öztürk conducted a qualitative phenomenological study to examine the views of school administrators about discipline and disciplinary problems. There were 18 high school administrators who participated in the research from one school district. The study focused on the definition of discipline, problems and causes, and strategies to prevent disciplinary problems. It was found that school administrators defined discipline as responsibility, system, and order. The causes of disciplinary problems are associated with the behaviors of students, families, and teachers. Focusing on the nature of the problem, school administrators applied educational, social, administrative, and psychological strategies to prevent disciplinary problems. School administrators prompted guidance services for students with the classroom teacher and family cooperation in the process of managing the disciplinary problems. In addition, the current mixed-method study will investigate the disciplinary actions and processes taken by school administrators using quantitative, archival data, and qualitative interviews. Based on the lived experiences of school administrators, the current study might provide a further understanding of how school administrators make disciplinary decisions regarding the inappropriate behavior of students.

In 2016, Kadıoğlu et al. conducted a qualitative study to investigate the discipline approaches of school managers. The sample of the study consisted of 56 school managers employed in secondary schools in the district of Başakşehir, Istanbul during the 2014-2015 educational year. The study unveiled the opinions of 56 school managers on the definition and aims of the concept of discipline, and, at the same time, revealed the discipline approaches that they have adopted. According to the findings, school managers

defined discipline as a way of yielding desired behaviors, complying with rules and regulations, rewarding, and motivating the employees, and maintaining order in the institution. However, it was also found that some school managers defined discipline as a punishment for undesired behaviors. It was found that school managers think that discipline aims to secure productive functioning of the institutions, to get things done neatly, to help the person to be successful, to prevent all possible problems, to make the personnel abide by the rules and regulations, and to organize the things to be done. The study also found that among the attitudes that the school managers take on when they implement discipline are encouragement and rewarding instead of prohibition, and identifying the reasons for, and preventing indiscipline. Based on these findings, it was concluded that most school administrators have preventive approaches towards indiscipline.

Brandon (2013) conducted a study to understand the decision-making of administrators in a Lutheran School setting. The study examined the relationship between administrators' philosophical beliefs and the influence of those beliefs on discipline decision-making. Brandon employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. Before data collection for the final study, Brandon conducted a pilot study survey in 2007. Administrators participated in an online decision-making survey regarding discipline. The final study applied a quantitative analysis of online survey data to understand the types and factors used in decision-making related to discipline. Brandon examined the decision-making styles, personal characteristics, and philosophical orientations of the administrators. There were no direct effects from personal characteristics on the decision-

making style of the administrators. However, the philosophical orientation influenced the decision-making style. Whereas in Brandon's study, the administrators were from a Lutheran school setting, the school administrators in the current study are from a public-school setting.

Disparities in Discipline

In the 1960s, the Louis Harris Poll revealed that discipline constitutes a serious problem for public schools, particularly those in high poverty areas (Brodbelt, 1980). Brodbelt did additional research in the 1970s and found the job of discipline consumed 20 to 50% of in-class teaching in urban schools compared to 5 to 10% in suburban schools. More than 50 years passed and discipline in schools continues to be a problem (Cohen, 2016; Flannery et al., 2010; Skiba & Losen, 2016). In a more recent study, discipline continues to be a problem for educators (Hampton, 2018). In 2018, the United States Government Accountability Office, a nonpartisan federal watchdog, conducted a study to examine the discipline disparities for Black students, boys, and students with disabilities. The researchers visited schools across the country and interviewed administrators. Data were also collected from the 2013–14 school year from the Department of Education's Civil Rights department (Hampton, 2018; Nowicki & US Government Accountability Office, 2018). The Government Accountability Office found disparities in how different children receive disciplinary action in school. The results of the study found Black students, boys, and students with disabilities are disproportionately suspended, expelled, and other forms of discipline in K–12 public schools. Further, disparities for Black students and boys presented as early as preschool were significant

compared to students of other races and girls. According to Government Accountability Office, this report builds on research that shows students who are disciplined in ways that take them out of the classroom are more likely to fall behind, drop out, or get involved with the juvenile justice system.

The central aspects of schooling must focus on teaching and learning and the success of all students. The school environment has a direct impact on the quality of schooling (NASSP, 2001). Yet, discipline issues continue to erode the fabric of many classrooms in America's high-poverty public schools (NASSP, 2001). Researchers continue to identify those factors to support policymakers and school leaders in their quest to decrease behaviors that deter instructional and learning opportunities (Gouws, 2014; Kindiki, 2009; Rahimi & Karkami, 2015).

Disparities in Discipline: Research Findings

Researchers and educators perceived factors influencing the poor behavioral performance of children in high poverty areas are linked to the home and school environments that do not foster educational and economic success (Evans, 2003; Hudley, 2013; Ushomirsky & Williams, 2015; Wirt et al., 2004). For decades, educational stakeholders constantly searched for ways to minimize behavior problems in schools. Multiple factors influence how discipline is addressed in today's schools. A child who comes from a stressful home environment tends to channel that stress into disruptive behavior at school and be less able to develop a healthy social and academic life (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). In a multimethodological analysis of cumulative risk and allostatic load among rural children, Evans (2003) determined that children with more stress had

less delayed gratification and more impulsivity. Impulsivity was seen as a common disruptive classroom behavior among low-SES students. Further, impulsivity was an exaggerated response to stress that serves as a survival mechanism in conditions of poverty. Each risk factor in a student's life increases impulsivity and diminishes his or her capacity to defer gratification (Evans, 2003).

In a quantitative study conducted by Barrett et al. (2019) on discipline disparities by race and family income in Louisiana, student-level data were compiled from the Louisiana Department of Education for the 2000-01 through 2013-14 school years. The study explored topics related to policy discussions about discipline disparities. Findings showed Black students are about twice as likely as White students to be suspended, and low-income students are about 1.75 times as likely as non-low-income students to be suspended. Discipline disparities are large for both violent infractions (such as fighting and assault) and nonviolent infractions (such as disrespecting authority and using profanity). Disparities in suspension rates are evident within schools where Black and low-income students are suspended at higher rates than students of other races and social-economic status in the same school. Further, across schools, Black and low-income students disproportionately attend schools with high suspension rates. While across-district differences account for a small portion of the disparities, within-school and across-school-within-district differences each account for a sizable share of the disparities. Black and low-income students receive longer suspensions than their peers for the same types of infractions.

Poverty is another factor that is said to influence poor behavior in schools. Poverty's effects on the psychological and emotional state of children contribute to both student interest in school and overall happiness (Jensen, 2009). In a quantitative study published by *The Future of Our Children* in 1997, Brooks-Gunn and Duncan explored the relationship between poverty and child outcomes. Based on longitudinal data sets from national studies, the authors analyzed the effects of family income on children's lives, independent of other family conditions possibly related to a low-income household. Regarding the effects of income on child outcomes, 16.4% of poor children experienced behavior problems that last longer than three months, compared to 12.7% of nonpoor children. It was concluded that family income can substantially influence the well-being of children and adolescents.

School discipline appears to be increasing in high-poverty areas (Skiba et al., 2002). In research conducted in high poverty inner-city schools, Fergus (2019) found many educators believed that both parents and children in poverty are in greater need of discipline. Many believed that poorer communities suffered from an impoverished and dysfunctional culture. Soss et al., (2011) explain that for more than 20 years, the social welfare policy operated based on the principle that low-income individuals can only become responsible citizens by forcing them to confront a more demanding and appropriate operational definition of citizenship. In other words, many policymakers have assumed that the best way to help people escape poverty is to discipline them. For example, programs linked to social service agencies and parenting attached a discipline

component if the worker was late or did not complete a project as expected. Fergus (2016) describes this type of discipline as poverty-disciplining.

According to Fergus (2016), poverty-disciplining belief assumes that poverty is cultural and leads to dysfunctional behaviors that prevent success in school. This bias or stigma is attached to families living in low-income communities (Fergus, 2016; Fergus, 2017; Soss et al., 2011). The assumption is further made that children living in impoverished neighborhoods are surrounded by violence and stress that interferes with the intended purpose of school (Burdick-Will et al., 2010). While this is true in some areas, the assumption cannot be made for all communities in poverty. The beliefs formed by many educators today do not differ much from research conducted more than 25 years ago by James Coleman when he found the achievement gap was based on family background and not the school (Downer, 1989; Edmonds, 1981; Lezotte, 2001).

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson, appointed Coleman to conduct a study on the underfunding of schools with predominantly minority students (Dickinson, 2016; Edmonds, 1979). In the Coleman Report, formerly called the Equality of Educational Opportunity report, they found that segregation still existed, but the most significant finding was that the child's educational success was not contingent upon funding or region, but on the student's family background, coupled with a diverse socioeconomic mix in the classroom. Coleman was the first to document what came to be known as the achievement gap. Black children were several grade levels behind their White counterparts in school (Lezotte, 2001). Coleman further found that children in poverty lacked the ultimate conditions and values to support education, and could not learn,

regardless of schooling (Association for Effective Schools, Inc., 1996). In opposition to this study, Ronald Edmonds, Director of the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University, conducted a separate study believing that school did make a difference in the success or failure of educating children. Edmonds (1979) and Brookover and Lezotte (1981) and other researchers examined achievement data from schools throughout the United States where kids from low-income families were highly successful and thereby support that schools can and do make a difference.

To avoid such beliefs today, the Office of Civil Rights Office for the United States Departments of Education and Justice (2014) established guidelines for school discipline. These guidelines are meant to help schools avoid racially discriminatory disciplinary practices. The guidelines were based on the findings that Black children without disabilities are more than three times as likely as their White peers without disabilities to be expelled or suspended (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Further, over 50% of students who were involved in school-related arrests or referred to law enforcement were Hispanic or Black and lived in high poverty areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

School-to-Prison Pipeline: Research Findings

Research has been gathered on what is known by some educators and researchers as the school-to-prison pipeline. In 2012, Gonsoulin et al., created strategies for principals, and other district leaders to enhance schools' capacities to keep students out of the courts and in the classroom. There are four main factors known to contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline: racial disparities, poor conditions for learning, family-school

disconnection, and failure to build the social and emotional capacity of students. Regarding racial disparities, school principals are responsible for assigning dispositions for discipline issues (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007). Those discipline decisions made by principals account for Black students being suspended three times more likely than White students for behavioral offenses. Further, principals who failed to understand the conditions of the student they serve will make a decision that could have an adverse effect on educating children leading to a higher risk of poor educational outcomes, and more likely to engage in negative behaviors, disengage from school, and dropout (Gonsoulin et al., 2012). Finally, principals need to understand the importance of family when making any education or disciplinary decision.

School-wide Alternatives to Traditional Discipline Programs

School-wide discipline plans provided strategies that were used with students to prevent behaviors from becoming major issues. School-wide discipline plans provide an effective alternative to traditional discipline when all stakeholders are committed to the process (Noltemeyer, Ward, & McLoughlin, 2015). Educators continue to have grave concerns about disorder and danger in school environments and have begun to study the data and gain a better grasp of the research to make changes (Cressey, Whitcomb, McGilvray-Rivet, Morrison, & Shandler-Reynolds, 2014). Attacking discipline issues in a school community lessens the number of problems within a school environment.

School-wide discipline programs have existed for over 60 years (Maag, 2012). Beaty-O'Ferrall et al. (2010) found that when all school stakeholders created or selected a school-wide discipline plan, it helped maintain a structured learning environment with

boundaries. The most important tools of a discipline plan were to have expectations that are communicated clearly from the staff to the students and had buy-in from the students as fair and consistent. For students to buy in and take ownership of the school discipline plan, it is important that the rules were implemented with the expectation that all facets of the school community were involved in the communication process of the discipline plan. Several studies have been conducted that support school-wide discipline when preventive discipline practices are used.

Discipline in Schools: Research Findings. Researchers have most often conducted studies of well-disciplined and poorly disciplined schools to identify critical differences in discipline practices (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Independent analysis of data from California (Losen & Martinez, 2013), Indiana (Skiba & Losen, 2016), and Texas (Fabelo et al., 2011) demonstrate that most suspensions result from minor offenses that do not involve violence or possession of drugs or weapons and that racial disparities in the use of suspension are much greater in offense categories that are minor and involve subjective perceptions and discretionary punishments. In Connecticut, the state reported that more than 70% of the reported incidents were for misdeeds it labeled as "non-serious" offenses. The state does not indicate what percentage of nonserious offenses resulted in out-of-school suspensions versus in-school suspensions (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

In district-level data, some studies revealed that much of what determines whether a school has a high or lower level of suspensions is directly influenced by its leaders (Fabelo et al, 2011; Skiba & Losen, 2016). In fact, most large districts show a great deal

of variation in suspension rates from one school to the next. For example, a statewide study that tracked every middle school student in Texas, after controlling for race, poverty, and district policy, revealed that school factors had a tremendous impact on the suspension rate (Fabelo et al., 2011). Similarly, a quantitative study by Skiba et al. (2014) on the use of suspension throughout Indiana found that, after controlling for race and poverty, and other significant factors, one variable stood out as the strongest predictor of both suspension rates and disparities in suspension by race: principals' attitudes toward the use of harsh discipline.

Findings have revealed correlates common in safe, orderly, and well-managed schools. In well-disciplined schools, there tends to be a commitment to creating and sustaining appropriate student behavior as an essential for learning (Payne, 2018). A study on the Chicago Public Schools shows that schools serving students from the highest-crime neighborhoods had a wide range of safety ratings (Steinberg, 2015). In these schools, higher safety ratings were predicted by the levels of teacher-student engagement and teacher-parent engagement. Some of the high-scoring schools serving students from the highest-crime areas felt as safe to both teachers and students as many serving students from the lowest-crime neighborhoods. Equally important, after controlling for demographics, the Chicago schools that felt safer also used exclusionary discipline much less frequently than the schools that ranked low on safety (Steinberg, 2015).

The literature also provides evidence that racial school climate is associated with student achievement as well as other outcomes. In a quantitative study conducted by

Mattison and Aber (2007), data from 382 Black and 1,456 White students, showed that positive perceptions of the racial climate were associated with higher student achievement and fewer discipline problems. The study found that racial differences in students' grades and discipline outcomes were associated with differences in perceptions of racial climate. Likewise, a negative racial climate is also found to be an inhibiting factor in college preparation (Griffin & Allen, 2006). Results from a quantitative study by Hallinan et al. (2009), using a large sample of elementary and secondary schools in a major urban school district, showed that positive interracial interactions contributed to students' sense of school community, whereas negative interracial interactions inhibited that sense. Research also documents that race and ethnicity are significant predictors in explaining a change in discipline referrals (Shirley & Cornell, 2012).

There is also a high expectation for learning in a school with a positive school climate and that expectation is embedded in the culture of the school (Bear et al., 2015; Payne, 2018; Schneider & Duran, 2010; Watkins & Amber, 2009). Positive school culture and climate are one where individuals feel valued, cared for, and respected (Shafer, 2018). A positive school climate has been considered important for racial minorities and poor students (Booker, 2006). According to a study by Watkins and Aber (2009) that used quantitative survey data from 842 Black and White middle school students, the findings revealed that Black, high poverty, and female students perceived the racial climate in more negative terms than did their White, nonpoverty, and male counterparts, respectively. Principals of positive school culture communicate that expectation and it is infused in the school. The visibility of the principal is of the utmost

importance. Principals of well-disciplined schools tend to be very visible in hallways and classrooms, talking informally with teachers and students, speaking to them by name, and expressing interest in their activities (Phillips, 2016). Phillips (2016) believes that school principals are required to make sacrifices throughout the school day by being visible during school hours and at extracurricular activities.

Nelson (2002) conducted a qualitative study of effective school discipline practices. The perceptions of administrators, teachers, and parents in 20 schools were examined using exploratory and descriptive methods. Findings revealed that principals and teachers believed that students were well behaved because they used successful discipline practices. The teachers wanted additional conflict resolution training for students and teachers. Teachers also felt that parent involvement was the most important factor to have a successful school discipline program. The principals believed that by taking a proactive approach to discipline, all stakeholders are more likely to consider the school's discipline practices as successful. The parents felt an involved principal and caring teachers were paramount for implementing successful discipline practices. Parents also believed teachers should discuss, reinforce, and emulate good discipline practices.

The assumption could be made that schools that have a positive school culture would have more relaxed rules, but that is not the case. In fact, there should be clear and broad-based rules that are developed with input from students and communicated clearly (Bickmore, 2011; Carpenter et al., 2004). Widespread dissemination of clearly stated rules and procedures, moreover, assures that all students and staff understand what is and is not acceptable. In many schools, there is a separation of discipline authority that is

usually relegated to the principal. However, at high functioning schools, the principals, assistant principals, and other school disciplinarians take responsibility for addressing serious infractions, while holding teachers accountable for handling routine classroom discipline problems. Staff development and conferences designed to assist teachers are strongly recommended to improve their classroom management and discipline skills (Fisher, Frey, Pumpian, 2012; Kilinc, 2013). Finally, the saying, it takes a village, is true when it comes to creating a climate that promotes learning and minimizes behavioral issues. Researchers have found that well-disciplined schools are those which have a high level of communication and partnership with the communities they serve (Fisher, Frey, Pumpian, 2012; Payne, 2018). These schools have a higher-than-average incidence of parent involvement in school functions, and communities are kept informed of school goals and activities (Carpenter et al., 2004).

Summary and Conclusions

There is clear evidence based on the literature and data that there is a disproportionate disparity in discipline based on race. A significant amount of evidence shows that Black students are subject to a disproportionate amount of discipline in school settings, a smaller and less consistent literature suggests disproportionate sanctioning of White students in the same schools (Gregory et al., 2010). The literature and research are under-explored as to practices and decisions made that lead to this disparity. According to the National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline (2019), discipline disparities refer to instances when students who belong to specific demographic groups (e.g., race/ethnicity, sex, disability status) are subjected to particular disciplinary actions

disproportionately at a greater rate than students who belong to other demographic groups (e.g., Black males are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than White and Asian males). While the existence of these disparities is not controversial, how to interpret the disparities is bitterly disputed. At the heart of this dispute is whether racial discipline disparities reflect discriminatory discipline practices by educators. On one hand, discriminatory school discipline practices, punishing different groups differently for similar behaviors, certainly could contribute to the disparities we see. Researchers have found evidence of both implicit and intentional forms of bias in schools.

Issues related to discipline decisions and disparities in schools are complex, and educational stakeholders on all sides of discipline debates have voiced positions that go beyond the supporting research evidence. Utilizing a mixed-method approach for this research study is especially useful in understanding any disparities that may exist between quantitative results and qualitative findings. Further, reflecting on the participants' points of view provides greater insights into how decisions are made. The mixed-method study will give a voice to school disciplinarians and ensure that study findings are grounded in participants' experiences (Creswell, 2014).

The present study seeks to gain insights from school administrators on disciplinary decisions for multiple infractions based on disciplinary offenses and race. The findings will provide insights to school leaders seeking to make changes that would reduce the disparities associated with discipline as it relates to race. Therefore, literature was reviewed to gain a better understanding of those practices. The chapter ended with a discussion of school administrators and decision-making. Chapter 3 will provide detailed

information as to how the data was collected to examine the disciplinary processes of school administrators. This chapter will describe the mixed-method study process used to examine the research questions and hypothesis specific to this study. The methodology of this study is described in-depth as a roadmap for other researchers in this field of study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to explore the disciplinary processes used by school administrators when administering student discipline to determine the relationship between levels of offenses and the gender and race of students. Behavioral problems are addressed in schools based on processes and procedures created by the school administrators and governed by the codes of conduct and policies created by the school boards. An examination of the level of offenses and disciplinary processes in relationship to one school district's code of conduct was used in conjunction with interviews of school administrators to develop an understanding of the decision-making processes school administrators experience when administering punishments to high school students for inappropriate behaviors.

This chapter describes the methodology used to examine the research questions and hypothesis specific to this study. After the attributes of the setting are described, the research design and rationale are identified and justified specific to this study. Next, the role of the researcher is defined and examined specifically to personal and professional relationships, potential biases, and any other ethical issues. The methodology is described according to the participant selection process, the instrumentation, and data collection, including recruitment. Threats to validity and issues of trustworthiness are described and outlined as to how they are addressed. This chapter concludes with a summary of the main points of the research method process.

Setting

The setting is relevant to this study because of the disparities noted in the discipline data based on race in this school district. In 2015, an initiative was established to examine and address race and social justice inequities in response to racially charged incidents in the area. The data gathered illuminated the social and economic conditions disproportionately impacting the county's Black population, particularly in the public school system. Data gathered noted racial disparities specific to discipline.

The attributes of the environment specific to this study provide information about the county in which the school system is located and the school system. For the purposes of this study, the county's setting is described in the *State of Racial Disparities* report. Information in this report was collected using a racial equity lens. A racial equity lens has been used in many fields to identify injustice and structural barriers people of color face in education, employment, housing, health care, and even philanthropy (Sommer, 2017). Using a racial equity lens is essential to the creation of a fair and just society.

The school system is located in one of the largest cities in the state. As of 2018, the estimated population of the city was about 136,000, and 788,000 in the city's metropolitan area. There is a wealth of history in this area dating back to the British colonization and the Revolutionary War (Fraser, 1990). This city was also one of the major seaports for the transatlantic slave trade (Garrett, 2015). Since that time, there has been a history of legal segregation, racial violence, racial zoning, drugs, and mass incarceration linked to a disproportionate number of Blacks, and gentrification that is pushing the poor out of the downtown area (Gilchrist, 2016).

The County School District (CSD) is the second-largest school system in the state representing a combination of urban, suburban, and rural schools that span 1,000 square miles of coastal lands. CSD serves more than 50,000 students in 85 schools and several specialized programs. CSD offers diverse educational school options including neighborhood, charter, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), and Montessori schools. The schools are divided into elementary and early, middle, and high schools. Table 1 reveals the demographic data for the school district in this study. There is a total of 14,831 students enrolled in high schools with a racial composition of 6,957 students identifying as Black, 5,252 as Black, 1,965 as Hispanic, 273 as Asian, and 383 as Other (Table 1). Specific to this study, there were 15 high schools and four alternative schools that house high school students. The graduation rate ranges from 17% to 100% among the 15 schools of which there is a major disparity among graduation and enrollment. One of the schools is rated #1 in the nation. The school with a 100% graduation rate has a 19% minority enrollment. The school with the 17% graduation rate has a 100% minority enrollment. Each school is led by a principal with additional administrators assigned based on the school's enrollment.

Table 1

High School Overview

High School	Principal Race/ Gender	Assistant Principal(s) Race/ Gender	Enrollment	Race/Ethnicity %					Grad %	State Rank	Poverty Index %
				W	B	H	A	O			
School 1	WF	BF	664	78.2	3.8	4.9	10	3.1	100	1	N/A
School 2	BM	BM	482	6.4	79.4	13	-	1.2	74	137	87.75
School 3	BF	2 BM	372	1.6	97	.5	-	.8	72	123	93.89
School 4	HF	WF BM	190	24.5	55.9	12.8	1.1	5.9	-	-	N/A
School 5	WM	1 BF	413	2.7	88.4	7.2	.3	1.4	90.4	170	90.28
School 6	BM	1 BM	67	-	100	-	-	-	17	U/R	100
School 7	WM	2 BF 1 WF 1 WM	1597	11	63	25	.3	1	91	33	100
School 8	BM	1 BF	468	2.9	70.3	26.6	-	.2	95	173 - 221	88.25
School 9	BM	2BM 2 WF 1 BF	609	5.3	81.1	11.8	.3	1.5	76.6	169	89.9
School 10	WM	3 WF 1 BM 1 BF 1 WM	1504	10.2	53	33.3	1.4	2.2	63.2	167	78.85
School 11	WF	1 BM 1 WF	1113	72.6	13.8	4.7	53	3.7	97.3	2	11
School 12	WF	1 WF 1 BM	554	42	52	3	1	2	95	25	44
School 13	WM	1 BM 1 WF	321	17.8	55.5	25.5	-	1.2	77.8	74	78.98
School 14	WF	2 BM 1 BF 7 WM 3 WF	3997	82.6	10.3	2.9	2.3	2	93.3	4	19.89
School 15	WM	3 WM 2 WF 1 BF	1685	43.4	44.7	6.8	1.8	3.3	78.2	108	57.02

Research Design and Rationale

The mixed methods research design and rationale for this study are based on the following research questions and hypotheses:

Research Question 1 (Quantitative): What is the rate of concordance between actual level of offenses and disciplinary process for levels of offenses in 2016/2017 as described in the district's code of conduct?

Research Question 2 (Quantitative): Do race and gender differences exist in actual level of offenses and disciplinary processes for levels of offenses in 2016/2017 as described in the code of conduct by the gender and race of students?

$H_1$2: Actual level of offenses and disciplinary processes reflect the level of offenses described in the code of conduct by gender and race.

$H_0$2: Actual level of offenses and disciplinary process do not reflect the level of offenses described in the code of conduct by gender and race.

Research Question 3 (Qualitative): What is the lived experience of school administrators who administer disciplinary punishment?

Research Question 4 (Mixed-Method Question): How do the interviews with school administrators help to explain any quantitative differences in disparities that exist in levels of offenses and disciplinary processes by gender and race?

This mixed-method study explored a central phenomenon and concept. A mixed-methods study was selected to conduct this study because it provides a systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative data within a sustained program of inquiry (see Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The basic premise of this methodology is that such

integration provides an opportunity to interview school administrators who make disciplinary decisions by using qualitative data and understanding the relationship of offenses as described in the district code of conduct when using quantitative data. Using both methods provided a more complete understanding of the phenomena under examination. The evaluation of disciplinary processes provided an ideal opportunity for mixed methods studies to contribute to learning about the process school administrators are using that leads to disciplinary disparities in school discipline for Black students.

Mixed methods research was the best approach for answering the research questions in this study because it has been developed and refined to suit a wide variety of research questions (see Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The mixed-methods study was selected to incorporate the discipline data with the interview data within a single study. The intent was for the mixed method was to understand discipline behaviors based on the experiences of school administrators and numerical data that revealed evidence of disciplinary outcomes. In most studies regarding school discipline, the methods are usually qualitative or quantitative. Few studies are conducted with the mixing of qualitative and quantitative data within a single study. Therefore, a mixed-methods approach was the best method for this study.

A quantitative method was used to conduct descriptive research for Research Questions 1 and 2. The descriptive design was chosen because it establishes an association between the variables. There are no time or resource constraints with this design choice because the archival data used for data collection has both the independent and dependent variables clearly identified. The archival data were used to measure the

relationship of the different genders and races of students on the level of offenses. The design choice was consistent with research designs needed to advance knowledge in education because of the racial and gender disparities that exist in discipline data. The data was statistically analyzed to describe the decision-making processes of the participants regarding discipline.

A qualitative phenomenological approach was conducted in this mixed-method study for Research Question 3 to understand the lived experience of school administrators who administer disciplinary punishment. Phenomenology focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group to arrive at a description of the nature of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The qualitative component explored the lived experience of school administrators as they describe the process they use when administering disciplinary punishment and the factors that determine their decisions. The descriptive phenomenological research helped understand and describe the disciplinary process and procedures used by school administrators when administering discipline at their schools to determine the relationship between the actual level of offenses and disciplinary processes for offense levels.

Mixed methods can be an ideal technique to use qualitative data to explore quantitative findings. Using an explanatory sequential design typically involves two phases: (a) an initial quantitative instrument phase, followed by (b) a qualitative data collection phase. The qualitative phase builds directly on the results from the quantitative phase. In this way, the qualitative data explain the quantitative results in more detail. For example, findings from instrument data about suspension can be explored further with

qualitative interviews to understand better how individuals' personal experiences match the instrument results. This kind of study illustrates the use of mixed methods to explain qualitatively how the quantitative mechanisms might work.

Role of the Researcher

I conducted this mixed-methods study as the principal researcher conducting the interviews, collecting data, analyzing data, and displaying the findings. According to Howell (1972), the four stages that most participant observation research studies use are (a) establishing rapport or getting to know the people, (b) immersing oneself in the field, (c) recording data and observations, and (d) consolidating the information gathered. As a participant-observer, I recorded data and observations and consolidated the information gathered during the data collection. I had no personal and no professional relationships with any of the participants in this study. The participants work in the public schools, and while I have an indirect relationship with the school system, I did not know any of the potential participants nor did I work with them. As a probate judge, I have an indirect relationship with the people in the matter of the court. As of the writing of the dissertation, I had not met any school administrators in my court. In addition, the quantitative data was archival data from the school district and no changes were made to the existing data.

Methodology

The quantitative method with a descriptive approach was used to examine disaggregated archival data from all high schools in one school district during the school year of 2016-2017. The phenomenological approach was utilized for the qualitative

portion of this mixed-methods study to examine school administrators' disciplinary processes. Creswell (2007) noted, “a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their shared experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 57). Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological research methods work extremely well as a component of mixed methods research approach. The focus was on understanding the participants’ perceptions and interpretations of the process and procedures associated with the discipline processes. Quantitative and qualitative data provided a more complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Participant Selection Logic

The methodology of this study was described in-depth as a roadmap for other researchers in this field of study. The population for this study was school administrators in a county school district. Several schools have multiple school administrators who administer discipline. The number of school administrators is determined by the school’s population. The sample was drawn from the target population and the accessible population. The target population was high school administrators in charge of discipline who represent the entire set of units for which the interview data are to be used to make inferences. The target population size was approximately 44 school administrators from one school district located in one southeastern state. The school administrators serve as principals and assistant principals. For the purposes of this study, all the participants were

called school administrators. The common job responsibility is to administer discipline. The accessible population was any of the school administrators assigned to the 15 high schools in the district and is limited to those high school administrators willing to participate.

Purposive sampling, a form of nonprobability sampling, was used for this data collection. The process allows the researchers to rely on their judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in their study (Creswell, 2007). Purposeful sampling is a nonrandom method of sampling where the researcher administered interview questions to sample information from participants who were knowledgeable about a specific topic. The participants are believed to have a large amount of experience with the subject investigated. To gain meaningful data from the participants, I used the specific selection criteria: (a) administrators of high school, (b) school administrators who administer punishments for disciplinary infractions, (c) and school administrators of students in any grade 9th through 12th grades. All high school administrators meeting the criteria received an invitation to participate in the study. The email addresses are on the public schools' websites for each school. The sample was those who responded to the email agreeing to participate and who met the specific criteria.

The inclusion criteria for the sampling framework are based on the population from which the sample is derived. The sample population for this study was based on school administrators from one school district. There are 44 school administrators who administer discipline in the 15 high schools. School administrators are those who work with discipline for students in 9 through 12th grades. School administrators may be

excluded from the study because exclusion criteria were used to identify subjects who will not be included or who will have to withdraw from the study after being included (Salkind, 2010). Salkind maintains that exclusion criteria are guided by the scientific objective of the study and have important implications for the scientific rigor of a study as well as for the assurance of ethical principles. The exclusion criteria include administrators who may have children in high school; administrators who are currently in a legal proceeding for a disciplinary case; and administrators who cannot physically or mentally participate due to health issues. Therefore, the sample size measures for this study were determined by the number of individuals who agreed to participate coupled with those who are excluded from the study.

The school district of this study was divided into eight constituent districts. Each constituent district is led by an area superintendent and/or executive director. A meeting was held with each constituent district leader to discuss the study and seek permission to collect data from school administrators in their district. It was important to work with the constituent district leader to identify those meeting the subject population. Once a list of potential participants was obtained and permission granted to conduct research in that district, an email was sent to those meeting the criteria. The invitation outlined the title, purpose, criteria for participation, notification that participation in the study is strictly voluntary, and the consent to participate in this study form.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation is the course of action taken for developing, testing, and using the device and the instrument is the general term that researchers use for a

measurement device (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The archival data for the school year of 2016-2017 were provided by the school district when writing the prospectus and was used to examine race, gender, types of disciplinary infractions, and discipline decisions. The procedure for gaining access to the data set was multiple data sources. A letter of permission to use the data is attached. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the archival data provided by the school district. Information on school settings and district information was collected from public information from the State's Department of Education website. Data included the school type, constituent district, student-teacher ratio in core subjects, student attendance, end-of-course assessment, and poverty index. Data from the South Carolina High School League website confirmed the student population. Policies regarding discipline and procedures from each high school were gathered and examined from information obtained from the high schools' websites. The code of conduct handbook was obtained from the school district's website. The code of conduct contained data for the level of offenses, intervention, and consequences. A disciplinary procedure is a process for dealing with perceived misconduct (Skiba et al., 2014). The school district typically has a wide range of disciplinary procedures to invoke depending on the severity of the misbehavior. All information was public data except for the archival data for the school year of 2016-2017, which that information was obtained via an email request.

For Research Questions 1 and 2, SPSS software was used to measure the level of offenses and disciplinary process that reflect the level of offenses described in the code of conduct. The archival data used for quantitative data collection had both the dependent

and independent variables clearly identified. The dependent variable was the level of offenses. The independent variables were the gender (male, female) and race of students (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Other). The chi-square was used to measure the impact of the gender and race of students on the level of offenses. For Research Question 4, data from the quantitative portion of this study was compared to the codes and themes which emerged from qualitative interview data. Common themes related to disparities in levels of offenses and the disciplinary processes by gender and race are discussed.

For the qualitative portion of this mixed-methods study, there were several instruments such as the interview schedule, interview protocol, demographic data forms, audiotape, archival data, email list, school administrator's directory, discipline data, and code of conduct. Table 2 provides the source for each data collection instrument.

Table 2

Qualitative Data Collection Instrument Information

Instrument	Published or Developed	Published Information	Researcher Developed Information
Interview Schedule	Developed	N/A	• Adhere to the schedule of others • Conduct study within a define period of time
Interview Protocol	Published and Developed	• Study of School Turnaround by Milagros Castillo-Montoya • High School principals of Turnaround Schools • Components are appropriate	• Develop interview questions
Demographic Data Form	Developed		• Necessary for representative sample
Code of Conduct	Published	District Website	N/A

Different methods are used in qualitative research. The most common are interviews, focus group discussions, observational methods, and document analysis. School administrators were interviewed using the interview protocol (Appendix A). The data collection process for Research Question 3 was used according to guidelines established by Creswell (2007). Creswell discusses a researcher-participant working relationship that ensures the participant understands the process for participation. According to Creswell (2007), the data collection must be entirely voluntary with the right to decline participation at any point in the process. Further, participants were informed of the minimal risk and could discontinue at any time. Participant names were not used. Each participant was given a code that was used during data collection and data

analysis. The code was placed in a secure and locked file to ensure confidentiality. The benefits of participation were the opportunity to gain additional information that may inform their decisions. After the data collection process, each participant was sent an email informing them of such, thanking them for their participation, and notifying them of the next phase of the study. Each participant was given an opportunity to receive an electronic copy of the findings once the study has been approved. To assure confidentiality when collecting email addresses, participants were blinded (bbc) when sending information to the group. Further, a separate email address was created for confidential communication.

For the qualitative data collection, school administrators were interviewed. The interview process was designed for an in-depth interview by phone that contained open-ended questions. Interviews followed the interview protocol and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview questions were developed based on research by Brandon (2013) on decisions by principals in a Lutheran School setting. The interview questions were restructured for the interview portion of this study to include specific information about discipline. The questions helped to ascertain information for Research Question 3. Brandon conducted a pilot study survey in 2007 before data collection for the final study. The pilot study resulted in major changes to the survey published reliability and validity values relevant to their use in the study. The final survey included a Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* with a six-point scale for the opinion question statements. The instrument was previously used with school principals. In addition to the pilot testing

conducted by Brandon, the interview questions for the current study were field tested with a panel of experts consisting of school administrators who have administered discipline in their schools. Three school administrators field tested the interview questions before use in the main study. The purpose of the field test was to receive feedback on the appropriateness of the interview questions being asked related to the research study. No data was collected during the field testing of the interview questions. Feedback from the field test was used to adjust the interview questions for clarity and appropriateness to answer the qualitative research questions.

Additionally, my role was to safeguard the participants, and the participant data, and examine the archival data without bias. To maintain objectivity and avoid bias with qualitative data analysis, I had participants review the results of the interview using member checking. Member checking is a technique for exploring the credibility of results (Creswell, 2013). The transcribed interviews were returned to participants to check for accuracy with their experiences. For questionable comments or responses, I checked for alternative explanations. The identity of the participants was not shared, along with the data findings to avoid any form of threats or harm.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Before contacting potential participants and collecting data, I obtained written permission from the superintendent of the school district to complete the research study. The school district provided a list of potential participants along with using the school administrator's directory. Potential participants received a Letter of Invitation and Statement of Consent with voluntary participation and confidentiality information. To

ensure the participants meet the criteria needed to accomplish the purpose of the research, potential participants responded to demographic questions and inclusion criteria from the Letter of Invitation and Statement of Consent. The recruitment process lasted up to 14 days or until the point of data saturation was reached. Saturation is continuous data collection to the point where participants' responses add little to regularities that have already surfaced (Suter, 2012). In the interest of time, the invitation was resent to those who had not responded within the first week, followed by another four days later.

After receiving consent, potential participants were invited to participate in a telephone interview. School administrators within the school district under study were interviewed by telephone using an interview schedule and interview protocol. Participants gave prior consent and responded to the demographic questions and inclusion criteria via email. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and were audio recorded. Interviews were transcribed and emailed to participants for member checking to confirm the accuracy of the data collection. After member checking, there were no other follow-up procedures for the participants.

The archival data used for quantitative data collection for the school year of 2016-2017 were provided by the school district when writing the prospectus. Both the independent and dependent variables were clearly identified. The dependent variable was the level of offenses. The independent variables were the gender (male, female) and race of students (Black, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Other). The archival data was used to measure the relationship of the different races and genders of students on the level of offenses. A letter of permission to use the data is attached.

Data Analysis Plan

Mixed method research involves using qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques within the same study (Driscoll et al., & Rupert, 2007). Sequential mixed methods data collection strategies involve collecting data in an iterative process whereby the data collected in one phase contribute to the data collected in the next. The data analysis for the quantitative and qualitative components are discussed below.

For the quantitative component, the archival data were provided by the superintendent of the school district under study in this research. The archival data were the school district report of suspensions, expulsions, and other discipline data. The data comprised of a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet secured by a password. The archival data were used to examine discipline data information for the entire school district. The data were screened and cleaned to check for missing values using SPSS software. Any record found to be missing values was not used for purposes of analysis. Quantitative Research Questions 1 and 2 were as follows:

Research Question 1 (Quantitative): What is the rate of concordance between actual level of offenses and disciplinary process for levels of offenses in 2016/2017 as described in the district's code of conduct?

Research Question 2 (Quantitative): Do race and gender differences exist in actual level of offenses and disciplinary processes for levels of offenses in 2016/2017 as described in the code of conduct by the gender and race of students?

$H_1$2: Actual level of offenses and disciplinary processes reflect the level of offenses described in the code of conduct by gender and race.

$H_0$2: Actual level of offenses and disciplinary process do not reflect the level of offenses described in the code of conduct by gender and race.

The SPSS software was used to measure the level of offenses and disciplinary processes that reflect the level of offenses described in the code of conduct. The quantitative method with a descriptive approach was used to examine disaggregated archival data from the school year of 2016-2017. The dependent variable was the level of offenses. The independent variables were the gender (male, female) and race of students (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Other). These were measured using a chi-square analysis with assistance from a trained statistician who signed a confidentiality statement. For Research Question 1, a cross-tabulation table was created with the disciplinary process as the independent variable (rows of the table) and level of offense as the dependent variable (columns of the table). Based on collating the data in this fashion, I was able to generate a measure of concordance (0 = no concordance between process and offense and 1 = concordance between process and offense). The rate of concordance between process and offense were calculated using frequency and percentage statistics. Using this measure of concordance, in Research Question 2, the rates of concordance were compared between gender groups and race groups using chi-square analysis. Frequencies and percentages were reported and interpreted for the chi-square statistics. If a statistically significant finding is yielded from the chi-square analysis, then an unadjusted odds ratio with 95% confidence was calculated as a measure of the strength of association. Finally, disciplinary processes and level of offense were compared between the gender and race groups using chi-square

analysis. Statistical significance was assumed at an alpha value of 0.05 and all analyses were performed using SPSS Version 26 (Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.).

For the qualitative component, NVivo 11® software was used to help synthesize the textual data from the open-ended interview questions used in data collection. NVivo 11 is a qualitative data analysis program (QSR International, 2016). Using computer software for qualitative data analysis, researchers can automate the recording, sorting, matching, and linking of data to assist with answering research questions from the data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The transcripts from the participants' interviews were imported into NVivo 11 to generate themes and retrieve meanings. Before using NVivo, I manually coded data by highlighting text within the transcripts and making comments in the margins to label and organize the qualitative data. The codes became nodes in NVivo. Using NVivo provided a seamless process for exporting items to easily share data, analysis, and findings. The qualitative research question was as follows: What is the lived experience of school administrators who administer disciplinary punishment?

Threats to Validity

The threat to the validity of this study is described based on external and internal validity. External validity refers to the generalizability of the treatment/condition outcomes (Cook & Campbell, 1979). The information obtained from this study is important for school administrators who administer discipline and for the greater community and school administrators who are interested in the disparities that might exist with discipline, particularly those in surrounding counties and school leaders in other areas of southeastern states. Although the sample size is small, it is important to note that

all or a high percentage of those who met the criteria participated in the study which makes it generalizable to other similar size groups.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Data trustworthiness has four key components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure a study exhibits evidence of trustworthiness, it should be creditable. Credibility is seen as the most important aspect or criterion in establishing trustworthiness because the link to the findings demonstrates the truth of the research study (Patton, 2002). Utilizing a mixed-methods study helped to establish credibility and using member checking with the interview process. The credibility of the instrument is what makes the tool valid for collecting data (Patton, 2002). Used in the current study was the interview process as the primary source for collecting data. Multiple and consistent checks were used to ensure the instrument collects the intended information.

Transferability in a study ensures the findings can be applied to other circumstances and situations (Merriam, 2009). Transferability is established by providing readers with evidence that the research study's findings could apply to other contexts, situations, times, and populations (Smith, 2017). Transferability is applied by the readers in varying degrees to most types of research. This study was written for educators to make connections between elements of a study and their own experiences. For instance, school administrators at the high school level might selectively apply to their own classrooms results from this study of school administrators as to how they make disciplinary decisions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described thick description as a

way of achieving transferability. As such, the findings were reported describing a phenomenon in rich detail of which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people.

Dependability is important for the collection of data in the qualitative and quantitative methods for this study. To ensure a thorough understanding of the research a phenomenological study was selected and implemented. A step-by-step approach was used in the data gathering process to clean and screen the archival data. Further, specific criteria were used to gain meaningful data from the participants (Stake, 2006).

Confirmability is important in a mixed-method study because it serves both a qualitative and quantitative function. Confirmability in a qualitative study is equivalent to objectivity in a quantitative study. Data was confirmed by using interviews and archival data. Further, the interviews were transcribed, and member checked to confirm the accuracy of the data collection.

Ethical Procedures

The ethical procedures as outlined in the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application and the University's guidelines in the Dissertation Guidebook were followed to ensure access to participants and data are obtained per requirement. Three requirements were necessary before conducting research. First, I acquired a certificate from the National Institute of Health (NIH) that was necessary for conducting research to protect identifiable research information from forced disclosure. Second, I completed the requirement of the IRB to gain approval to begin the research using human subjects. Next, I submitted a letter to the district via email to request permission to conduct the

research and to request a list of school administrators who met the criteria. After receiving district approval, I sent individual letters of invitation and statements of consent to participate in the study. The consent to participate was returned via email. When the consent was granted, an interview was scheduled. The consent form outlined a description of the study and disclosed potential risks and strategies to protect the privacy of the participant. Furthermore, this consent form affirmed that participation in the study was not mandatory, and all subjects could discontinue their participation at any point. Participants were assigned a pseudonym to preserve anonymity and confidentiality. Data will be stored for no less than 5 years upon completion of the dissertation. For safekeeping, data will be kept on a computer locked by a password with access only by me. Also, a backup copy of the data were stored on a USB drive secured in a locked file cabinet.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided a detailed account of the research method that was used for this mixed-method study. The research design was discussed and the rationale for using such design. The methodology provided details on the participant selection and the population from which the participants work. Data for this study was collected from archival data (quantitative) and telephone interview data (qualitative). To ensure the credibility of the data, threats to validity both internally and externally were examined. The chapter concluded with the ethical procedures that were followed based on the IRB requirements. This chapter provided information on data collection; Chapter 4 addresses the data analysis based on the data that was collected.

Chapter 4: Results

An examination of the level of offenses and disciplinary processes in relationship to a school district's code of conduct was used in conjunction with interviews of school administrators to develop an understanding of the decision-making process school administrators make when administering punishment to high school students for inappropriate behaviors. Data were collected from archival data and telephone interviews. The quantitative method with a descriptive approach was used to examine disaggregated archival data from the school year of 2016-2017. The phenomenological approach was utilized for the qualitative portion of this mixed-methods study to examine school administrators' disciplinary processes. The purpose of this mixed-method study was to explore the disciplinary processes used by school administrators when administering student discipline to determine the relationship between levels of offenses and the gender and race of students.

Setting

The setting for this study was the CSD. CSD is the second-largest school system in the state representing a combination of urban, suburban, and rural schools that span 1,000 square miles of coastal lands. CSD serves more than 50,000 students in 85 schools and several specialized programs. CSD offers diverse educational school options including neighborhood, charter, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), and Montessori schools. The schools are divided into early learning, elementary, middle, high, and charter schools. Specific to this study, there are 15 high schools and 4 alternative schools that house high school students. Each school is led by a principal with

additional administrators assigned based on the school's enrollment. The school system is in one of the largest cities in the state.

Demographics

For the qualitative portion of this mixed-method study, participants were school administrators from the CSD assigned to one of the 15 high schools in the district with the responsibility to administer discipline. Purposive sampling was used for this data collection. Participants' years in the field of education ranged from 12 to 39 years with 1 to 9 years in their current position. Table 3 provides a visual of the study participants' demographic data. Participants were referred to as P1, P2, P3, and so on, for the remainder of this study.

Table 3

Study Participants' Demographic Data

Participant	Current Position	Race/Gender	Years in Field of Education	Years in Current Position
P1	Principal	White/Male	17	5
P2	Assistant Principal	Black/Male	12	5
P3	Assistant Principal	Black/Male	24	8
P4	Principal	White/Male	23	1
P5	Principal	Black/Male	22	3
P6	Assistant Principal	Black/Female	26	3
P7	Assistant Principal	White/Male	19	2
P8	Principal	Black/Female	39	4
P9	Associate Principal	Black/Female	17	5
P10	Assistant Principal	Black/Female	20	9
P11	Principal	Black/Female	24	1
P12	Principal	Black/Male	29	4

Data Collection

Using an explanatory sequential design, quantitative data collection and analysis occurred first, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis. Then, the qualitative data was used to explain and contextualize the quantitative findings. Both quantitative and qualitative data collection are discussed below.

Quantitative Data Collection

The archival data used for quantitative data collection for the school year of 2016-2017 were provided by the school district when I was writing the prospectus. Both the independent and dependent variables were identified at that point. The dependent variable was the level of offenses. The independent variables were the gender (male, female) and race of students (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Other). The archival data were used to measure the relationship of the different races and genders of students on the level of offenses. In addition, CSD provided information on the codes of conduct for students and references for procedures and policies that address disciplinary actions. Archival data was used to examine discipline data information for the entire school district.

Qualitative Data Collection

For the qualitative data collection, 12 high school administrators from CSD participated in the study after IRB approval (approval number 03-17-21-0483047). I used the following specific selection criteria: (a) administrators of high school, (b) school administrators who administer punishments for disciplinary infractions, (c) and school administrators of students in any grade, 9^{th} through 12^{th}. All high school administrators meeting the criteria received an invitation to participate in the study. The email addresses

were on the public schools' websites for each school. The sample included those meeting the specific criteria who responded to the email agreeing to participate.

Data collection was conducted through telephone interviews held between July 23 and July 26, 2021, followed the interview protocol (Appendix A), and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interview protocol, which included the interview questions was used to help participants understand the rights of participants being studied and to ensure that the research was conducted in an ethical manner. The script used at the being of each interview outlined the ethical procedures to be followed based on the IRB requirements presented in the IRB-approved consent form. To preserve anonymity and confidentiality, each participant was assigned an alias, pseudonym. For example, Participant 1 was referred to as P1. Participants' names do not appear in the research. The pseudonym was used during data collection and data analysis. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed interviews were returned to participants. Participants checked their interview transcriptions to confirm accuracy. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary and participants could withdraw from the study at any time and with no ramifications. No participants withdrew from the study. The interview questions helped to ascertain information for Research Question 3.

Data Analysis

This mixed-method research study involved using quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques within the same study (Driscoll et al., 2007). An examination of the level of offenses and disciplinary processes in relationship to a school district's code of conduct was used in conjunction with interviews of school administrators to develop

an understanding of the decision-making process of school administrators when administering punishment to high school students for inappropriate behaviors. The quantitative data analysis appears first followed by the qualitative data analysis.

Quantitative Data Analysis

For the quantitative component, the archival data was provided by the superintendent of the school district under study in this research. The archival data were the school district report of suspensions, expulsions, and other discipline data. With assistance from a trained statistician, the quantitative method with a descriptive approach was used to examine disaggregated archival data from the school year of 2016-2017. The data comprised of a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet secured by a password. The SPSS software was used to measure the correlation between the level of offenses and disciplinary processes that reflect the level of offenses described in the code of conduct.

The level of discordant disciplinary process based on the level of offense was generated using frequency and percentage statistics for the first research question. For the second research question, chi-square analyses were used to compare the gender and race of participants on the discordance between disciplinary processes based on the level of offense. Frequencies and percentages were reported and interpreted for the groups. All analyses were performed using SPSS Version 26 (Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.) and statistical significance was assumed at an alpha value of 0.05. Qualitative data analysis followed the quantitative data analysis.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was the method of data analysis for the qualitative data. Semistructured interviews with 12 high school administrators from the CSD were used to collect the qualitative data and then classified into themes. Thematic themes resulted from using manual coding and NVivo 11 software. Braun and Clarke's (2012) approach to conducting thematic analysis served as the systematic process for data analysis. The six phrases to the approach include familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and the write-up. Provided in Table 4 is a step-by-step guide to the thematic analysis process using Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic approach.

Table 4

Step-by-Step Guide to the Thematic Analysis Process

Steps	Description
Phase 1: Familiarizing Yourself with the Data	Listen to audio recordings of interviews. Transcribe audio to produce transcripts. Read and reread textual data (transcripts of interviews)
Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes	Go through each interview transcript. Identify content that is potentially relevant to the research question and code it.
Phase 3: Searching for Themes	Review the coded data to identify areas of similarity and overlap between codes. Develop themes.
Phase 4: Reviewing Potential Themes	Review the developed themes in relation to the coded data and entire data set.
Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes	Determine what is unique and specific about each theme. Decide what to call each of them. Select extracts to present and analyze and then set out the story of each theme with or around these extracts.
Phase 6: Producing the Report	Determine the presentation order of the themes. Logically and meaningfully connect themes to tell a coherent story about the data. Write up the analysis of the data.

After the collection of the data through in-depth telephone interviews, familiarization with the data began with transcribing the audio recordings immediately after the interviews. I captured the lived experience of school administrators who administer disciplinary punishment. Responses from the open-ended questions formed the data upon which the thematic analysis was conducted. Each participant's interview was transcribed into text from the audio recordings to produce a verbatim transcript. To

precisely transcribe the conversation in the interview, I listened to the audio recordings several times and compared the audio recordings with the transcript.

In Phase 2 of the data analysis, transcripts were reviewed to generate codes. Before using NVivo 11, I manually coded the textual data by highlighting text within the transcripts and making comments in the margins to label and organize the qualitative data. The codes became nodes in NVivo 11. In addition to a manual review of the coded data to identify areas of similarity and overlap between codes, NVivo 11 software was used as another tool in discovering selective codes from the data to establish themes. In analyzing the depth of codes, themes emerged from the interview data. I reviewed the developed themes in relation to the coded data and the entire data set. This completed Phases 3 and 4 of the data analysis.

After reviewing potential themes, I moved to Phase 5. Themes were defined and named as follows: school's discipline data, disciplinary policies, disciplinary practices, disciplinary decisions, and race and gender. Extracts from the interview transcripts were selected to present, analyze, and then set out the story of each theme with or around those extracts. Then, in Phase 6, I determined the presentation order of the themes by logically and meaningfully connecting themes to tell a coherent story about the data. The quantitative and qualitative results are presented in the next section.

Results

The archival data was used to examine discipline data information for the entire school district to address Research Question 1 and Research Question 2. Research Question 3 explored the lived experience of school administrators who administer

disciplinary punishment. Results from the data analysis for the quantitative and qualitative components of this mixed-method study are presented. For Research Question 4, data from the quantitative portion of this study was compared to the codes and themes which emerged from qualitative interview data. Common themes related to disparities in levels of offenses and the disciplinary processes by gender and race are presented. Results are organized by research questions.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 focused on determining the rate of concordance between actual level of offenses and disciplinary process for levels of offenses in 2016/2017 as described in the district's code of conduct. The question was: What is the rate of concordance between actual level of offenses and disciplinary process for levels of offenses in 2016/2017 as described in the code of conduct?

There was 57% discordance between the level of offense and the disciplinary process. The level of offense and the associated disciplinary process did not match 57.0% (*n* = 8474 actions) of the time. The level of offense and the associated disciplinary process did match 43.0% (*n* = 6380 actions) of the time.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 examined whether differences exist in the actual level of offenses and disciplinary processes for levels of offenses in 2016/2017 as described in the code of conduct by the gender and race of students. Results from the quantitative data for this mixed-methods study are presented in the quantitative components section. Research Question 2 was: Do differences exist in actual level of offenses and disciplinary

processes for levels of offenses in 2016/2017 as described in the code of conduct by the gender and race of students?

$H_1$2: Actual level of offenses and disciplinary processes reflect the level of offenses described in the code of conduct by gender and race.

$H_0$2: Actual level of offenses and disciplinary process do not reflect the level of offenses described in the code of conduct by gender and race.

There was a total of n = 14,854 participants included in the study. Over half (n = 8474, 57.0%) had discordant disciplinary processes associated with their level of offense. However, according to chi-square analysis, there were no differences between racial groups regarding discordant processes and level of offense, $X^2(6, N = 14{,}854) = 6.71$, p = 0.35. Conversely, male students (n = 6265, 57.9%) did have a significantly higher rate of discordant disciplinary process based on the level of offense versus females (n = 3209, 55.7%), $X^2(1, N = 14{,}854) = 6.76$, $p = 0.009$. All frequencies and percentages are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Frequencies and Percentages

Analysis	Discordant	Concordant	*p*-value
All participants	8474 (57.0%)	6380 (43.0%)	-
Race			
American Indian or Alaskan Native	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)	
Asian	32 (53.3%)	28 (46.7%)	
Black or African American	6328 (57.5%)	4676 (42.5%)	
Hispanic/Latino	463 (56.3%)	360 (43.7%)	
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	10 (71.4%)	4 (28.6%)	
Two or More Races	114 (56.4%)	88 (43.6%)	
White	1519 (55.4%)	1221 (44.6%)	0.35
Gender			
Female	3209 (55.7%)	2550 (44.3%)	
Male	5265 (57.9%)	3830 (42.1%)	0.009

Research Question 3

Qualitative data collected through telephone interviews answered Research Question 3: What is the lived experience of school administrators who administer disciplinary punishment? The findings are presented based on the five major themes that emerged from the analysis of data collected from 12 high school administrators from the

CSD. The five major themes were school's discipline data, disciplinary policies, disciplinary practices, disciplinary decisions, and race and gender.

Theme 1: School's Discipline Data

The collection and retention of discipline data related to the types of disciplinary actions at the schools in which the participants were school administrators was the first theme. For example, P8 referred to using Review 360 as an electronic system to track disciplinary infractions. The data is housed in Review 360. In describing the process for documenting infractions, P8 stated:

> So, if an infraction occurs by a student, then it is documented in Review 360 by the administrator who handles it or the classroom teacher because there are some infractions that can be managed by the teacher. We entered that in for accountability and for equitable reasons. And of course, Review 360 allows us to generate reports as well. So, we can determine, what is the infraction that occurs most in our school. We can generate a report, specifically on a student. We can share the information with parents.

P9 and P11 discussed being a school that is discipline data-driven with a dedicated administrator responsible for tracking discipline data. The assistant principal at P9's school is responsible for tracking the discipline data to see how many discipline occurrences they have based on fights and disrespect for example. That data is broken down by grade level, time of day, and student's skin color. P9 stressed the importance of monitoring students' behaviors. P11 echoed P9 in stating that administrators looked at the school's discipline data, such as discipline and grade, to determine issues and concerns.

Theme 2: Disciplinary Policies

All participants described the code of conduct and progressive discipline plan (PDP) as district policies that guided disciplinary practices at the school level. P2 provided the following definition and example in describing the changes implemented by the district:

> Years ago, the district created a document called the Progressive Discipline Plan for all administrators throughout the district and every single school within the district as a guide on how to process referrals and the consequences for a variety of infractions. So, they may be differentiated between elementary, middle, and high schools. The infractions are divided up by level. Level one is simple infractions and level 3 which is the highest and more serious infractions. This document does not only list the infractions but defines the infraction and then it gives what the consequences should be. For example, if a student is refusing to obey or comply then the progressive discipline plan, defines what that looks like and the consequences the administrator should give that student. So, this is a guide to help administrators and a guide to eliminate inconsistency to how administrators process referrals which we experienced in the district before.

In addition, P9 provided more details about the code of conduct and PDP and stated:

> The code of conduct is given and is available to all of the students and their parents. When making my decisions based on discipline, we have in effect what we call the Progressive Discipline Plan. And with that Progressive Discipline Plan, we have tiers of level one, level two, and level three offenses. Those

> offenses are broken down into the first occurrence, second, third or fourth at those levels and at each level it tells the infraction and definition.

P6 stated, “We are very consistent with the consequences given. The level of discipline depends on the offense.” Consequences for misbehavior by students are based on the code of conduct while actions for disciplinary infractions are based on the PDP. P2 echoed other participants, but added the following:

> Within the Progressive Discipline Plan, the entire district uses the PBIS behavior framework [which] stands for Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports. A national movement in regard to learning and behavior, analyzing behavior, and having educators teach the appropriate behavior the same way that they teach academics. When a student's a part of the PBIS framework is behavior, we will look at the consequences as a more progressive discipline plan.

All participants used the district's code of conduct and PDP as disciplinary procedures in establishing and implementing disciplinary practices at the school level.

Theme 3: Disciplinary Practices

In addition to discussing the district’s disciplinary policies, participants discussed how they handled discipline at their schools. P3 stated:

> we don't have too many teachers who submit referrals because we kind of empower them to take some steps within the classroom and we call those teacher manners referrals. So once the teachers have exhausted what they are able to do, then it's left for us as administrators to follow through.

P4 stated that there is an Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) team at the school that looks at system-wide data down to individual students for both attendance and discipline. The team includes teachers, administrators, and counselors. The team "looks at students that have multiple referrals and look to create intervention plans and programs for them." Also, P4 pointed out that "there's a huge emphasis on social-emotional learning to help us move forward to identify students and get them the help they need to be successful. P12 added: "We use the code of conduct along with the Progressive Discipline Plan to make sure punishment is consistent." P11 also mentioned using MTSS for progress monitoring of discipline data with a focus on the disciplinary action and grade level.

Theme 4: Disciplinary Decisions

The following subthemes were identified from Theme 3: decision-making authority, decision-making process, and decision-making style.

Decision-Making Authority. Participants described their decision-making authority as narrow, broad, or something in between. P1 explained the reason for narrow authority for making decisions related to student discipline. Disciplinary infractions processed at the school level are reviewed by the district and the district makes decisions on what actions to apply. P1 said,

> We have the ability to apply discretion to the PDP that's in place, although the PDP is the vast majority of time, exactly how we deal with the consequences only those cases where there are extenuating circumstances.

Decision-making authority was something in between for P5.

> There are certain offenses at certain levels where as administrators, we can determine and make final decisions on the outcome. Then, there are others that are beyond our control, and we have to report up to the district level or to another department within the district so that they can get involved. And so, it's a combination, in certain matters, like I said, certain situations, we have a little more [authority] in terms of the finality and the decision making. On average we have to consult specific personnel at the district level and now the district offices that work with student interventions or school interventions. (P5)

Decision-Making Process. Participants provided details about the last major discipline decision made, which included the problem, student(s) involved, the process, and the decision. An altercation between two male students was the last major discipline decision made by P9.

> After reviewing the tape, we talked to the student [Student A] and to the other administrator who took care of the other student [Student B]. It was simple cut and dry. As a student [Student A] that I had was not the aggressor, the student was really minding his own business and with the altercation even he of course, because the other person was being aggressive with that was the aggressor. They [Student B] went after him. And he just tried to defend himself but even in defending himself, he did a push off. And so instead of being charged like this simple assault or disturbing school, his infraction based on the Progression Discipline Plan was a minor infraction.

The PDP served as the process used to make this disciplinary decision: “the process that I used came right out of the Progressive Discipline Plan.”

Decision-Making Style. The PDP also served as the decision-making style for P9.

> My decision-making style is based on the Progressive Discipline Plan. That's how I use it now. In the past, prior to this plan being in place, I considered myself being a firm disciplinarian. But I was firm and consistent across the board, regardless of who was sitting in front of me. Regardless of who was the aggressor, you automatically got five days, no question asked. I just wanted to set that tone that we can resolve issues by talking it out instead of fighting it out.

Theme 5: Race and Gender

A final theme emerged from the questions posed to administrators in one school district concerning the decision-making process for school discipline as it related to race and gender. Participants discussed how race and gender impact the behavior of students, administrators' treatment of students, and disciplinary actions and outcomes. Results are divided into three subthemes related to race and gender as just mentioned.

Behavior of Students. With Interview Question 12, participants had the opportunity to tell how race and gender impact the behavior of students. When it came to student behavior, P7 stated:

> In my experience, more females get into more altercations than males. Males usually or more, refused to obey or disrespect. Females tend to be a little bit more physical. With me, as far as being a male administrator, I usually get the most

> pushback from male students. Generally, female students tend to interact more with female teachers than male teachers. And same with male students, they generally seem to push back with male teachers more so than female teachers. As far as our discipline, I've tried not to look at it more so as male, female. I try to be pretty even across the board. And, of course, it's hard to deviate from the PDP regardless, but I try to stay neutral whether it's dealing with a male or female.

Disciplinary Actions. In response to Interview Question 13, participants discussed the role they believed race and gender played in disciplinary actions. P10 stated:

> Typically, when you look at the data from the district, and you see the expulsions. And you see the alternative programs. It's primarily Blacks that end up in those spaces, and the number across the board is relatively low compared to the size of student body, but I think you very rarely see a White student in that data, but the White students are doing the exact same thing. They're not getting the same consequences. And that's not at my school. Because my school is in predominantly White. But if you look at this population. They're doing the same thing. but somehow, they don't end up going through the same thing the way Blacks go through in PDP. And like I said, at my school, that's something we do for the most serious cases.

Administrators' Treatment of Students. Interview Question 14 allowed participants to talk about any differences in the way administrators treat students of different races and or gender. P8 stated:

> I think that people come with prejudices or preconceived notions about any race. I think they may intend to look for issues. But if again, if you are following the PDP and you treat them fairly, that shouldn't be there. Wait, but you know, we're humans.

Disciplinary Outcomes. Participants described situations they experienced where race and or gender played a role in the outcome. P1 shared a situation involving an 18-year-old Black male student who stood over 6 feet tall and a shorter, female White teacher weighing less pounds than the student. The student questioned a grade that he had received on a paper. The student was upset about the grade and went back to talk to the teacher. P1 did not "think it's uncommon in a school setting, for a student to get a bad grade and not be happy about it." However, "the teacher's referral that she wrote, was for intimidation, which is a higher-level offense." Comparing the situation with that of a White female, P1 stated: "If that had been a 10th grade White female, mad about her grade, there would not even be a referral that was processed let alone an intimidation referral." P1 concluded with how the situation was handled:

> On the discipline side of that, we didn't process a consequence for that student that was remotely close to the level that the teacher had written the infraction for. [On the teacher side] that was more a conversation with the teacher about teaching male students of color in her classroom and recognizing some implicit bias there that would have caused her to have the emotional response that she felt the need to categorize that child as intimidating or intimidating her. There were no threats that were made, you know, wasn't threatening physical harm or anything

> like that. So that was one that I think, could go down that road where race and gender could have affected what students received, but that was not, we chose to handle it and chose to handle it, working on the teacher side of that, hopefully, prevent that, that discriminatory behavior on her part, moving forward.

On the other hand, P4 stated that "sometimes when females are involved, I think they sometimes get a lighter disciplinary consequence than the males do for similar fractions" in describing an altercation between four female students. The females refused to stop fighting after the administrators got involved so they all were suspended for three days. P4 stated:

> Based on the PDP outlines, it gives little discretion with the number of days, based on severity of the altercation and the response from the students, but we do have a little bit of flexibility there. We can suspend up to five days of course but try not to do that, because that is a pretty devastating amount of time to be out of school and not being able to participate in your classes and stuff.

After returning to school, the female students participated in a conflict resolution with the guidance counselor and established guidelines and expectations for future situations.

Research Question 4

For Research Question 4, data from the quantitative portion of this study was compared to the codes and themes which emerged from the qualitative interview data. The qualitative data was used to explain and contextualize the quantitative findings to address Research Question 4. The mixed-method research question was: How do the

interviews with school administrators help to explain any quantitative differences in disparities that exist in levels of offenses and disciplinary processes by gender and race? Common themes related to disparities in levels of offenses and the disciplinary processes by gender and race are discussed.

The quantitative results revealed that the actual level of offenses and disciplinary process do not reflect the level of offenses described in the code of conduct by gender and race. The level of offense does not match the disciplinary process, but that happens significantly more for males than it does for females. Males received more disciplinary actions than females. Black males are disciplined more than White males.

According to interviews with school administrators, disparities exist in levels of offenses and disciplinary processes by gender and race. All participants agreed that males received more disciplinary actions than females, and Black males were disciplined at a higher rate than White males and received harsher punishment than White males. P1 compared a disciplinary outcome for an Black male to the potential outcome for a White female. An Black male was dissatisfied with a grade and after discussing it with the teacher, the female White teacher wrote an administrative referral for intimidation. P1 stated: “If that had been a 10th grade White female, mad about her grade, there would not even be a referral that was processed let alone an intimidation referral.” P5 provided an example of a disparity in level of offenses and the disciplinary processes. In two separate cases, one involving a White male and another involving an Black male both for possession of drugs. The Black male had “had less than I would say less than an inch long roach, marijuana joint,” and “was recommended for expulsion.” The White male

was caught “not once, but twice with a container of marijuana.” The first time was on a school trip out of state and the second time it was in his bookbag on school campus. For the first offense, a “hearing conducted student was referred back to school on probation.”

On the other hand, P2 thinks race and gender played a part in how administrators treat students in handling discipline, but not so much gender. P2 stated:

> I do think administrators around the district handle things differently or they could miss an interpretation because of their culture. I remember hearing a student telling another student I'll stick you and stick means I'll box you. Well, a teacher was not familiar with that colloquialism [and] interpreted stick as I'm going to stab you, so she wrote up the student for threatening, and I had to have a conversation with the teacher to let her know that mean he’s going to box him.

As with some other participants, P2 felt that issues like this happen often in the school district because the administrators do not understand how colloquialism works and that students think differently.

P10 explained that the data from the district showed that it is primarily Blacks receiving expulsions and being sent to alternative programs and stated, "I think you very rarely see a White student in that data, but the White students are doing the exact same thing." Most of the students at P10’s school are White. In agreement, participant P9 observed colleagues treating students differently and stated:

> I have witnessed where my colleagues have treated students differently. And sometimes I do believe they're not even conscious of what you're dealing with. But I know what I have observed. I have seen where White students in the past

> have gotten a break versus Black students. I have seen some administrators have given girls versus the boys.

P9 believes in being firm but fair and stated: “I'm going to listen, I'm going to give you the opportunity to explain, and then I'm going to discipline you accordingly.”

Participants felt that the PDP was put in place to help with the inconsistencies in how discipline was handled across the district. P12 stated: “We use the code of conduct along with the progressive discipline plan to make sure punishment is consistent.” Since the PDP has been implemented, some participants believe that “this has now given all students, male, female, Black, White, Hispanic, a better playing field for them to be treated equally when it comes to discipline. However, P8 emphasized that regardless of having the PDP, administrators are still human: “If you are following the PDP and you treat [students] fairly, [different treatment] shouldn't be there. Wait, but you know, we're humans.”

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure this study exhibited evidence of trustworthiness, I considered credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The trustworthiness of this mixed-method study is supported by multiple sources, namely archival data, interviews, and notes.

Creditability

Utilizing a mixed-methods study helped to establish credibility. For the quantitative portion, the archival data was statistically analyzed by a trained statistician to ensure accuracy. The archival data was provided by the superintendent of the school

district under study in this research. The archival data was the school district report of suspensions, expulsions, and other discipline data. For the qualitative portion, data collection continued until reaching the point of data saturation. Saturation is continuous data collection to the point where participants' responses add little to regularities that have already surfaced (Suter, 2012). In addition, the interview participants checked their interview transcripts to confirm accuracy. The sample included 12 school administrators.

Transferability

Transferability in a study suggests that the findings can be applied to other circumstances and situations (Merriam, 2009). Transferability is established by providing readers with evidence that the research study's findings could apply to other contexts, situations, times, and populations (Smith, 2017). Transferability is applied by the readers in varying degrees to most types of research. This study was written for educators to make connections between elements of a study and their own experiences. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described thick description as a way of achieving transferability. Rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon conveyed the actual experiences of the participants in the study.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of data over time and is synonymous with reliability. Dependability is important for the collection of data in the qualitative and quantitative methods for this study. For the quantitative component, the archival data was provided by the superintendent of the school district under study in this research. For the qualitative component, a phenomenological study was selected and implemented to

ensure a thorough understanding of the research. Further, specific criteria were used to gain meaningful data from the participants (Stake, 2006).

Confirmability

Confirmability is important in a mixed-method study because it serves both a qualitative and quantitative function. Confirmability in a qualitative study is equivalent to objectivity in a quantitative study. Data were confirmed by using interviews and archival data. Further, the interviews were transcribed, and member checked to confirm the accuracy of the data collection. According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), confirmability is established when credibility, transferability, and dependability are all achieved.

Summary

There were two quantitative research questions for this study. Research Question 1 focused on determining the rate of concordance between the actual level of offenses and disciplinary process for levels of offenses for the school year of 2016-2017 as described in the district's code of conduct. Quantitative results showed the rates of discordant and concordant findings between the level of offense and disciplinary process. There was 57% discordance between the level of offense and the disciplinary process. Research Question 2 examined whether differences exist in the actual level of offenses and disciplinary processes for levels of offenses for the school year 2016-2017 as described in the district's code of conduct by the gender and race of students. Quantitative results showed that there were no differences in levels of concordances across the races, $p = 0.35$. However, males ($n = 6265$, 57.9%) had a significantly higher

rate of discordant disciplinary process based on the level of offense versus females (n = 3209, 55.7%), X^2 (1, N = 14,854) = 6.76, p = 0.009.

Research Question 3 explored the lived experience of school administrators who administer disciplinary punishment. By answering open-ended questions during telephone interviews, participants provided detailed descriptions of their experiences. Five major themes emerged from the analysis of data collected from 12 high school administrators from the CSD. The five major themes were school's discipline data, disciplinary policies, disciplinary practices, disciplinary decisions, and race and gender. All participants described the code of conduct and PDP as district policies that guided disciplinary practices at the school level. It is worth noting that the district-wide PDP was implemented in 2016. Before the PDP, each principal implemented discipline policies and the discipline policies were different for each school. In addition to describing the district policies and different levels of offenses, participants discussed how they handled administering punishment for inappropriate behaviors at their school. In discussing discipline data at their school participants focused on the demographics of the school and used the data for making future decisions related to discipline. Disciplinary decisions included decision-making authority, decision-making process, and decision-making style. Most of the participants described their decision-making authority as something in between. Participants described situations they experienced where race and or gender played a role in the outcome. The qualitative data was used to explain and contextualize the quantitative findings to address Research Question 4. Chapter 5 includes the

interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

There is a problem of racial and gender disparities with the practices and decisions made by school administrators when administering discipline for inappropriate behavior of students (Barrett et al., 2019; Brooks & Erwin, 2019; Ushomirsky & Williams, 2015). The purpose of this mixed-method study was to explore the disciplinary processes used by school administrators when administering student discipline to determine the relationship between levels of offenses and the gender and race of students. I used both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the disciplinary processes and actions taken by high school administrators to explain potential disparities in school disciplinary outcomes. The quantitative method with a descriptive approach was used to examine disaggregated archival data from the school year of 2016-2017. The archival data was the school district report of suspensions, expulsions, and other discipline data. A qualitative phenomenological approach was conducted to explore school administrators' lived experience with administering disciplinary punishment. Semistructured interviews with 12 school administrators in the district were used to collect the qualitative data.

Based on the quantitative findings, the actual level of offenses and the disciplinary process did not reflect the level of offenses described in the code of conduct by gender and race. The qualitative findings explained and contextualized the quantitative findings. Disparities existed in levels of offenses and disciplinary processes by gender and race. Black males received more disciplinary actions than females. Also, Black males were disciplined at a higher rate than White males and received harsher punishment than White males.

Chapter 5 includes the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and conclusion. Interpretation of the findings is grouped by quantitative and qualitative data analysis presented in Chapter 4. Recommendations are guided by the findings reported in Chapter 4, conclusions, and a review of the literature. In addition, the implications and conclusions are drawn from the findings in Chapter 4.

Interpretation of the Findings

The quantitative findings for this study were discussed relative to Research Question 1 and Research Question 2. Archival data were used to examine discipline data information for the entire school district. The qualitative findings addressed Research Question 3. I conducted telephone interviews with 12 high school administrators responsible for making disciplinary decisions regarding the inappropriate behavior of students. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings related to disparities in levels of offenses and the disciplinary processes by gender and race addressed Research Question 4. The research findings' connections to the literature and the conceptual framework are discussed in Chapter 5.

Quantitative Findings

In literature from Chapter 2, researchers found that disparities in discipline exist based on race, ethnicity, and gender (Brooks & Erwin, 2019; Ispa-Landa, 2018; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). Based on the quantitative results from Chapter 4 for the current research study, males received more disciplinary actions than females. Black males were disciplined more than White males. The quantitative findings confirmed with previous

literature that disparities exist in disciplinary processes based on race and gender. Brooks and Erwin (2019) found that discipline disparities exist in how suspensions and expulsions are administered to students, particularly to students of certain racial and ethnic groups. Disparities existed in the use of suspension and expulsion as discipline practices used for students of certain racial and ethnic groups.

Moreover, the quantitative results revealed there is a significant difference in the level of offense and the disciplinary process. Regardless of race and gender, the level of offense did not match the disciplinary process 57% of the time, and this mismatch happened significantly more for males than it did for females. This calls into question the way that disciplinary actions are being dealt because disciplinary actions are not matching the level of offense. These findings extend knowledge in the discipline that there is a problem with the disciplinary process. Amstutz & Mullet (2015) suggested that multiple factors influence discipline, such as the discipline process itself. It is important for school administrators to follow one consistent process that is fair and just for all students. In the current study, the quantitative results revealed inconsistency between the level of offenses and the disciplinary process. The level of offense and the associated disciplinary process did not match 57.0% of the time.

Qualitative Findings

Based on the results from thematic data analysis in Chapter 4, the qualitative findings created a meaningful understanding of the experiences of school administrators who administer discipline for students' inappropriate behavior. Data collected and analyzed from 12 high school administrators from the CSD formed the qualitative portion

of this mixed-method study. Guided by Research Question 3, the analysis of the qualitative findings is presented according to the themes that emerged from the analysis of data. The five major themes were school's discipline data, disciplinary policies, disciplinary practices, disciplinary decisions, and race and gender.

Theme 1: School's Discipline Data

Discipline data related to the types of disciplinary actions at the schools in which the participants were school administrators. Similar to what was found in the literature review, the school administrators in the current study agreed that the school's discipline data showed disproportionate expulsions and suspensions related to gender and race of students. As with findings by Kadıoğlu et al. (2016), school administrators in the current study discussed preventive approaches for discipline. School administrators stressed the importance of having a dedicated administrator for tracking discipline data. Participant P8 stated "We can determine, what is the infraction that occurs most in our school. We can generate a report, specifically on a student. We can share the information with parents." The assistant principal at participant P9's school is responsible for tracking the discipline data to see how many discipline occurrences they have based on fights and disrespect for example.

Theme 2: Disciplinary Policies

DeMatthews et al. (2017) discussed the disciplinary disparities according to key factors such as race, gender, grade, age, and codes of conduct. The intended purpose of the code of conduct offered direction for students to establish good behavior. Such codes should minimize the possibility of disparities when administering punishments for

disciplinary actions. However, the findings in the current study revealed that although the district's code of conduct and PDP is in place, Black students, especially males are disciplined more than their counterparts. Participant P10 stated, "I think you very rarely see a White student in that data, but the White students are doing the exact same thing." All participants described the code of conduct and PDP as district policies that guided disciplinary practices at the school level but allowed school administrators, hearing officers, and the school board to make discipline decisions. The PDP provided guidelines on how to process referrals covering a list of infractions, definitions for the infractions, and explained the consequences. Consequences for misbehavior by students are based on the code of conduct while actions for disciplinary infractions are based on the PDP. With these policies in place, participants felt that there was a smaller gap in racial and gender disparities. Participant P12 stated: "We use the code of conduct along with the Progressive Discipline Plan to make sure punishment is consistent."

Theme 3: Disciplinary Practices

Additional studies showed disciplinary actions taken by high school principals were influenced by cultural backgrounds, race, and skin color of students (Skiba et al., 2014). In the current study, participants discussed how they handled discipline at their schools. Based on the qualitative findings, school administrators followed the PDP when administering discipline for inappropriate behavior of students. Participant P4 said, "there's a huge emphasis on social emotional learning to help us move forward to identify students and get them the help they need to be successful." However, some participants recalled other administrators being influenced by students' race, gender, and even

cultural backgrounds. Participant P9 stated, "I have witnessed where my colleagues have treated students differently."

Theme 4: Disciplinary Decisions

When administering consequences for misconduct by students, school administrators with good intentions may or may not make morally sound disciplinary decisions (Ispa-Landa, 2018). For the school district in the current study, disciplinary infractions processed at the school level are reviewed by the district and the district makes decisions on what actions to apply. There are certain offenses at certain levels where school administrators determined and made final decisions on the outcome. The findings revealed that sometimes participants varied from the PDP based on the student involved in the misconduct to be fair with the consequences. However, for discipline decisions beyond their control, participants reported to the district level or another department within the district as per district procedures. Participant P1 stated, "We have the ability to apply discretion to the PDP that's in place, although the PDP is the vast majority of time, exactly how we deal with the consequences only those cases where there are extenuating circumstances."

Theme 5: Race and Gender

Research shows disparities based on race and gender among students receiving discipline (Cholewa et al., 2018). In the current study, the final theme for school discipline was related to race and gender. Participants discussed how race and gender impacted disciplinary actions and outcomes. The same findings are reported as others that race and gender play a role in disciplinary outcomes in schools. As pointed out by the

participants through personal experience and knowledge of the discipline data from the district, Black students, especially males, show up in the data for more suspensions, expulsions, and alternative school referrals than White students. Participant P4 stated that "sometimes when females are involved, I think they sometimes get a lighter disciplinary consequence than the males do for similar fractions". In addition, participants felt that White students do the same things but receive either no consequences or lesser consequences for misconduct. According to Barrett et al. (2019), "While the existence of these disparities has been clear, the causes of the disparities have not."

Theoretical Framework

The experiences shared by the school administrators supported the quantitative findings. The theoretical framework for this study was based on the theory of justice that centers on the belief that justice is equivalent to fairness (Rawls, 1971). Rawls' theory of justice provided a better understanding of justice when examining the potential disproportionalities of discipline as it related to race and gender. The rationale for applying Rawls' justice theory is that it would provide school stakeholders with the perspectives for examining alternative to exclusionary disciplinary approaches regarding the rights of all students (Mills, 2009; Welsh, 2018). The theory of justice provides a universal system of fairness and a set of procedures for achieving it. In the context of Rawl's theory of justice, the findings revealed that the decrease in racial and gender disparities was at least partly explained by newer disciplinary approaches implemented by the school district.

Limitations of the Study

Considering the purpose of the current research study, the limitations are as follows. First, the current study involved only high school administrators in one school district. There are numerous school districts within the state in which this study took place. Another limitation was the time constraints placed on the school administrators to participate in an interview within a specific time. Further, conducting the interviews presented a potential barrier because it required me to recruit participants. In addition, my knowledge of the subject matter had the potential to add bias to the research (Creswell. 2013). To limit researcher bias, the quantitative data was archival data from the school district and no changes were made to the existing data. The qualitative data was collected through recorded interviews with school administrators who administer punishments for disciplinary infractions. The verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews ensured higher accuracy of the data collection and ensured internal validity of the information. In addition, the participants reviewed and provided feedback on the audio recordings and transcriptions for accuracy.

Recommendations

The recommendations for future research are grounded in the strengths and limitations of the current study and support the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. One recommendation is to replicate the current mixed-method study to include high school administrators in other school districts within the state in which this study took place. A second recommendation is to conduct quantitative research to include larger sample size and focus on high school administrators' experiences with disciplining students. Lastly,

examine the potential to remove race and gender disparities with alternatives to out-of-school suspensions and expulsions.

Implications

The current mixed-method study adds to the body of scholarly research on discipline practices and disciplinary disparities related to high school students. Using quantitative, archival data, and qualitative interviews, I investigated the disciplinary actions and processes taken by school administrators when addressing the inappropriate behavior of students. The findings revealed that Black male students were subjected to disciplinary actions at a greater rate than female and White students. Both racial and gender discipline disparities exist in the school district under study. Implications for positive social change and recommendations for practice are discussed in the following sections.

Positive Social Change

In the search for a better understanding of school disciplinary actions, the behaviors of school administrators and students committing the infractions are both a challenge and an opportunity (Ispa-Landa, 2018). The current research study has implications for positive social change at the teacher, school administrator, superintendent, and school board levels. Disciplinary infractions processed at the school level are reviewed by the district and the district makes decisions on what actions to apply. Understanding disciplinary decisions by school administrators might make a difference in school-based and district policy changes regarding disciplinary actions for students' inappropriate behavior. This study may contribute to positive social change by

giving administrators reasons to establish intercession, review existing policies and choose the most suitable procedures that could decrease the disparity in disciplinary practices.

As disparities in discipline continue to exist based on race and gender, it is worth examining discrimination in school discipline (Brooks & Erwin, 2019; Ispa-Landa, 2018; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). In researching discipline disparities, Barrett et al. (2019) found that Black students are suspended and expelled from schools at a higher rate than White students. Further, Brooks and Erwin (2019) found that Black male students receive harsher punishment than females. Disproportionate expulsions and suspensions concerning gender and race of students is a social change matter because of the possibility of discrimination in institutionalized responses. The results of the current study found that males received more disciplinary actions than females. Black males were disciplined more than White males. Data in the current study supports the need to examine discrimination in schools.

Recommendations for Practice

Although a code of conduct and PDP are in place at schools within the district, the quantitative and qualitative findings in the current study showed disciplinary disparities in the treatment of students in specific demographic groups and differences in the type of disciplinary actions taken against those same students. These policies disproportionately impact Black male and female students. Results from this study might be useful to schools and districts as they look at their disciplinary action policies and procedures in the future as to how modifications can be made that would be fair and equitable for all

students. Additionally, school administrators might be able to use this research to inform school-based changes to reduce discipline disparities. Several studies have been conducted that support alternative school-wide discipline when preventive discipline practices are used.

Conclusion

This mixed-method study explored the disciplinary processes used by school administrators when administering discipline for inappropriate behavior of students. The disciplinary process involved the disciplinary policies and procedures used by school administrators (Kinsler, 2013). The code of conduct and the PDP represented the policies and procedures of the school district. Consequences for misbehavior by students were based on the code of conduct while actions for disciplinary infractions were based on the PDP. Quantitative, archival data were used to examine discipline data information for the entire school district. The archival data included information on race, gender, types of disciplinary infractions, and disciplinary actions. In addition, qualitative interviews provided lived experiences of high school administrators to investigate their disciplinary processes and actions. The qualitative data provided further understanding of how school administrators made disciplinary decisions regarding the inappropriate behavior of students. The findings from this study may benefit school administrators and the greater community who are interested in the disparities that exist with discipline, particularly those in surrounding counties and school leaders in other areas of southeastern states.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Beginning Script

Thank you so much (*Insert Name*) for taking the time out of your busy day to share your point of view on discipline and decisions you make in administering punishment for disciplinary infractions. Criteria for this study were created to ensure all participants had consistent characteristics, and you have met the requirements. Before we begin the interview process, I have information to share that is required prior to conducting an interview for research.

The interview process is designed for an in-depth interview by telephone that will contain open-ended questions. The interview protocol is designed to last approximately 45 minutes. However, the time is contingent upon your response. Your interview will be recorded and transcribed word for word, exactly as you have spoken. The sample will include twelve participants. Member checking will be used to verify the transcription. You will be allowed to review and verify the accuracy of the transcript. Your consent to participate in this study was received via email. However, you can still decide to be a part of this study or not. Participation in the study is strictly voluntary. Once you start, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. To withdraw from the study, you can inform me, the researcher, verbally or in writing before, during, or after the interview process by emailing (stephanie.ganaway-pasley@waldenu.edu) or calling (843-270-1961). The results of the research study may be published, but your identity including your name will remain confidential and unknown to any outside party. In this research, there are no foreseeable risks to you. Although there may be no direct benefit to

you, a possible benefit from your participation in this research study is to share your experiences with other leaders in your district or professional associations.

You will be assigned a pseudonym to preserve anonymity and confidentiality. Your pseudonym for the research study is _____. Additionally, I ask that you avoid the mentioning of personal names during the interview process. In the event you have to use a name, please try to use first names only or other mean for identifying others. Thank you for your patience thus far. Before we begin the interview, are there any questions? (*Pause for questions*). Thank you. Let us begin.

Interview Script

I have received your signed, informed consent form. I will ask open-ended questions for you to provide a response. There are no wrong responses. Please be honest in your response based on your experiences. Recording will begin now. [Document time, place, interviewer, and interviewee, then proceed to demographic and interview questions.]

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Demographic Questions

Let me begin with a few questions about you and your school.

1. How many years have you been in the field of education?

2. What is your current position?
3. How many years have you held this position?
4. I have reviewed some demographic information about your school. Please tell me some things to help me understand your school better.

Interview Questions

Next, I would like to explore with you Codes of Conduct, Discipline Data, and Policies that guide disciplinary practices.

5. How do you use the code of conduct in making disciplinary procedures?
6. Would you describe your school's discipline data?
7. Please tell me about the policies and guidelines in place that use discipline data.

Let me move on to several questions about your decision-making authority, process, and style.

8. Please describe the scope of your decision-making authority as narrow, broad, or something in between?
9. Would you tell me about the last major discipline decision you made? What was the problem? Who was involved? What did you decide?
10. Please describe the process you used to make this disciplinary decision.
11. How would you describe your decision-making style regarding discipline?

Finally, let me explore with you how the decision-making process for school discipline relates to race and gender.

12. Please tell me how race and gender impact the behavior of students?
13. What role do you believe race and gender play in disciplinary actions?

14. Tell me about any differences in the way administrators treat students of different races and or gender?
15. Would you describe a situation you experienced where race and or gender played a role in the outcome?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about discipline practices at your school, especially related to race and gender?

Ending Script

Thank you for your participation in the study. Please be assured that your responses will be kept confidential. Member checking will be conducted by sending you a verbatim transcription of the recorded interview via email for you to review, verify accuracy, and provide feedback. If you have any questions during this process, please call or email. Again, thank you for your participation.