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Principals' Perceptions of How to Reduce Discipline Disparities for Black Students

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Disparity exists in disciplinary actions taken toward Black students compared to White students in the public schools of a county school district in a Southwest U.S. state. Successful school leadership practices are needed to minimize the disproportionality of Black students being expelled, suspended, and routed to the school-to-prison pipeline. The purpose of this basic qualitative case study was to explore school leaders' perceptions of how to reduce the disciplinary actions taken with Black students in the public schools of a county school district in a Southwest U.S. state. The conceptual framework was critical race theory. The research questions addressed (a) what strategies school leaders used (if any) to reduce discipline referral rates, including suspensions, among Black students and (b) obstacles school leaders perceived to reducing discipline referral and suspension rates among Black students. Data were collected from semistructured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews with four school principals, seven assistant principals, and one student success coordinator. Thematic analysis was used to code the data and develop categories and themes. Results indicated that lack of professional development or training in cultural competence and variances in disciplinary strategies and procedures in high schools played a role in the disproportionate discipline practices. Positive social change could be influenced by targeting professional development based on the findings to increase culturally responsive leadership resulting in fewer suspensions and expulsions for Black students, leading to more instructional time and better academic outcomes.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my boys, Gabriel and Mateo; you have made me stronger, better, and more fulfilled than I ever could have imagined. I love you to the moon. In addition, I dedicate this work to my grandmother, my number one fan. I hope I have made you proud.

Acknowledgments

First and most importantly, I thank God for giving me the inspiration, the wisdom, the strength, and the endurance to complete this work. I would like to express my gratitude and special thanks to my brilliant chair, Dr. Voelkel. Thank you for your patience, guidance, and motivation. To my husband, Ronald, thank you for your many sacrifices. During this process, you have carried a double load, and have done so without complaint. I love you so much. My gratitude and appreciation should also go to my family: my mom for her prayer, love, and endless support; my sister for her encouragement and laughter through this arduous process; and to my best friends, thank you for always being cheerleaders in my corner.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

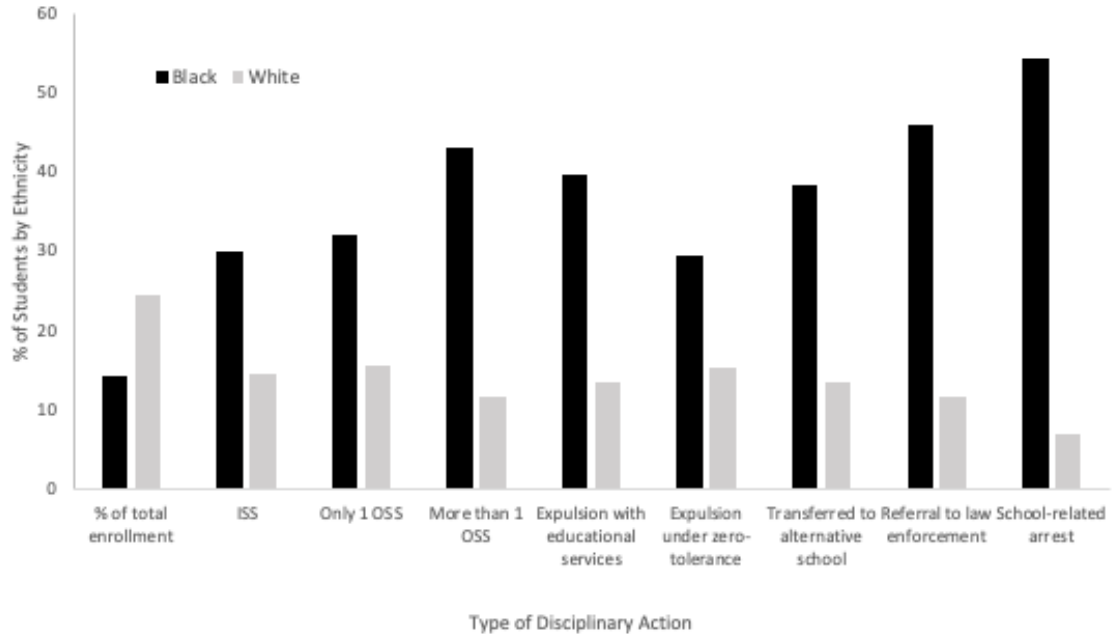
The problem addressed in this study was the disparity in disciplinary actions taken toward Black students as compared to White students within the public schools of a county school district in a Southwest U.S. state. Statistically, disproportionate expulsions and suspensions negatively impact Black students, as such disciplinary measures result in lost learning time (Larson et al., 2018). Suspensions have negative effects on students, including decreased academic achievement and increased likelihood of dropping out and incarceration (Gahungu, 2018; Hwang, 2018; Kirkman et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2014). Therefore, disproportionate disciplinary measures by race create an inequitable learning environment.

Discipline data for the district from 2017, the most recent data available from the U.S. Department of Education (2021), indicated Black students disproportionately received all types of disciplinary measures tracked. The Civil Rights Data Collection database provided numbers of students receiving specific disciplinary actions, by race, as well as student enrollment numbers but did not provide percentages or comparisons. The computation and analysis of disciplinary percentages and percentage enrollments revealed the disparities. As shown in Figure 1, Black students represented 14.2% of the student enrollment in the district, yet represented 45.9% of students referred to law enforcement, 42.9% of students receiving more than one out-of-school suspension (OSS), and 45.1% of students receiving in-school suspension (ISS; U.S. Department of Education, 2021). In comparison, White students comprised 24.4% of students in the

district, yet represented only 11.7% of students referred to law enforcement, 11.5% of students receiving more than one OSS, and 13.5% of expulsions (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). To view the data from a different perspective, 11.5% of Black students in the district received ISS during 2017, compared to 3.2% of White students. Appendix B shows detailed statistics of disciplinary actions by race in the district as well as in the 10 high schools of the district.

Figure 1

Percentage of Black and White Students Receiving Disciplinary Actions in the Study District in 2017



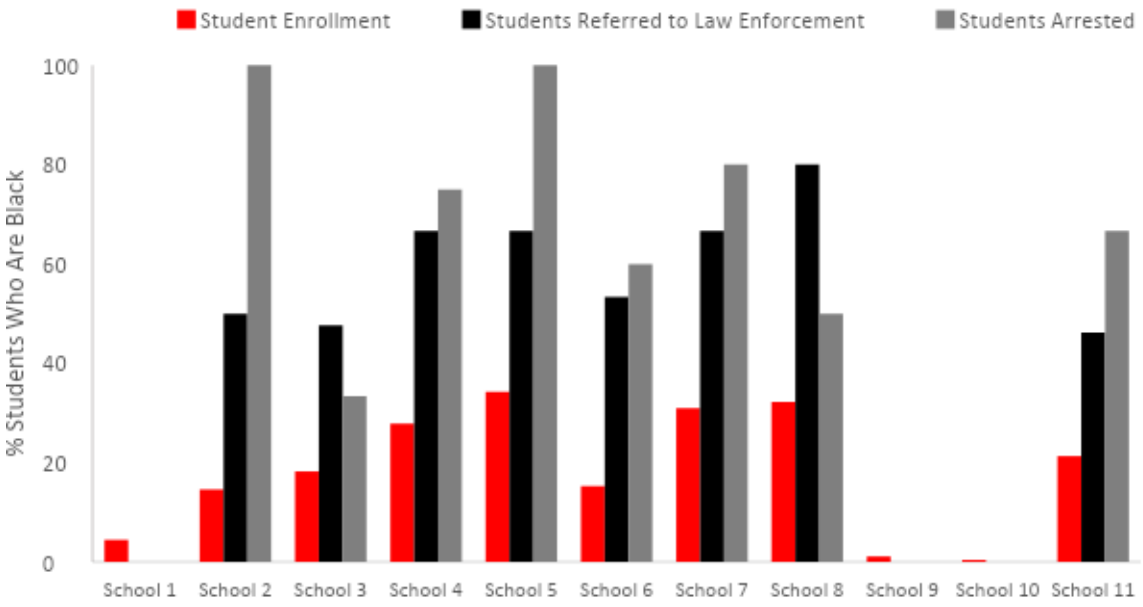
Note. ISS = in-school suspension; OSS = out-of-school suspension. Dotted line emphasizes percentage of student population for each group. Data from *Civil Rights Data Collection: Discipline of Students Without Disabilities, 2017* [Data set], by the U.S. Department of Education, 2021, https://ocrdata.ed.gov/flex/Reports.aspx?type=district

Examining the U.S. Department of Education (2021) discipline data for the district by school level showed consistent disproportionate disciplinary actions by race across eight of the 11 high schools in the study district. School 9 had only 1.1% Black students, and School 10 had 0.4% Black students, preventing statistical conclusions. Only School 13 showed no racial disparities, and school data also indicated limited use of

suspensions or expulsions. Detailed information is presented in Appendix B. Figure 2 illustrates the disparity between the percentage of Black students in each school compared to the percentage of students being referred to law enforcement or arrested in eight high schools examined.

Figure 2

Percentage of Black Students Among Students Receiving Law-Enforcement-Related Disciplinary Actions at High Schools in the Study District in 2017



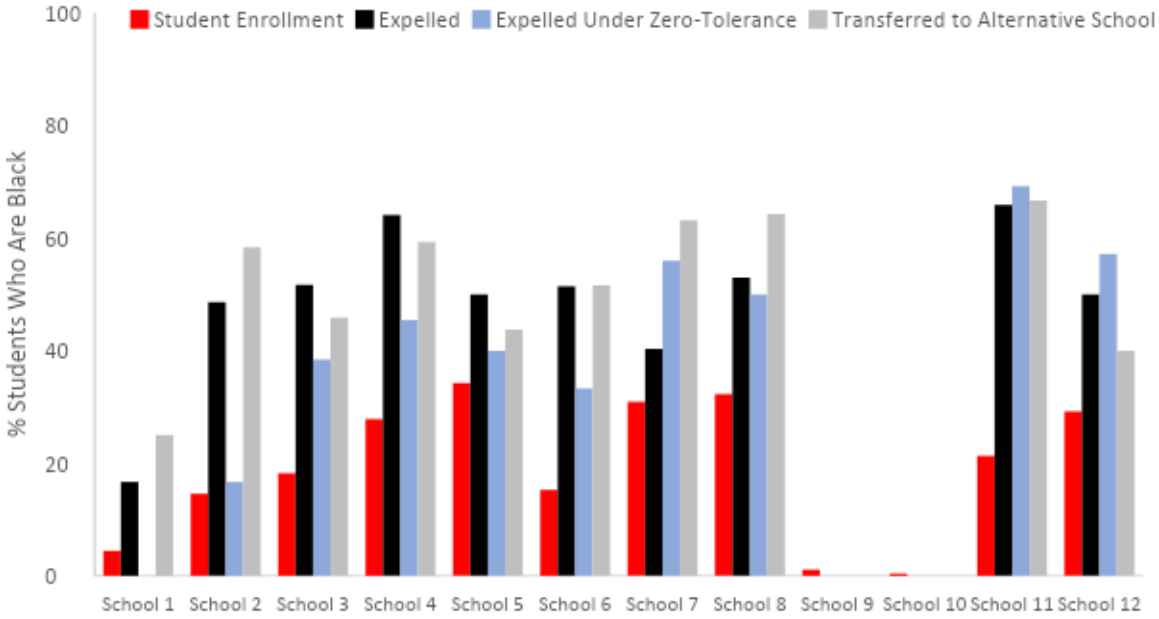
Note. Red columns represent percentage of Black students in each school. Black column is percentage of students referred to law enforcement who were Black. Gray column is percentage of students arrested who were Black. Data from *Civil Rights Data Collection: Discipline of Students Without Disabilities, 2017* [Data set], by the U.S. Department of Education, 2021, https://ocrdata.ed.gov/flex/Reports.aspx?type=district

Figure 3 shows the consistent disparity between the percentage of Black students enrolled and the percentage of students being expelled or transferred to alternative

schools who were Black. Black students at School 2, for example, represented 14.6% of students yet 48.6% of students expelled with educational services and 58.3% of students transferred to an alternate school.

Figure 3

Percentage of Black Students Among Students Receiving Expulsions at High Schools in the Study District in 2017



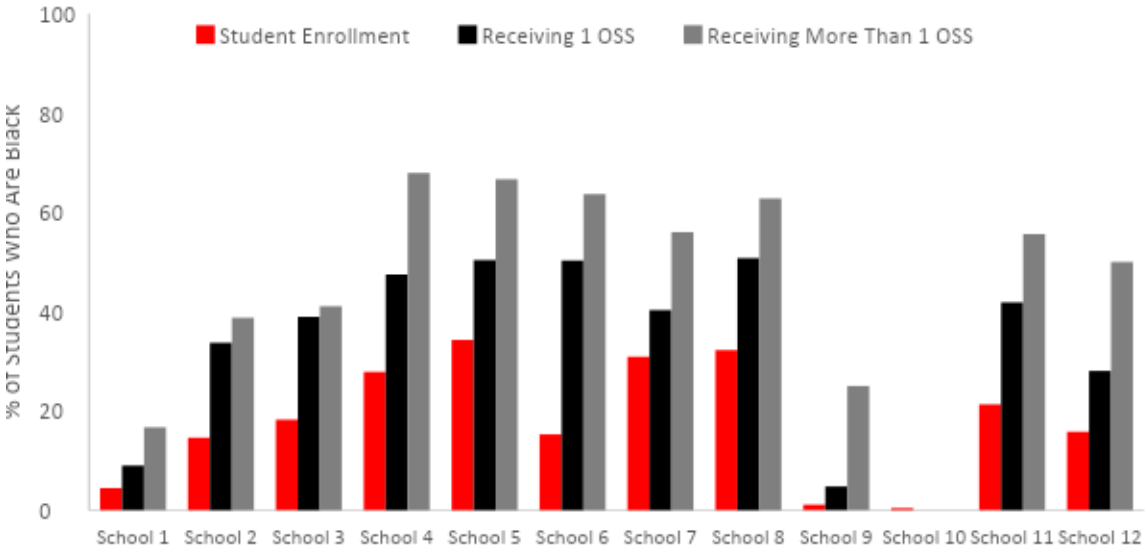
Note. Red columns represent percentage of Black students in each school. Black column is percentage of students expelled who were Black. Blue column is percentage of students expelled under zero tolerance who were Black. Gray column is percentage of students transferred to alternative school who were Black. Data from *Civil Rights Data Collection: Discipline of Students Without Disabilities, 2017* [Data set], by the U.S. Department of Education, 2021, https://ocrdata.ed.gov/flex/Reports.aspx?type=district

Figures 4 and 5 show the consistently disproportionate ISS and OSS of Black students in district high schools. As shown in Figure 4, students received OSS at a rate far greater than their student representation. Black students received more than one OSS at a

rate at least double their representation in the student population. At School 6, for example, Black students represented 15.3% of the population but 50.3% of students receiving only one OSS and 63.6% of students receiving more than one OSS that school year. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the consistent problem across disciplinary types and across high schools in the district.

Figure 4

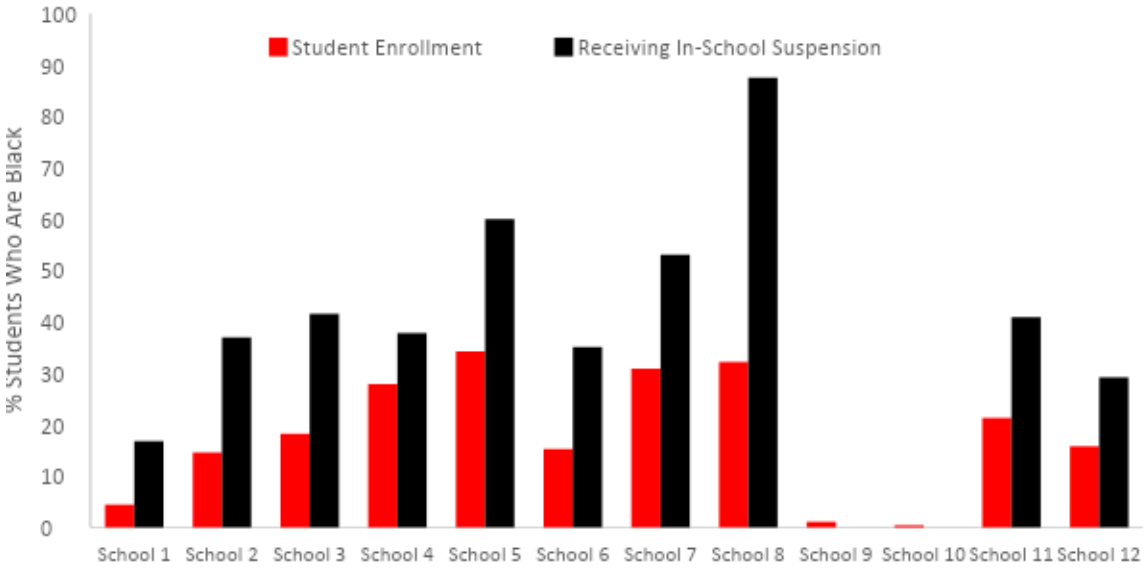
Percentage of Black Students Among Students Receiving Out-of-School Suspension (OSS) at High Schools in the Study District in 2017



Note. Red columns represent percentage of Black students in each school. Black column is percentage of students receiving one ISS who were Black. Gray column is percentage of students receiving more than one OSS who were Black. Data from *Civil Rights Data Collection: Discipline of Students Without Disabilities, 2017* [Data set], by the U.S. Department of Education, 2021, https://ocrdata.ed.gov/flex/Reports.aspx?type=district

Figure 5

Percentage of Black Students Among Students Receiving In-School-Suspension at High Schools in the Study District in 2017



Note. Red columns represent percentage of Black students in each school. Black column is percentage of students receiving in-school-suspension who were Black. Data from *Civil Rights Data Collection: Discipline of Students Without Disabilities, 2017* [Data set], by the U.S. Department of Education, 2021, https://ocrdata.ed.gov/flex/Reports.aspx?type=district

This local problem reflected a broader national problem. Nationally, disciplinary actions against Black students have included referrals from school to interaction with a police officer and entering the juvenile justice system (Cole, 2019). Scholars such as Mallett (2017) have described the issue of discipline disparities—and consequences—as the school-to-prison pipeline, in which school policies and procedures drive many children into a criminal justice system pathway, especially students of color. Current research has indicated the school-to-prison pipeline helps create and sustain racial

disparities and negatively impacts the host state's Black students (American Civil Liberties Union, 2019a; Martin & Beese, 2017). The U.S. Department of Education (2021) data indicated racial minorities are often disproportionately disciplined. More specifically, Black students are disproportionately likely to be suspended or expelled compared to their peers of other races, particularly White students (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Adding all of the disciplinary infractions together for 2017, Black students in the study school district were twice as likely as White students to be disciplined; 33% of students receiving disciplinary actions were Black, although Black students represented only 14.2% of student enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Rationale

The disproportionate discipline practices for Black students compared to White students has been well documented throughout the United States (Larson et al., 2018; Osher et al., 2015). According to the American Civil Liberties Union (2019), whereas Black students only represent 16% of public school enrollment nationwide, they represent 42% of multiple suspensions and 31% of school-related arrests. Students of color are disproportionately at risk for suspension and expulsion (Card & Giuliano, 2016). On a national level, Quinlan (2016) found Black students were being sent to the principal's office for minor infractions, such as campus disruption, computer misconduct, insubordination, and dress code, whereas White peers were given warnings for the same incidents. Recognizing the role harsh disciplinary policies play in sustaining racial disparities at the state and district levels can help address the issue of disparity in the

school-to-prison pipeline on a national level (Mallett, 2017). When removed from classrooms due to disciplinary actions, students often do not receive adequate opportunities necessary to learn (Curran, 2016; Larson et al., 2018).

At the state level, White students comprise 34% of Nevada's public school total enrollment, whereas Black students comprise 10% of the total enrollment, yet Black students constitute a larger percentage of expulsions (ProPublica, 2020). Southern Nevada data indicated suspensions have increased dramatically, and Black students are disproportionately suspended or expelled from school (Education Commission of the States, 2018). More specifically, three schools in the study district showed particularly high suspension rates, with the number of suspensions representing 17% of school enrollment for Schools 4 and 8 and 45% of enrollment for School 7 (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Many studies indicated recurring factors influence disproportionate outcomes for diverse students: discipline policies and practices, interventions and referrals, teacher expectations and misconceptions, and cultural dissonance (Annamma, 2016; Mallett, 2017). Often, lack of culturally responsive school leadership leads to disproportionate disciplinary decisions, negatively impacting Black students (Hines-Datiri, 2015). Investigating school leaders' strategies and perceptions could yield findings leading to a solution to discipline disparities. The purpose of study was to explore school leaders' perceptions of how to reduce the disciplinary actions taken with Black students within the public schools of a county school district in a Southwest U.S. state.

Definition of Terms

The research on school leaders' perceptions and disproportionality includes certain key terms. The following key terms are defined as used in this study:

Critical race theory: Critical race theory places race at the center of the analysis to discover ways institutions create and maintain racial inequality (Price, 2019).

Discipline disparities: This term refers to the inequitable rate of disciplinary office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions of students based on race (Curran, 2016).

School-to-prison pipeline: In this process, students are pushed out of schools through suspensions or expulsions and end up in prisons; the process disproportionately funnels students of color into prisons (Annamma, 2016). Elias (2013) defined the school-to-prison pipeline as developing from policies encouraging police presence at schools and harsh zero-tolerance tactics.

Zero-tolerance policy: A zero-tolerance code of conduct in schools supports harsh disciplinary responses to violations, including expulsion (De La Rue & Forber-Pratt, 2018).

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because suspensions lead to reduced academic achievement and increased likelihood of dropping out of school; therefore, disproportionate suspensions and disciplinary actions by race create an inequitable learning environment. The problem of disproportionate disciplinary actions against Black students is pervasive and begins in the early grades (Quinlan, 2016). Baule (2020) and Clark et al. (2017) have attributed the disparity to zero-tolerance policies, lack of cultural

understanding, and lack of a trusting school climate; methods to address these factors are needed because the problem persists. Strategies such as culturally responsive school leadership, positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), prevention programs, and a culture of equity reduce suspensions and help Black students remain in the classroom and succeed in school (Baule, 2020; Heilbrun et al., 2015; Hines-Datiri, 2015). Results of the current study may provide insights into school leaders' perceptions of how to reduce disciplinary discrepancies. Education has long been a force for social change by addressing inequities in society (Martin & Beese, 2017). Qualitative data could provide understanding of obstacles to reduced disciplinary practices as well as suggestions for useful strategies. This study may be the first qualitative study within the district of school leader perceptions and strategies related to discrepant disciplinary rates.

Research Questions

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore school leaders' perceptions of how to reduce the disciplinary actions taken with Black students within the public schools of a county school district in a Southwest U.S. state. Findings could increase understanding of how to reduce disproportionate disciplinary actions with Black students. The research participants were school leaders in one public school district in a Southwest U.S. state. Two research questions guided the study:

1. What strategies do school leaders use (if any) to reduce discipline referral rates, including suspensions, among Black students?
2. What obstacles do school leaders perceive to reducing discipline referral and suspension rates among Black students?

Review of the Literature

The literature review section presents the foundation for the study by providing a review of previous research literature on the topic. Articles related to disproportionate suspension and disciplinary action with Black students were selected. Topics include disparate treatment of Black students, zero-tolerance practices and the school-to-prison pipeline, the impact of poverty and other contextual factors, more equitable discipline strategies, and culturally responsive teaching and leadership. Research literature within the previous 5 years (2015–2020), preferably from peer-reviewed journals, was sought. Search terms included *zero tolerance*, *school-to-prison pipeline*, *school discipline*, *disproportionate discipline*, *culturally responsive leadership*, *culturally responsive instruction*, and *positive behavior interventions*. I searched Walden University's education databases, including Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, ERIC, ProQuest, and SAGE. Additionally, I accessed the U.S. Department of Education (2021) public database: Civil Rights Data Collection.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this qualitative study was critical race theory. Critical race theory is a framework for researchers to understand the inequalities in education to find solutions (Kempf, 2020; Price, 2019). Critical race theory places race at the center of the analysis to discover ways that schools create and maintain racial inequality (Price, 2019). Clark et al. (2017) used critical race theory to explore White female teachers' disciplinary practices with ethnic minority students. Clark et al. found

racial perceptions impacted teacher misunderstandings of student behavior, leading to teachers feeling the need to engage student behavior from a disciplinary stance.

Culturally responsive educational leadership has implications for equitable, less disparate disciplinary practices. The leadership of a school sets the climate and culture schoolwide, impacting student success and teacher behaviors (Skourdoumbis, 2017). Therefore, developing effective leaders is an important part of the process for education students who have been marginalized (Khalifa et al., 2016). Moreover, lack of culturally responsive school leadership can lead to disproportionate disciplinary decisions (Hines-Datiri, 2015).

Critical race theory and culturally responsive school leadership supported the investigation of school leaders' perceptions of disciplinary disparities by race and related strategies or obstacles to equitable disciplinary actions in one district. Given the documented inequity in suspension rates of students by race, critical race theory was a relevant lens to explore the problem. Lack of culturally responsive school leadership may be an issue in schools in the district, leading to school culture of institutionalized racism rather than efforts to correct the problem of inequitable disciplinary referrals.

Institutionalized Racism and the Disparate Treatment of Black Students

Gustafson et al. (2020) explained schools were originally designed to educate White male students, and school and district leaders are still predominantly White. Schools continue to demonstrate structural racism through implicit racial bias (Kempf, 2020). Further, most principal preparation programs do not focus on equity or racism in schools (Gustafson et al., 2020). As a result, Black students receive inequitable treatment

in schools nationwide in terms of referral for special education, gifted education, and discipline.

For example, Moody (2016) described the underdiagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in Black children as a result of racism that is structurally and institutionally embedded in school policing policies. Moody examined how microprocesses lead to structural inequality within education for Black children. Institutional racism and flawed behavioral attributions lead to the underdiagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in Black children and their consequent overrepresentation in the school-to-prison pipeline (Moody, 2016). Moody used a qualitative analysis of underdiagnosis and over punishment using empirical data to depict how administrators, parents, and teachers shaped ideas about behavioral disorders and punishment.

Card and Giuliano (2016) researched low-income and ethnic minority students being substantially underrepresented in gifted programs. Card and Giuliano questioned whether the underrepresentation was due in part to a failure to identify and serve students from all backgrounds. Card and Giuliano concluded administrators should pay attention to the underrepresented and explained the harm of educational disparities between socioeconomic groups. In a quantitative study, Williams (2014) discussed the racial and ethnic disparities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The study illustrated how quantitative data can be used to represent structural inequalities, educational processes, and outcomes for underrepresented students.

Clark et al. (2017) used critical race theory to explore White female teachers' disciplinary practices with ethnic minority students. Clark et al. found racial perceptions impacted teacher misunderstandings of student behavior, leading to teachers feeling the need to engage student behavior from a disciplinary stance. Kempf (2020) noted teacher decision making was impacted by implicit racial bias that teachers might not recognize. Disproportionate disciplinary actions by race are a topic urgently in need of study (Nguyen et al., 2019).

The disparity in discipline practices of students by race is well documented. Students of color are disproportionately suspended and expelled from school (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Osha et al., 2015). Black students are 3 times as likely as White students to be suspended and lose twice as many instructional days out of the classroom (Larson et al., 2018). Black students receive harsher punishments than their White peers for the same infractions (Osha et al., 2015; Quinlan, 2016). The impact of discriminatory discipline practices in schools includes lost learning time, alienation from school, and interaction with the juvenile justice system (Osha et al., 2015).

Zero-Tolerance Policies and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Inequitable suspension rates result in Black students losing instructional time, eventually increasing their likelihood of dropout and incarceration (Baule, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2019). Zero-tolerance policies that stress removal from the classroom or school, as well as an on-campus police presence, tend to support the school-to-prison pipeline (Nguyen et al., 2019). In the 1990s, school districts began enacting zero-tolerance policies mandating suspension for a variety of infractions, including nonviolent behaviors

such as refusing to take off a hat (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2017) or having a disrespectful attitude (Rodríguez Ruiz, 2017). Further, the police presence increased in schools with zero-tolerance policies (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2017). However, the use of suspension as a strategy to create safe, orderly schools was ineffective. Schools with zero-tolerance policies tended to have high staff turnover rates, lower student achievement, and higher dropout rates (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2017). Moreover, studies of the results of zero-tolerance policies showed the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline with Black students as well as students with disabilities (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018).

Curran (2016) examined the effect of state zero-tolerance laws on suspension rates and principal perceptions of problem behaviors. Results indicated the laws were predictive of larger increases in suspension rates for Black than White students, potentially contributing to the suspension gap. Similarly, De La Rue and Forber-Pratt (2018) stated that the traditional reaction of implementing swift and harsh disciplinary responses in the form of zero-tolerance policies and school-based law enforcement officers is not only ineffective but also can have a disparate impact on students of color and contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline helps create and sustain racial disparities and negatively impacts Black students in Nevada (American Civil Liberties Union, 2019a; Martin & Beese, 2017).

Annamma (2016) explored the social and spatial mechanisms that funneled students of color into the carceral state. Annamma stated “the focus on the [school-to-prison] pipeline neglects the ways society is imbued with a commitment to criminalizing unwanted bodies” (p. 1210). Annamma investigated the sociospatial dialectic and the

vulnerability of certain populations. This article focused on the underlying social racism that leads to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Elias (2013) defined the school-to-prison pipeline as policies that encourage police presence at schools, harsh tactics including physical restraint, and automatic punishments that result in suspensions and out-of-class time. Elias stated the pipeline starts in the classroom, as a teacher's decision to refer students for punishment can push certain students out of the classroom, forcing them to lose instructional time and be more likely to enter the criminal justice system. Elias concluded that administrators need to ensure their teachers and staff receive support and training for effective discipline and best practices for behavior modification to keep students in school.

Snapp et al. (2015) focused on understanding the narratives and pathways of how students with multiple underrepresented identities experience intensified discipline disparities. Snapp et al. showed how the school-to-prison pipeline disproportionately affects youths of color. Multiple systems of support failed youths, increasing the difficulty of successfully completing school and excelling. Snapp et al. reported that teachers and administrators tended to enforce school policies unequally.

Impact of Poverty

Underlying racism and lack of cultural understanding are not the only contributors to the school-to-prison pipeline. Poverty and other factors impact student behavior (Baule, 2020). Additionally, the school-to-prison pipeline disproportionately affects low-income students as well as Black students and those with disabilities (Rodríguez Ruiz, 2017). Academic challenges often begin in primary school and, when left unaddressed,

require remediation at the postsecondary level, leading to lower degree attainment rates (Quinlan, 2016). Children in poverty are at risk of low academic achievement and low levels of concentration (Boatwright & Midcalf, 2019). In addition, low-economic-status children may not have access to other nonfinancial resources, such as social support systems and role models, to help with social behavior development (Boatwright & Midcalf, 2019). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2021), because racial and ethnic minorities are the fastest growing groups in the United States and make up a disproportionately large segment of the economically poor population, tending to the educational needs of students in poverty is in the national interest. However, preservice teachers receive little training on working with students living in poverty, according to Boatwright and Midcalf (2019).

Administrators must work not only with school staff but also with parents to minimize discipline problems in schools (Jeong et al., 2017). Jeong et al. dissected the relationship between paternal and maternal education and early childhood development. Jeong et al. found a relationship between parental characteristics and efforts and children's early development. Jeong et al. also reported educational and parenting programs to allow caregivers to acquire critical parenting skills and support their children's early learning are needed across all settings.

Mallett (2017) discussed the norms of schools and the disproportionate effects on certain children within urban schools. Mallett reported an indirect link between maltreatment and trauma and the school-to-prison pipeline. Trauma has multiple harmful impacts on children and adolescents, both at the time of the incident and longer term.

Mallett described evidence-based practices and policy changes to move from punitive to rehabilitative paradigms in the schools and juvenile courts. Some states have made significant changes and modifications to zero-tolerance policies that have led to much improved outcomes for vulnerable children and adolescents (Mallett, 2017).

Miller and Barnes (2015) addressed the connection between paternal incarceration during childhood and various outcomes in young adulthood. Miller and Barnes examined whether paternal incarceration placed offspring at greater risk for negative economic outcomes during adulthood, as measured by employment, income, home ownership, and welfare receipt. As the statistics in their quantitative study showed, children with an incarcerated parent were more likely to be incarcerated at a young age. Understanding such contextual factors can help school staff prevent incarceration of low-income students through culturally responsive strategies (De La Rue & Forber-Pratt, 2018; Miller & Barnes, 2015).

Positive Strategies for Classroom Discipline

Since 2015, states and districts have revised zero-tolerance laws to support less exclusionary discipline (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2017; Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). A 2015 law removing zero-tolerance policies from Illinois schools also required professional development for teachers on classroom management, a critical determining factor in a teacher's ability to use equitable discipline practices (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). Other revisions include a tiered rather than zero-tolerance responses to infractions (Rodríguez Ruiz, 2017).

School district leaders in Denver, Colorado, implemented restorative justice rather than zero-tolerance practices (Rodríguez Ruiz, 2017). The goal in restorative justice is to determine the underlying cause of the behavior and to create healing between perpetrator and victim. Both are asked what happened, what the effects are, who is responsible, and how the problem can be solved. Rather than being excluded from the school, the student showing poor behavior is encouraged to be part of the school community and learns conflict-management techniques (Rodríguez Ruiz, 2017). As Boatwright and Midcalf (2019) noted, low-economic-status children often lack access to social support systems and role models to develop appropriate social behavior. Programs such as restorative justice and PBIS help teach such behavior, rather than using a punitive approach.

PBIS is an approach that has shown success in improving behavior and achievement among diverse students (Baule, 2020; Larson et al., 2018). Larson et al. (2018) found a statistically significant association between teachers' use of proactive behavior management and positive student behavior. Baule (2020) advocated the use of PBIS rather than harsher law-enforcement-oriented policies that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Although in Baule's study of PBIS in middle school and high school suspensions continued to disproportionately occur with Black students, use of suspensions as a disciplinary strategy dropped in both schools.

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leadership

Gustafson et al. (2020) noted the principal is second only to the teacher in impacting student achievement and stated racially aware leadership is important to improving student achievement. However, principal preparation programs may not be

preparing leaders able to understand social justice and racial equity in schools (Gustafson et al., 2020). In their study of a university educational leadership program changing to include instruction on equity, Gustafson et al. described the shift as starting "with genuine reflection and long, difficult, and frustrating discussions about current department practices, personal biases, and how they perpetuated the status quo" (p. 11). Self-reflection is a vital part of the process. A goal of the shift was to enable new principals to recognize inequitable policies in schools and classrooms.

Larson et al. (2018) explained culturally responsive pedagogy is the knowledge and skills to teach diverse students through an understanding of students' cultures as well as the teachers' and school leaders' cultures. A lack of culturally responsive school leadership leads to disproportionate disciplinary decisions, negatively impacting Black students (Hines-Datiri, 2015). Heilbrun et al. (2015) studied the association between principal attitudes toward zero-tolerance and suspension rates for Black and White students. Suspension rates for Black students were more than double those for White students. School leaders create and enforce policies and expectations and contribute to the school culture. According to Nguyen et al. (2019), studies have shown a school culture perceived by students as indifferent or impersonal contributes to disproportionate suspension rates. Culturally responsive leaders can model for staff the reflection required to develop culturally responsive teaching (Acquah & Szelei, 2018).

De La Rue and Forber-Pratt (2018) recognized that school staff should strive to be less punitive in their responses to violence and should move toward supportive interventions. Such a shift requires schools and administrators to challenge ingrained

stereotypes and find ways to address the contextual factors that may contribute to negative student behaviors. Administrators, teachers, and students could benefit from a reformed policy that favors treatment before punishment when addressing problem behaviors in schools.

Teacher training is necessary for teachers to recognize inherent bias in their disciplinary decisions (Nguyen et al., 2019; Osha et al., 2015). In a mixed-methods study in Illinois by Moreno and Scaletta (2018), teachers reported not receiving adequate professional development in classroom management. However, research has shown White teachers with high self-efficacy in classroom management tend not to be as distressed by externalizing behaviors of Black students, compared to their counterparts with low levels of classroom-management self-efficacy (Larson et al., 2018).

Clark et al. (2017) found White, female educators lacked skills using classroom management with culturally diverse and low-income students. Clark et al. used race relative to class and gender to explore White female teacher disciplinary practices with ethnic minority students. Clark et al. used critical race theory to examine how race, class, and gender reciprocally informed each other, while prioritizing the issue of race. Once trained in multicultural instruction, teachers reduced discipline referral disparities.

In a quantitative study using data from 274 teachers in 18 elementary and middle schools in one district, Larson et al. (2018) found a statistically significant relationship between teachers' use of culturally responsive practices and positive student behavior. Larson et al. controlled for teacher race, general educator versus special educator status,

and years of teaching experience. Larson et al. maintained more research is needed on culturally responsive practices in schools.

Martin and Beese (2017) conducted a study with students attending an alternative school due to being removed from their traditional schools for behavior issues per district policy. Most of the students had been introduced to the prison pipeline by their experiences with arrest, incarceration, and relationships with parole officers. Martin and Beese examined 15 years of student artifacts from student-produced literary magazines and classroom reflections on effective practices. In an unusual strategy, Martin and Beese concluded that rather than attempting to fix students, school staff and researchers instead should investigate how students use literacy and make connections that do not privilege one student over another. Martin and Beese sought to identify, problematize, and ultimately transform schools and society though ending oppression through education. Such strategies promote social justice and equity in schools to avoid the school-to-prison pipeline.

Quinlan (2016) concluded the data in general, including factors beyond student discipline, have shown that students of color face serious educational inequities. Quinlan researched multiple strategies to lessen inequities, ranging from occasional visits from school psychologists to more wraparound services to ensure teachers do not address the issue of loss of control of the classroom by suspending students. Quinlan concluded that to address racial disparities, teachers need a dialogue about racial biases and how to recognize them in the classroom. Kempf (2020) concurred that teachers and school leaders must be able to acknowledge implicit biases before being able to make equitable

decisions. Schiff (2018) and Wilson et al. (2018) noted even programs such as restorative justice may be hindered if teachers do not talk about race and addressed institutionalized racism in schools. Osha et al. (2015) recommended school staff "tackle the tough conversations" about race and discipline policies (p. 3).

Strategies such as culturally responsive school leadership (Hines-Datiri, 2015), restorative justice (Rodríguez Ruiz, 2017; Schiff, 2018), PBIS (Baule, 2020), prevention programs (Heilbrun et al., 2015), and a culture of equity, to name a few, potentially reduce suspensions and help Black students remain in the classroom and succeed in school. In Texas, school administrators have discretion in disciplinary actions, undercutting zero-tolerance policies (Rodríguez Ruiz, 2017). Research is needed to investigate how district discipline policies are implemented at the school level as well as on principals' perceptions of discipline and suspension rates (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2017). The question remains whether local school leaders understand these available programs, their reasons for not implementing such programs, and any obstacles they face.

Implications

Implications of this study included a lack of culturally responsive leadership, potentially suggesting the need for professional development for school leaders as well as teachers in the district. Elias (2013) concluded that administrators need to ensure their teachers and staff receive support and training for effective discipline and best practices for behavior modification to keep students in school. This study may assist leaders of other schools and educational arenas who wish to develop or revise their approach to inherent bias, institutional racism, or inequitable practices via professional development.

Results yielded a heavy emphasis on zero-tolerance policies, necessitating a policy change at the district level toward policies preventing loss of instructional time.

Summary

In Section 1, I presented the local problem and the gap in practice addressed in this study. The problem is a disparity in disciplinary actions taken toward Black students as compared to White students within the public schools of a county school district in a southwestern state. This local problem reflected a broader, national problem. Investigating school leaders' strategies and perceptions related to reducing rates of discipline referrals for Black students could yield findings leading to a solution to discipline disparities. Therefore, the purpose of study was to explore school leaders' perceptions of how to reduce the disciplinary actions taken with Black students within the public schools of a county school district in a southwestern state. I presented the research questions and conceptual framework, followed by a literature review.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

Relation to the Problem and Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore school leaders' perceptions of how to reduce the disciplinary actions taken with Black students in the public schools of a county school district in a Southwest U.S. state. To obtain rich data in the participants' own words, I used a qualitative approach. In this basic qualitative study, I used semi structured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews with school leaders in a single school district to explore their perceived strategies and obstacles to reduce disciplinary actions against Black students (see Appendix C). A qualitative research interview seeks to cover both a factual and a meaning level and is particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What strategies do school leaders use (if any) to reduce discipline referral rates, including suspensions, among Black students?
2. What obstacles do school leaders perceive to reducing discipline referral and suspension rates among Black students?

Justification of Research Design

A quantitative study would have involved measuring school leaders' attitudes or responses through a survey (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Such a study would have offered participants choices from a researcher-provided list, for example, rather than gathering leaders' perceptions in their own words. Therefore, the quantitative approach

was not appropriate to answer the research questions. Additionally, I considered other qualitative types of research, as described by Creswell and Poth (2018): ethnography, narrative study, phenomenology, and case study. An ethnographic study would have involved a specific population and would not have been appropriate for the diverse participants in this study. A narrative study would have addressed life stories of the participants, which would not have answered the research questions or addressed the problem. A case study would have required a bounded system, such as a single school, and varied sources of evidence (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology would have involved asking participants about participants' shared experience with a phenomenon, which was related to the goal of this study. The basic qualitative approach was chosen based on the plan to interview school leaders to determine their perceptions of how to address the problem (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Basic qualitative studies are conducted in a natural setting (e.g., a school) to learn participants' perceptions to answer research questions (Caelli et al., 2003).

Participants

Criteria and Sample Size

Participants were purposefully selected who could help answer the research questions. The setting of the study was a school district in a Southwest U.S. state. Participants were leaders of public high schools in the study district: principals, assistant principals, and student success coordinators (previously referred to as deans). As shown in Appendix B, 2 of the 13 high schools in the district (Schools 9 and 10) had less than 1.1% Black student enrollment; the remaining schools had Black student populations

ranging from 4.4% to 34.2% (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Of the remaining 11 high schools, 10 had shown disproportionately high numbers of disciplinary actions for Black students.

The target population was 11 school principals and 22 assistant principals or student success coordinators. Preference was given to school principals, with additional willing assistant principals and student success coordinators added to the sample as needed. The final sample was 12 interviewees. Administrators interviewed were four principals, seven assistant principals, and a student success coordinator. A small number of participants is often appropriate in qualitative research because fewer participants each may yield more in-depth data and deeper inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Gaining Access to Participants

I submitted a Walden University Institutional Review Board application for the approval of the research proposal, which was approved April 26, 2021 (Number 04-26-21-0559969). To gain access to participants, I established a line of communication with the school administrators using contact information publicly available on the school and district websites. I emailed an invitation to participate to school administrators with an explanation of the study's purpose and asking for their involvement. The email explained the confidentiality of participation and that the names of participants, schools, and the district would not be presented in the final research.

School leaders who expressed interest in participating were emailed a consent form. No interviews occurred without participants first signing a consent form. Then, I scheduled either a face-to-face or Zoom interview with each participant.

Establishing Researcher–Participant Relationship

To increase comfort level and trust with the participants, I emailed the list of open-ended interview questions prior to the interview. This way, participants would feel prepared and less apprehensive. I listened carefully and avoided letting my personal bias affect the manner in which I asked questions or responded to participants' statements. I assigned participants numerical pseudonyms for confidentiality.

Although I compiled data illustrating the problem of disproportionate disciplinary measures among Black students at all but one of the invited schools, these data were not the focus of the interviews. I did not wish to make interviewees feel defensive. Rather, I wished to gain their perceptions of ways to reduce disciplinary actions among Black students. Therefore, the interviews focused on participants' perceived strategies and obstacles rather than the percentage data I collected to support the rationale for this study.

Ethical Measures

I informed participants that their identities, as well as those of their school and district, would remain confidential. Participants could discontinue participation at any time without repercussion. I reminded participants of these ethical aspects of participation prior to the interviews. Participants provided a signed consent form prior to the interview. The consent form allowed audio recording of the interview, which was later transcribed. All materials, including recordings, were kept in password-protected files and labeled with numeric identifications instead of by name. Only I had access to the list of participants. All records will be destroyed 5 years after completion of the study.

Data Collection

Data collected were the perceptions of school principals, assistant principals, and student success coordinators at high schools in the study district. These individuals were able to provide qualitative data to answer the research questions. Interviews were useful in exploring views, beliefs, opinions, and experiences. I conducted semistructured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews with school administrators. Amara et al. (2020) described the use of in-depth, semistructured interviews.

The interview questions were created based on possible contributing factors to discipline disparities cited in research from Baule (2020), Hwang (2018), and the U.S. Department of Education (2021). Related issues covered in the interview questions were tracking and analysis of discipline data, school procedures for teachers to follow, behavioral expectations of students, professional development, and needed supports. The interview questions were fashioned to engage interviewees in the topic in a logical, conversation-like manner. I pilot tested the interview protocol with two participants. I used these pilot interviews to understand whether questions elicited the appropriate data to answer the research questions and whether any questions were unclear.

During interviews, I recorded audio and took short notes with the participant's consent. These field notes supplemented data analysis of the transcripts. Before commencing the interview, I ensured I had two digital recorders to protect against faulty equipment.

The interview protocol (see Appendix C) was sufficient to answer the research questions because the interview questions were designed to align with the research

questions. Research Question 1 addressed strategies school leaders use to reduce discipline referral rates, including suspensions, among Black students. Responses to Interview Questions 4–12 generated data to answer Research Question 1. Research Question 2 addressed obstacles school leaders perceive to reducing discipline referral and suspension rates among Black students. Responses to Interview Questions 13–15 generated data to answer Research Question 2.

After each interview, the interview was transcribed. The interviews were recorded using a cellular device and transcribed into a Word document. I listened to each interview while reading along with the transcript to ensure accuracy. Then, I emailed a copy of the transcript to each participant for review for accuracy. This process added to the validity of the study (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each participant had 7 days to review their transcript and make any corrections. After transcripts were confirmed to be accurate, the audio recordings were destroyed to protect participants' identities. Transcripts were labeled only with the participant's number, not with their name.

Memos enabled me to keep track of data, as suggested by vom Brocke et al. (2017). I built a database to keep track of the process of securing informed consent, conducting interviews, transcribing interviews, sending interview transcripts to the participants, and receiving any changes from the participants. FileMaker Pro database software was used.

Data Analysis Results

First, I read and reread the transcripts. Then, I conducted inductive analysis by line-by-line coding, as described by Saldaña (2015). The first pass through each transcript

resulted in initial coding. Subsequent reads yielded changes in the codes first ascribed. Some codes were based on the concepts or topics of a phrase and were descriptive codes. Other codes, called in vivo codes, were the phrases used in the participant's own words (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2015). During the first and second cycle of coding, I made notes including my reflection on the research topic (see Lustick et al., 2020). I compared codes between transcripts and combined codes into categories and finally overarching themes.

To produce quality, credible, and accurate results, I used various strategies. I used the same semistructured interview protocol with all participants. Such consistency enabled me to rely on the data generated. Transcript reviews gave participants the opportunity to review their transcribed interviews and make changes for accuracy, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018). To ensure the data collection and analysis were reliable, I was aware of my implicit and explicit biases. Prior to data collection, I reflected on my expectations and preconceptions to prevent such biases from affecting the interviews. While analyzing transcripts, I employed reflexive note taking, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell, to acknowledge my bias and prevent such bias from affecting the analysis. Finally, whereas much of the coding focused on commonalities among the data, I looked for discrepant cases and reported on such discrepant or outlier findings. The final sample was 12 administrators, including four principals, seven assistant principals, and a student success coordinator. Table 1 shows the themes emerging for each research question.

Table 1

Research Questions and Themes

Research question	Theme
1. What strategies do school leaders use (if any) to reduce discipline referral rates, including suspensions, among Black students?	Theme 1: School leaders and the district offer professional development on PBIS, behavior management, social-emotional learning, social justice, restorative justice, and culturally responsive teaching. Theme 2: Discipline expectations are communicated to students through various methods depending on the school. Theme 3: Office referral procedures depend on infraction. Theme 4: Discipline data are analyzed based on repeat offenses, ethnicity, and type of offense. Theme 5: Specific interventions vary by school, including social-emotional learning, PBIS, and support from school counselors. Theme 6: More positive, transparent relationships among staff, parents, and all stakeholders could improve discipline disparities. Theme 7: Schools in the district do not have a consistent system for monitoring discipline referral patterns.
2. What obstacles do school leaders perceive to reducing discipline referral and suspension rates among Black students?	Theme 8: Participants described a lack of classroom management and lack of meaningful, positive relationships as an obstacle. Theme 9: The perceived obstacles varied by participant, suggesting the need for consistent professional development.

Note. PBIS = positive behavioral interventions and supports.

Research Question 1

What strategies do school leaders use (if any) to reduce discipline referral rates, including suspensions, among Black students? Responses to Interview Questions 4–12 generated data to answer Research Question 1. Seven themes emerged, as shown in Table 1. Table 2 presents the codes for Themes 1–4, and Table 3 presents the codes for Themes 5–7.

Table 2

Themes 1–4 and Codes for Research Question 1: Strategies to Reduce Referral Rates

Theme	Code
1. School leaders and the district offer professional development on PBIS, behavior management, social-emotional learning, social justice, restorative justice, and culturally responsive teaching.	Professional development (behavioral & cultural) PBIS training Behavior management Book study Cultural competency sessions School district code of conduct Restorative justice training
2. Discipline expectations are communicated to students through various methods depending on the school.	Yearly behavior expectations review Behavior structure Discussions/orally Student handbook Awareness School-wide assembly
3. Office referral procedures depend on infraction.	Type of infraction dependent Disciplinary framework Warning After interventions Conferences (student & parent) PBIS Progressive discipline School suspension
4. Discipline data are analyzed based on repeat offenses, ethnicity, and type of offense.	Repeat offenses Ethnicity separation Type of offense Grade Monthly admin meeting District online data lab

Note. PBIS = positive behavioral interventions and supports.

Table 3

Themes 5–7 and Codes for Research Question 1: Strategies to Reduce Referral Rates

Theme	Code
5. Specific interventions vary by school, including social-emotional learning, PBIS, and support from school counselors.	Social-emotional learning PBIS Social workers Check-in Referrals, including to counselor School safety professional Behavior mentor Best practices
6. More positive, transparent relationships among staff, parents, and all stakeholders could improve discipline disparities.	Disciplinary decision-making participation Reducing power struggles Precise negative behavior definition Strengthen meaningful relationships Transparency with staff and students
7. Schools in the district do not have a consistent system for monitoring discipline referral patterns.	Behavior system review Documentation None Observations Individual progress tracking Review monthly referral rates Supervision Teacher follow-up

Note. PBIS = positive behavioral interventions and supports.

Theme 1: Professional Development

School leaders and the district offer professional development on PBIS, behavior management, social-emotional learning, social justice, restorative justice, and culturally responsive teaching. All but one of the participants stated the district offered various types of professional development. However, three participants stated little to no training was offered specific to student behavior and behavior management. Additionally, cultural awareness training was limited.

Regarding professional development in classroom management, discipline, and behavior management, eight participants stated most teachers are involved in various categories of yearly training, which include sessions on PBIS, social justice, behavior management, and related best practices. Four participants stated they had restorative justice training several years ago. Participant 7 indicated little professional development on behavior management.

Culturally responsive professional development includes district training, cultural competency sessions, restorative justice training, social cultural asset focus, and outside consultancy. Participant 4 stated, "Our staff is required to take a district training in regard to culturally responsive teaching." However, Participant 3 stated, "There have been some pockets of training in culturally responsive teaching, but nothing broad." Participant 6 described bringing in an outside consultant.

When asked how discipline disparities could be changed for the better in schools, participants shared their ideas on what can be done to improve discipline disparities

among Black students, which included professional development related to cultural awareness. Participant 3 elaborated,

> I think a couple of things that could help with these discipline disparities are more cultural awareness training for teachers and staff and more defined definitions on different infractions. In terms of increased cultural awareness, it's been well known that different cultures react to situations differently.

Participant 7 suggested "having more training for all staff members on how to address students when they are upset, having a more systematic way of addressing these situations." Participant 9 answered, "Some teachers still need more professional learning and self-evaluation to better understand equity." Participant 9 added, "The same infraction should have the same consequences; however, equity includes individual social cultural understanding." Participant 12 stated, "Understanding student behaviors and finding out what works for them is key." These three participants suggested more professional learning for the teachers to be able to understand their students to make explicit effort to educate, reflect, and apply best practices for all students.

Theme 2: Communicating Discipline Expectations

Discipline expectations are communicated to students through various methods depending on the school. Participants described tiered behavioral structures, student handbooks, assemblies, presentations and orientations, and discussions. Most indicated the communication occurred at the beginning of the year. Participant 7 stated, "Behavioral expectations are communicated to students through a dean's orientation at the beginning of the school year." Participant 8 stated,

> Every year, at the beginning of the school year, the administrators over discipline make a video that is presented on the first day of school in the classrooms. This video reviews all the behavioral guidelines provided by the school district. In addition, the behavioral guidelines booklet is sent as a PDF to all students and parents the week prior to opening of school.

Similarly, Participant 1 stated,

> Each year we have a school-wide assembly where they come by grade, and we talk about the school rules and the school expectations, and we just review that student handbook and make sure they know what's expected of them.

In addition to schoolwide orientations, classroom teachers communicated expectations to students. Participant 5 responded, "Each teacher reviews class in-school behavior expectations at the beginning of the year." Rather than a daily, continued set of communicated expectations, as in PBIS, the communication at the beginning of the year was expected to suffice in many schools. Participant 3 responded,

> Behavioral expectations and discipline procedures are communicated in two broad ways: through school orientations and posters, teacher presentations, and other similar means. There is an expectation that if a student needs to be reminded of expectations to avoid disciplinary action, that those conversations have been private between the teacher and student or administrator and student. However, some students engage in actions that result in immediate disciplinary action, like fighting, without the benefit of an initial warning. The understanding is that it is

> expected that the student knows coming in that they cannot engage in that type of behavior.

Participant 6 noted students were informed of expectations "this year in a slideshow during their mentorship class, which is the first class of the day, and school wide." Participant 4 described a tiered structure, which teachers communicate to students:

> We have a four-tiered structure for behavior, measuring behaviors and steps. Step 1, very minor, to Step 4, major. We train our teachers on the structure each year and have them relate to their students. Since this is school wide and has been in place for some years, students understand how the structure works, and are aware of the behavioral expectations.

Teachers used a combination of a printed student handbook and classroom presentations.

Theme 3: Referrals Depend on Infraction

Office referral procedures depend on infraction. Procedural steps are in place that teachers follow for office referrals, but these steps vary by school. Procedures include tiered systems, progressive discipline, informal student conferences, and office referrals. For example, Participant 11 responded, "We use progressive discipline and expect our teachers to work through steps that include warning, informal student conferences, parent contact, and office referral. If it is a severe infraction, it comes directly to administration." Schools variously used the district tiered framework, teacher autonomy, PBIS, and interpretation of major versus minor infractions. Monitoring of referrals varied as well.

Six participants referred to using the district framework. Three participants use the district Code of Conduct, and one participant mentioned using an administration framework. Participant 6 described using the district guidelines for discipline: “It’s the same rules and consequences for all of our students.” Participant 1 described a district-wide program of multitiered systems and supports (MTSS), which “defines inappropriate behavior and the appropriate consequences.” Participant 4 stated, “MTSS is a framework our school district developed. We utilize the framework and adjust it to fit the needs of our school with a focus on keeping kids in the classroom.” The framework was developed by administrators, according to Participant 7, without involvement of students or teachers.

Four participants stated discipline procedures were based on teacher autonomy and social-emotional learning systems like PBIS. Participant 1 responded, “Teachers develop their own classroom rules, and then the school rules are posted and enforced by the teachers, and referrals are written after documented interventions and then eventually sent to the office.” Participant 12 responded,

> For immediate behavior issues, teachers can call or intercom the office. For repeat offenders, teachers may be supplied with radios and protocols when students need to cool down and be away from the classroom. Teachers can also email the behavior team.

Participant 6 stated, “We use PBIS to recognize positive behaviors following classroom discipline, like warning, student conferences, teacher detention, parent contact,

intervention referrals, or the counselor, classroom interventions, and referral to the Student Success Office." Participant 9 explained,

> Teachers can fill out an office referral after ensuring that they have addressed the infraction previously with social-emotional learning, social justice, conferences with students, parents, etc. We are moving away from office referrals and more toward the whole-school support such as social-emotional learning, increasing rigorous and meaningful learning processes and providing greater support structures and classroom plan, turnaround plan, and office plan. Teachers can call for these supports, and we have specific staff that can address the need.

The other eight participants described using a minor-versus-major infraction process to determine office referrals. Participant 2 stated, "Teachers look at an offense as either a major or minor infraction. Minor infractions require four attempts to correct behavior before it becomes a major infraction where the student would be referred to the office." Participant 10 stated,

> Teachers can give citations to students for small behavior items such as not keeping their hands to themselves, or being disruptive, things like that. Once a student receives three, the teacher can send the student to the office to see administration. If a major incident occurs, such as fighting, the teacher sends the student to the office with a referral.

Participant 4 stated,

> Office referrals depend on the behavior infraction. For all minor behaviors, students are to stay in the classroom and the teacher should use an intervention,

> such as reteach, private conversation, give a warning, utilize cooldown area, loss of classroom privilege, conference with parents, etc.

Participant 3 stated,

> As of now, the classroom discipline progression includes a warning, an individual conference with the student, and a parent phone call home. Administration is currently considering adding an additional step of a counselor/social worker referral prior to discipline referral. Of course, this applies only to minor offenses: inappropriate language or similar. Major offenses—fighting, directed profanity, etc.—led directly to the discipline referral. That said, there is sometimes a difference in opinion about what constitutes a minor or major offense.

The observation by Participant 3 of differences of opinion in major versus minor offenses is important to equitable disciplinary practices.

Theme 4: Data Analyzed Based on Repeat Offenses, Ethnicity, and Type of Offense

School leaders analyze discipline data based on repeat offenses, ethnicity, and type of offense. Six participants noted data were analyzed to determine repeat offenses. Five stated disciplinary data were analyzed by ethnicity. Four described data as being analyzed by type of offense. Participant 3 stated,

> Generally, we look at discipline data in terms of type of offenses being committed, for example, how many fights, how many drug possessions, etc. From there, the admin team will often look for trends in that data to determine if we need to have a targeted intervention with specific populations. For example, if we have 100 fights, and 90 of them involve exclusively one grade of student, it would

> then behoove us to work with that particular grade. In terms of data shared with the staff, we will often only share data regarding numbers of different types of offenses. This is generally to facilitate the discussion with staff on what trends, trajectories we are seeing with types of offenses as well as discuss perceptions, everything is fine, or it's horrible compared with reality.

Participant 6 stated, "We analyze the discipline data on a monthly basis during our admin team meetings. We also review incident and resolutions in focus and quarterly reports."

Participant 12 described the use of the district online data lab. Participant 1 also stated,

> The data that we track is in a program called Infinite Campus, and we submit all behavior referrals and behavior issues within that program. You can separate it by ethnicity and repeat offenses, but the results, we only share them if they're requested.

Theme 5: Interventions Vary by School

Specific interventions vary by school, including social-emotional learning, PBIS, and support. Four participants mentioned social-emotional learning, and three mentioned PBIS. Participant 12 stated, "Social emotional learning headed by school social workers and restorative justice elements." As noted earlier, Participant 9 explained,

> We are moving away from office referrals and more toward the whole-school support such as social-emotional learning, increasing rigorous and meaningful learning processes, and providing greater support structures and classroom plan,

> turnaround plan, and office plan. Teachers can call for these supports, and we have specific staff that can address the need.

Participant 4 described a successful strategy of goal setting:

> We develop small goals to correct the behavior. When students meet their goals, they receive an incentive. Each plan is different and developed with student input. Since we implemented the system, office referrals have gone down over 70%.

Disciplinary improvement programs are still an underexplored area. Participant 3 stated,

> We are currently working with a vendor to implement the positive behavior programs [PBIS] at the school starting next school year. This will allow us to record and reward positive student behaviors and interactions instead of just focusing on the negative behavior.

Programs are new in some schools, as mentioned by the participants.

The majority of participants stated they work with school social workers, counselors, and school behavior and safety professionals. Counselors work closely with the administration and the students for referral purposes. Participant 2 mentioned, "Counselor referrals, especially for student conflicts, are a common first step." Participant 12 stated, "The school counselor is part of the behavior team and part of all decisions with the behavior team." However, such use was not consistent.

Participants 3 and 11 stated counselors are not heavily involved, and Participant 7 indicated not involving any counselors. Participant 3 stated,

> At this point, they [school counselors] are not heavily involved. They may have a particular student that they work with and know that they helped develop a plan with administration. But for the general population, they are not included as a part of the progression. However, this is something that's currently being discussed for implementation next school year.

Participant 8 explained, "Social workers . . . take on a counseling role for all offenses that are egregious in nature and are handled by both them and then administrators over discipline." Participant 11 responded, "We have a safe school professional who gets involved when it is drug or sex related, since that ties to mental and social emotional health." At some schools, counselors and social workers only became involved when the infractions were severe.

Theme 6: More Positive, Transparent Relationships

More positive, transparent relationships could improve discipline disparities. Participant 6 suggested "transparency with staff and parents regarding the statistics that we share within the school." When asked how discipline disparities could be changed for the better in schools, Participant 2 stated, "Support directly in the classroom, finding time and ways for the student and teacher to have a one-on-one conference with admin or counselor available to facilitate the sharing." Participant 4 stated, "All schools should implement school-wide positive intervention support and restorative justice practices for all students. This will limit behaviors that are referred to the office and allow and guide students to correct their behavior." A fundamental aspect of PBIS is positive relationships between students and teachers (Leverson et al., 2019). Yet, Participant 2 noted students

and teachers did not understand each other's perspectives: "Most students that are referred to repeatedly may believe that 'the teacher simply doesn't like me,' and the teacher believes the student 'doesn't want to respect' them. When there is a power struggle, no one wins."

Participant 5 recommended frequent conferences with parents and students to "allow all parties to express their feelings and all parties understand expectations moving forward, including consequences." However, Participant 6 noted parents did not update contact information, making calls or attempts at home visits impossible. Theme 6 is tied to Theme 1, related to professional development, and Theme 8, related to a lack of positive relationships as an obstacle to reducing office referrals and suspensions, particularly among Black students (Theme 8 is discussed in the section on Research Question 2).

Theme 7: No Consistent System for Monitoring Discipline Referral Patterns

Schools in the district do not have a consistent system for monitoring discipline referral patterns. Participants were asked about monitoring procedures to ensure teachers were interpreting rules fairly. Monitoring procedures reported by participants include supervision, documentation, follow-ups, and observations. Participant 2 responded, "When the referral is submitted, if there are not the minor events documented, the referral is sent back to the teacher to document what interventions took place first." Participant 3 stated,

> Administration can follow up with the teachers individually and check the teacher contact log to ensure phone calls have been made home. Administration will

> communicate with the teacher to verify steps have been followed prior to the discipline referral. However, there is generally no way to be 100% sure.

Participant 10 described working with individual teachers: "As referrals have drastically reduced, we've worked with specific teachers with students that are having difficulty improving reduction of discipline." Participant 4 described the use of a data system in which teachers input the intervention used: "If data is not being entered, the teacher is held accountable and will be retrained to enter behavior data." The data are reviewed by the MTSS committee. Similarly, Participant 4 stated,

> Our MTSS committee analyzes all behavior in fractions both minor and major, and often looks over repeat behaviors and intervention strategies utilized to correct the behavior. Often, members of the committee will support our teachers through behavior intervention plans and do whatever it takes to keep students in the classroom.

Finally, one participant indicated the school had no procedures to monitor referral patterns. Participant 7 stated, "We don't have a way of knowing whether teachers consistently follow the procedures." As Participant 3 noted, differences of opinion existed regarding what constituted a minor versus major infraction.

Research Question 2

What obstacles do school leaders perceive to reducing discipline referral and suspension rates among Black students? Four interview questions were used to answer the second research question. Two themes emerged, as shown in Table 1. Table 4 presents the codes for Themes 8–9, to answer Research Question 2.

Table 4

Themes 8–9 and Codes for Research Question 2: Obstacles to Reducing Referral Rates

Theme	Code
8. Participants described a lack of classroom management and lack of meaningful, positive relationships as an obstacle.	Inappropriate referrals High respect expectations Lack of classroom management Lack of positive relationships Racist staff members Power struggles
9. The perceived obstacles varied by participant, suggesting the need for consistent professional development.	Changing current mindset Consistent expectations Ensuring unbiased targeting Lack of meaningful relationships Parent involvement Perspective Misunderstanding stigma Undoing background influence

Theme 8: Lack of Classroom Management and Positive Relationships

Participants described a lack of classroom management and lack of meaningful, positive relationships as an obstacle. Inadequate classroom management led to inappropriate or frequent disciplinary referrals. Participant 1 said, “There are teachers that write 100 referrals a year, and there are those that just write one, so anyone writing 100 referrals may be over referring students and should develop a different classroom-management strategy.” Participant 4 described inappropriate referrals prior to implementing a framework: “Students were sent to the office previously for minor behavior infractions, such as eating in class. Additionally, teachers were yelling at students and were not trained on how to work and be patient with students.” Participant 3

stated teachers make inappropriate referrals "due to not fully understanding where different offenses fall on the progressive discipline matrix."

Lack of training or ability in forging meaningful relationships with students was noted. Participant 5 responded,

> A handful of teachers do fall into this category: They lack classroom management or haven't attempted to forge meaningful relationships with their students. An example would be submitting referrals for students not prepared for class, students not sitting in assigned seats, or students simply talking too much.

Participant 10 explained,

> Over referring has occurred. For all of these instances, I feel the patience for an individual is basically gone for the teacher, and they do not attempt de-escalation strategies, because they are tired of the same behaviors. With this example, I feel the teacher did not take the time to better get to know the student and develop a positive relationship with the student.

Teachers need training to develop classroom management and best practices related to developing student relationships and trust. Participant 12 stated, "This is always reflected in the teachers' lack of management tools, which falls on administration to provide appropriate supports for classroom-management success."

The participants also gave reasons for inappropriately referring students, including power struggles, mindsets, and racism. Many participants blamed the difficulty of changing the mindsets and past influences of teachers and Black students. Students are not open to trusting adults, and teachers have not adopted the culturally responsive

mindset. Participant 1 stated, “Really just changing the mindset of seasoned teachers seems to be our largest obstacle for reducing referrals among Black students. They just haven’t adopted that culturally responsive mindset that we need.” Participant 2 explained,

> I find that some teachers place a desire to be respected at such a high level, they are set up for failure before the class even begins. They demand respect simply because they are an adult, and that is not something that our society, regardless of race, ethnicity, embraces any longer. So, when a power struggle ensues, sometimes over something even minor like a hall pass or cell phone, the adult expects the student to comply without any effort for the student to explain their actions or reasons.

Similarly, Participant 7 said, “Yes, anytime a student does not follow a direction or are disrespectful in some way to a teacher, they’re quick to send them to the behavior office instead of trying interventions or trying to connect with the student to find out what is wrong.”

A few participants admitted to racist teachers. Participant 6 stated, “Yes, we have staff members who are racist and are completely unaware of this.” Participant 8 answered, “Data has demonstrated that there are a couple of teachers who over refer students of color. This data has been shared with these teachers and with their supervisors to begin to bridge this conversation.” Participant 7 noted “the stigma that Black students are more aggressive and argumentative with teachers or staff members. Staff are quick to send them out of the classroom instead of listening and trying to understand.”

Additionally, some participants mentioned the lack of communication between teachers, students, and parents, which causes distrust, defensiveness, and poor relationships. Participant 11 explained,

> I think that the obstacle at the high school level is that kids have already made up their minds about school, what they want to do or be in life, and if fixed mindset has set in, and been ingrained in a kid's mind, it is very, very challenging to transform that into a growth mindset. High school kids are not open to trusting adults as readily as younger students. Our children learn what they live.

Participant 2 stated,

> Not understanding each other's perspectives. Most students that are referred to repeatedly may believe that 'the teacher simply doesn't like me,' and the teacher believes the student 'doesn't want to respect' them When there is a power struggle, no one wins.

Participant 8 offered,

> One obstacle that we face is that both parents and students are immediately on the defensive, and the majority of the time is spent arguing rather than listening. There is much distrust in the Black community for authority figures, not without cause. But this distrust prevents parents and the school to become allies that benefit of the students.

When asked how discipline disparities for Black students could be changed for the better in schools, participants shared ideas that included professional development, cultural awareness training, and specific interventions. Three participants suggested more

professional learning for the teachers to be able to understand their students and apply disciplinary practices equitably. Participant 3 advocated for "more cultural awareness training for teachers and staff." Participant 9 observed, "Some teachers still need more professional learning and self-evaluation to better understand equity." Three participants stated that teachers should have specific interventions they follow to improve discipline disparities, including direct support, early interventions, equity assurance, and incorporating PBIS and restorative justice. Participant 2 noted administrator or counselor support is needed in the classroom to facilitate one-on-one connection between teacher and student.

To further improve relationships among all stakeholders, teachers, students, and parents should be involved in decision-making, according to one participant. Participant 8 said,

> We need to invite the parents and students of color to be involved in the decision-making processes of our disciplinary action. We need to also involve the Black staff members that we have in leadership and decision-making. We need to also involve the Black staff members that we have in leadership and decision-making, especially in the area of disciplinary consequences.

Theme 9: Perceived Obstacles Varied by Participant

The perceived obstacles varied by participant, suggesting the need for consistent professional development. For instance, some participants blamed intractable mindsets and defensiveness among the Black community, students, and parents. Some mentioned similarly rigid mindsets among teachers. Some participants admitted to having racist

teachers on staff. Participants mentioned lack of quality relationships and communication with parents and students. Other obstacles included a lack of clear understanding of the types of infractions considered major or minor and the appropriate teacher response. Additionally, participants whose schools had implemented PBIS reported positive results. These varying responses suggest a district-wide need for professional development to increase teacher cultural awareness and build better relationships in schools as well as clearly identify a disciplinary infraction framework.

Discrepant Cases

I used triangulation and member checking to ensure that discrepant cases were handled appropriately (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2016) recommended using multiple sources of investigation when attempting to achieve validity. I gave direct attention to discrepant data during analysis to determine the credibility and dependability of this study. The data collected reflected the perceptions of principals and assistant principals from 12 public schools in one district. No truly discrepant cases were found, although Participant 7 repeatedly indicated a lack of professional development opportunities.

Evidence of Quality

The two significant steps taken to ensure that a high standard of research quality was maintained were member checking and triangulation. Triangulation was in place as I interviewed 12 participants to draw a range of information from multiple data sources (see Lambert, 2012). A member check is a strategy to “check-in” with participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 4). I emailed a copy of the transcript to each participant for

review for accuracy. This process of reviewing transcripts added to the validity of the study (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore school leaders' perceptions of how to reduce the disciplinary actions taken with Black students within the public schools of a county school district in a Southwest U.S state. I used interview questions to gather school administrators' perceptions of the different methods or procedures used to manage discipline referrals among Black students. The responses also revealed obstacles to equitable discipline. Participants shared thoughts and ideas on what should be changed to ensure better discipline equity for all students.

Research Question 1 was the following: What strategies do school leaders use (if any) to reduce discipline referral rates, including suspensions, among Black students? The data showed school leaders have been using various methods to reduce discipline referral rates among Black students. The data revealed seven themes. School leaders and the district offer professional development on PBIS, behavior management, social-emotional learning, social justice, restorative justice, and culturally responsive teaching. Discipline expectations are communicated to students through various methods depending on the school. Office referral procedures depend on infraction. Discipline data are analyzed based on repeat offenses, ethnicity, and type of offense. Specific interventions vary by school, including social-emotional learning, PBIS, and support from school counselors. More positive, transparent relationships among staff, parents, and all stakeholders could improve discipline disparities. Finally, schools in the district

do not have a consistent system for monitoring discipline referral patterns. The results suggest considerable variance in disciplinary strategies and procedures in high schools in the district. Some of the areas that have not been used include use of data tracking systems, adopting PBIS, and ensuring teachers are culturally competent to understand students.

Research Question 2 was the following: What obstacles do school leaders perceive to reducing discipline referral and suspension rates among Black students? Two themes emerged. Participants described a lack of classroom management and lack of meaningful, positive relationships as obstacles. The perceived obstacles varied by participant and school, suggesting the need for consistent professional development across the district. Professional development on developing meaningful relationships with students, preventing power struggles, as well as training on cultural competence could improve disciplinary practices in the district.

Section 3: The Project

The purpose of this study was to explore school leaders' perceptions of how to reduce the disciplinary actions taken with Black students within the public schools of a county school district of a Southwest U.S. state. The research conducted in this qualitative study revealed obstacles to equitable discipline. Results indicated variance in disciplinary strategies and procedures in high schools in the district. Areas that could improve include use of data tracking systems, adopting PBIS, and ensuring teachers are culturally competent to understand students. Participants identified obstacles of a lack of classroom management and lack of meaningful, positive relationships. Professional development on developing meaningful relationships with students, preventing power struggles, and developing cultural competence could improve disciplinary practices in the district.

The project resulting from this study was a staff development that focused on cultural competency and solutions to discipline disparities. Data collection from the southwestern schools revealed the administrators' emphasis on additional training on cultural competency. The administrators interviewed emphasized a need for positive, transparent relationships among staff, parents, and other stakeholders to improve discipline disparities. Findings indicated a lack of professional development in effective discipline and best practices for behavior modification. Based on the study findings, I designed a 3-day professional development workshop emphasizing training teachers and staff members regarding cultural biases, equity and diversity, and cultural competency. As part of this professional development, teachers and staff will collaborate, explore,

review, and practice strategies to decrease discipline disparities and increase effective discipline practices.

Rationale

As explained in Section 1, disproportionate disciplinary measures by race create an inequitable learning environment. Disproportionate expulsions and suspensions of Black students negatively impact education because these disciplinary measures result in lost learning time (Larson et al., 2018). To provide equitable and fair disciplinary actions while maintaining a safe and trusting environments for all students, schools and districts have implemented professional development on PBIS, behavior management, social-emotional learning, social justice, restorative justice, and culturally responsive teaching. Lack of culturally responsive school leadership can lead to disproportionate disciplinary decisions. Nguyen et al. (2019) and Osha et al. (2015) conducted studies on culturally responsive teaching highlighting that teacher training is necessary for teachers to recognize inherent bias in their disciplinary decisions. Schools are in dire need of leaders who acknowledge the fundamental importance of social justice and reconstruct their institutions and visions around equitable practices (Chin & Trimble, 2015). The current project included strategies to reinforce Ford's (2017) model of connecting professional development to improving cultural competence within schools. An exploration of administrators' perceptions of school disciplinary policies and teacher–student relationships revealed aspects used to support the development of this project.

I decided to create a professional development training because studies had shown professional development keeps educators abreast of the changing educational needs of

youths (see Granger et al., 2018). Professional development promotes a better understanding of student performance while attempting to keep up with education reform and district needs (Skourdoumbis, 2017). This training will offer teachers and staff members an overview of the evidence-based professional learning strategies recommended to assist teachers with discipline in classroom settings. The use of this project will provide high school teachers of the study's district with some evidence-based strategies to strengthen culturally responsive teaching through professional development.

Review of the Literature

The goal of this review of the literature was to promote a quality project based on online databases of scholarly peer-reviewed articles. To find current and relevant studies, the databases SAGE, ERIC, Education Research, and ProQuest were used. I also used the Google Scholar search engine. The keywords and phrases used to conduct the research included *professional development*, *cultural competence*, *classroom management*, *fair and equitable educational practices*, *mentoring*, *andragogy*, and *teacher efficacy*.

Beginning With the "Why"

Adults learn differently from children; their learning is motivated by the understanding that the knowledge is needed and can address a specific problem (Greenhaw & Denny, 2020; Knowles, 1975; Veiga-Branco, 2018). Andragogy, or adult learning theory, as developed by Knowles (1975), undergirded the professional development project. Adults are self-directed and learn based on a perceived need to address a daily problem. Particularly for in-service or veteran teachers, an understanding that professional development is relevant and needed is important (Greenhaw & Denny,

2020). Many of the studies on teaching cultural competence or classroom management described courses with preservice teachers (Alarcón & Bettez, 2021; El-Abd & Chaaban, 2021; Eliyahu-Levi & Ganz-Meishar, 2020; Feize & Gonzalez, 2018; Kumar et al., 2018). Convincing in-service teachers of the need for professional development is a different learning situation.

Effective professional development to implement school change should "begin with the why" (Missouri Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support, 2019, p. 13). Communicating the need for change in disciplinary practices is important in establishing a shared vision for changes in classroom management (Missouri Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support, 2019). Presenting background evidence, as shown in Chapter 1 of this study, indicating the problem with inequitable disciplinary practices throughout the district—and the nation—will be needed to convince teachers of the need for change. Teachers will learn the evidence that Black students are disproportionately suspended (American Civil Liberties Union, 2019; Larson et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Further, the disproportion is not based on Black students' behavior; Quinlan (2016) showed Black students received disciplinary consequences, whereas their White peers received only warnings for identical infractions.

Classroom Management

Classroom management is vital for student learning and is the foundation of discipline decision by teachers (Collier-Meek et al., 2019). Teacher self-efficacy in classroom management not only decreases problem behaviors in students but also decreases teacher burnout and increases teacher retention (El-Abd & Chaaban, 2021).

Preventive practices such as PBIS improve classroom culture and student behavior, increasing instructional time (Collier-Meek et al., 2019). Teachers initially need to understand that problem behavior is a form of communication by students, indicating they need more engagement, more help with the work, or someone to listen (Missouri Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support, 2019). Two studies focused on professional development in classroom management among in-service teachers rather than preservice students: Collier-Meek et al. (2019) and Mitchell et al. (2018).

Collier-Meek et al. (2019) addressed the problem that teachers are often overwhelmed with the multiple aspects of classroom management, leading to feelings of low self-efficacy. Collier-Meek et al. sought to determine which of the evidence-based classroom management strategies were most effective to decrease the learning load on in-service teachers. Collier-Meek et al. examined 14 strategies of classroom management identified in the research and determined two were particularly effective: (a) frequent references to the schedule and routines and (b) behavior-specific praise. These two practices should be the pillars of classroom management in-service training.

Clear Expectations

Mitchell et al. (2018) reported clear expectations and routines are foundational to effective classroom management. Classroom management includes a foundation based on clearly expressed expectations for both students and teachers (Center on PBIS, 2022; Collier-Meek et al., 2019; El-Abd & Chaaban, 2021; Kratochwill et al., 2010). Expectations in a high school classroom should be devised with input from students to create a shared vision for expected behavior and collective responsibility (Kratochwill et

al., 2010). Involving student input gives students decision-making power and increases personal accountability (Alarcón & Bettez, 2021). Teachers should never assume students understand appropriate behavior; expectations should be visible and taught at the beginning of the school year, with five or fewer expectations taught in each lesson (Kratochwill et al., 2010). These expectations should be posted in the classroom, modeled by the teacher, and referred to throughout the school year (Center on PBIS, 2022; Collier-Meek et al., 2019; Kratochwill et al., 2010). Terminology should be made clear; for example, "being respectful" is vague and should be explained with specific examples (Kratochwill et al., 2010). This process is an opportunity to gain input from students, making the vision for behavior a joint endeavor. Additionally, these expectations are a sort of contract between teacher and students.

Frequent References to Routines or Schedule

Collier-Meek et al. (2019) found frequently referring to classroom schedules or routines was a particularly effective form of classroom management. Glock and Cate (2021) reported reminders of such structure were necessary for students showing externalizing behavior, such as talking loudly or being disruptive. Mitchell et al. (2018) noted emphasizing routines and clear expectations was a simple yet often underused method of classroom management.

Behavior-Specific Praise

Behavior-specific praise should be given at higher rates than teachers likely expect. Guidelines are a desired 5:1 ratio of praise to correction in the classroom (Center on PBIS, 2022; Collier-Meek et al., 2019). Teachers should actively increase the amount

of behavior-specific praise, according to observations by Collier-Meek et al. (2019). Error corrections are calm statements noting specific infractions and may be needed to correct problem behavior. Behavior-specific praise is a powerful method of increasing good classroom behavior (Kratochwill et al., 2010).

Opportunities to Respond

Preventive strategies, which create an environment preventing inappropriate behavior, include offering students frequent opportunities to respond and express themselves (Collier-Meek et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2018). Mitchell et al. (2018) noted many teachers are unaware of the importance of giving students opportunities to respond. Opportunities to respond relate to student engagement. Engagement results when students are involved in decision making in the classroom, such as a degree of autonomy in choosing topics or materials (Kratochwill et al., 2010). Positive relationships between teachers and students are important for engagement and a feeling of belonging (El-Abd & Chaaban, 2021; Kumar et al., 2018). Teachers in El-Abd and Chaaban's (2021) study learned students do not need to be silent for a managed classroom; rather, students needed constructive conversations facilitated by a calm, friendly teacher. Such engagement also contributes to a culturally relevant classroom, as described in a later section of this review.

Additional Practices

Another preventive strategy in classroom management is active supervision. Active supervision and monitoring occur as teachers walk through the classroom checking on students working in small groups or independently (Collier-Meek et al.,

2019). This instructional strategy also offers the opportunity for behavior-specific praise. Active supervision likely hones teachers' "noticing" skills (Michalsky, 2021, p. 1). Such skills help teachers, in turn, teach self-regulation strategies to students of setting a goal, working toward the goal, and evaluating progress (Michalsky, 2021).

Alarcón and Bettez (2021) offered the strategy of active listening to improve classroom management. In their study, active listening was part of an effort to use cultural awareness to build a community in the classroom. Alarcón and Bettez described 32 hours of training among preservice teachers to help them improve cultural competence and interpret "sociocultural contexts" (p. 275). Such training was not practical for the current in-service professional development project. However, the practice of active listening may be incorporated into teacher training and combined with the strategy of active supervision.

Kratochwill et al. (2010) described the practices of clear expectations, behavior-specific praise, and student opportunities to respond as part of basic classroom management, or Tier 1 of PBIS. Tier 2 refers to more intensive behavioral strategies needed with subgroups of students. Tier 2 students may need small group work related to anger management or conflict resolution. Kratochwill et al. advised the teacher must not create rules the teacher is not willing to enforce. Additionally, response to misbehavior must be consistent, without embarrassing students. OSS should be a last resort. Teachers should be willing to seek help from a school counselor if needed (Kratochwill et al., 2010).

Hands-On Versus Vicarious Learning

Mitchell et al. (2018) described the practice of professional development in classroom management involving hands-on practice as well as coaching and follow-through. Using peer teaching or team teaching allows instructors to continually self-reflect on teaching practices. For example, teacher pairs evaluated each other's frequency of offering specific praise and opportunities for student response. One-shot workshops are unlikely to change behavior, whereas continued reinforcement and self-evaluation will (Mitchell et al., 2018). In their study to improve classroom management among in-service teachers, Mitchell et al. offered three professional development sessions with time between each session for coaching and feedback. Teacher learning teams continued to review discipline data and classroom practices after the professional development.

El-Abd and Chaaban (2021) studied whether vicarious observation of a veteran teacher helped preservice teachers increase self-efficacy in classroom management. Findings showed students did not benefit from observation but needed hands-on experience to increase self-efficacy. El-Abd and Chaaban stressed the basic aspects of classroom management: clear expectations, repeated routines, student engagement, and positive relationships between teacher and students. Perhaps role-playing could contribute to effective professional development in both classroom management and cultural awareness.

Cultural Awareness

Teachers of diverse student populations require empathy and understanding of multiple cultures. However, no single effective method has emerged from the literature to

effectively teach cultural awareness to teachers (Parkhouse et al., 2019). In a systematic review of 40 studies on professional development to increase teacher efficacy with culturally diverse students, Parkhouse et al. (2019) reported "we found a small literature base with too much variation across types of programs studied and outcomes analyzed to draw conclusions about the factors that contribute to effectiveness" (p. 416).

According to Kumar et al. (2018), a culturally competent teacher understands the various cultures represented by the student population, has self-awareness of cultural background and presumptions, and stresses the value of differences among students. Developing cultural competence first requires self-reflection (Kumar et al., 2018; Lindom, 2020). The process of developing cultural awareness is ongoing, with teachers learning about student cultures (Lindom, 2020). Teachers should consider how societal structures affect student behavior as well. A culturally aware or responsive approach is a mindset used in everyday teaching (Samuels, 2018).

Self-Awareness

As noted, the first step in cultural awareness is self-reflection. Social work students in a study by Feize and Gonzalez (2018) rejected the term "competence," preferring the terms of "cultural awareness" and "cultural humility" (p. 477). Through humility, individuals could increase receptivity and self-awareness, including awareness of personal bias (Feize & Gonzalez, 2018). Cultural awareness involved evaluation of ethics, policy, and personal emotions and training to reject stereotypes. Feize and Gonzalez noted racism is deeply embedded in U.S. society.

Byrd (2021) detailed specific aspects of resistance to developing cultural competence. Understanding motivations to resistance might help develop more effective training. Individuals may deny the existence of inequality, preferring to believe in a just world. Such individuals need to become aware of structural inequality (Byrd, 2021). In the current study, broad as well as specific evidence of disproportionate discipline referrals based on race may be important. Individuals may feel overwhelmed, understanding the existence of inequality but feeling unable to address it (Byrd, 2021). This response is based on low self-efficacy, according to Byrd. Professional development is designed to increase such self-efficacy. Some individuals may feel the problem exists but is not relevant to them; reflection and increase self-efficacy is needed to address such an attitude (Byrd, 2021).

Practical Classroom Activities

In addition to understanding personal bias and societal structures of inequity, teachers need simple, practical methods of increasing cultural awareness in their classrooms. Classroom practices promoting cultural awareness include actively seeking student input in topics or classroom decision-making (Kumar et al., 2018). Such shared decision-making promotes not only cultural awareness, but also classroom management and positive student behavior (Alarcón & Bettez, 2021). Lindom (2020) recommended a strengths-based approach involving respect for individual differences. Such an approach ties into the effective use of praise in classroom management (Collier-Meek et al., 2019).

Samuels (2018) emphasized positive teacher–student relationships in increasing cultural awareness in the classroom. Culturally aware teachers build a classroom

community (Alarcón & Bettez, 2021) by connecting students, teachers, families, and surrounding community (Samuels, 2018). Including student voices and opinions in classroom discussions and decision-making helps increase student self-esteem and engagement. Dialog and conversations with students increase understanding as well as student engagement (Samuels, 2018). Giving high school students involvement and some autonomy in their learning leads to improved cultural awareness as well as better classroom management.

Real Talk

I saw Adolph Brown as a keynote speaker at a cultural competency training years ago and bought his book, *Real Talk: Lessons in Uncommon Sense: Nurturing Potential and Inspiring Excellence in Young People* (Brown, 2008). He grew up as a "pipeline kid," he said, referring to the school-to-prison pipeline that begins with disproportionate suspensions. Brown understands the issues and provides practical strategies to work on them. His top message is that relationships yield results. In his book, Brown has shown educators how to teach with heart and empathy and connect with students. Each chapter concludes with a reflection page titled, "Notes to Nurture Potential and Inspire Excellence in Young People—What I've Learned from This Chapter and What I Will Change." Brown's book will tie together teacher training on classroom management principles and cultural awareness.

Project Description

The project's overall goal is to provide teachers with cultural competency training in order to increase confidence, knowledge, and effectiveness. There is a shortlist of

resources needed for the implementation of the professional development. The school will need to order copies of Brown's (2008) book, *Real Talk: Lessons in Uncommon Sense: Nurturing Potential and Inspiring Excellence in Young People.* The teachers will receive an email about the date and time of the training. The first training will take place during the summer staff development day scheduled in August. The second and third dates will be scheduled during the fall and winter staff development days (September and November, presumptively). In addition to teachers, the school administrators will be encouraged to take part in the training. The best scenario would bring each school together independently for school-wide practices. Mitchell et al. (2018) also offered three professional development sessions, with time between each session for coaching and feedback to improve classroom management among in-service teachers.

The title of the suggested PowerPoint is *Pausing Perceptions.* The goals of the professional training sessions are to give the educators an overview of the local demographics and to outline the impact of school suspension data. After the summary of the local statistics, the educators will be given highlights of the selected topics based on the themes related to the research from this study.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

The PowerPoint in Appendix A provides the specifics for the application of the professional development. In many training scenarios, some barriers are expected. Preventative measures will be put in place to plan the best outcomes for the training sessions. Stakeholders will be notified of the professional development dates with ample time to make preparations. Reminder notifications will be distributed via email. To

ensure minimal technical difficulties, the setting of the training will be checked to ensure all websites, links, and presentation materials work properly. The timeline, roles and responsibilities will be delegated and discussed before the end of the 2022-2023 school year to ensure the plan is in place for the 2023-2024 school year.

Proposal Implementation and Timetable

The plan for implementation of the proposed project will begin at the end of the 2022-2023 school year. Before school staff is released for the school year, training coordinators will develop the plan for the training session in August. The summer staff development day is a mandatory allotted time for district-wide professional development. Implementation of the project will take place during the summer staff development day scheduled in August and the fall and winter staff development days scheduled in September and November. The proposed timeline is as follows: In May 2023, planning will occur for summer staff development. August 2023, the first session will take place: Summer Staff Development Day: Knowing Your "Why." October 2023, the second session will take place: Fall Staff Development Day: Cultural Competency Training. November 2023, the third session will take place: Winter Staff Development Day: *Real Talk* Book Study.

Roles and Responsibilities

The plan is to acknowledge the roles and responsibilities before the end of the 2022-2023 school year. I will take the role of the facilitator by presenting the outline for the study to the administrators. My position as the facilitator requires working with administrators to organize the communication with teachers about the requirements and

expectations for each training session. The plan is to work closely with the administrators to ensure the physical setting is prepared for the training in August, the book is ordered, and an accountability procedure is in place for the teachers.

District leaders will be responsible for communicating the professional development plan to applicable schools. High school administrators will be expected to support the attendance and engagement of the courses through school site reminders and will be highly encouraged to complete the training as well. Teachers participating in the training will be responsible for internet access as well as a technical resource to successfully access the training. Participants will be responsible for practicing the strategies taught in the training.

Project Evaluation Plan

Formative assessments will be conducted via Google Forms at the completion of each training. Participants will be asked to complete a post training survey in which they will be asked to note any gained insights, clarifications and remaining questions, and feedback for future content. The feedback from these surveys will help pinpoint areas that need improvement for future professional development and training. At the conclusion of the entire professional development, participants will complete a survey with open-ended questions regarding content, delivery, pacing, relevance, effectiveness, and whether specific learning outcomes were achieved. The surveys are located in Appendix A as part of the project materials.

Project Implications

The problem was a disparity in disciplinary actions taken toward Black students as compared to White students within the public schools of a county school district in a Southwest U.S. state. Based on an exploration of school leader perceptions of how to reduce the disciplinary actions taken with Black students, the solution devised is professional development on classroom management through cultural awareness and development of meaningful relationships with students. A 3-day training course for high school teachers will provide opportunities for reflection and practice, with time between each training day for feedback. Teachers will benefit from this project by learning how to implement fair, equitable, and effective classroom management procedures for all students. The project focuses on current discipline disparities discovered in the southwestern state and works to alleviate those disparities to allow for effective culturally responsive teaching. The professional development is expected to increase the teachers' capacity to implement effective discipline practices. The training also allows participants to engage firsthand with culturally relevant teaching by viewing recordings and reading articles relevant to cultural competency and respective content areas and allows for immediate application of new knowledge to strengthen effective discipline practices. Finally, the dialogue generated via the discussions will provide teachers with further examples of best practices while building a community of learners.

This project influences the larger context through a research based district level response to the problem of a disparity in disciplinary actions taken toward Black students as compared to White students within the public high schools of a county school district

in a Southwest U.S. state. The disparity in disciplinary actions taken toward Black students as compared to White students remains a major national problem (Hines-Datiri, 2015). This project has the potential to address this issue at the local and national level. Parkhouse et al. (2019) reported an inadequate literature base on professional development to increase cultural competence among educators. This study adds to the knowledge base.

Conclusion

The project, a professional development entitled Pause the Perceptions, was designed to provide teachers with the professional training to consistently implement effective discipline practices in their respective classroom communities. The data collected and analyzed from this study indicate that teachers want and need training in cultural awareness to reduce racial disparities in discipline. The findings also reveal the need for consistent professional development to create meaningful, positive relationships among teachers and students. The evaluation methods of this project included both formative and summative assessments of participants.

The continuation of the project's implications for the future is described in Section 4. Conclusions of the research in addition to self-reflection are included in the next section. Finally, the project's strengths, recommendations for alternate approaches, and potential for social change for the research are also presented.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gather information regarding school leaders' perceptions of reducing discipline disparities among Black and White students in the public schools of a Southwest U.S. state. The lack of professional development on cultural competency and equitable educational practices may have shaped inequitable outcomes for Black students in the study district. The participants outlined some of the training beneficial to staff members and student learning environments, which may enhance culturally responsive school leadership and appropriate and fair disciplinary decisions and prevent cultural biases and social injustices in the classroom.

The need for this study was supported by the 2017 district-wide data that Black students represented 14.2% of the school population and accounted for 42.9% of OSS (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). These data demonstrated a disproportionate number of total suspensions for Black students compared to their White peers in the local school district. This study was based on a local problem. The implementation of the professional development in Appendix A has the potential to support positive change for Black students.

When considering an instrument to gather data, I endeavored to ensure accuracy, rigor, and consistency. Interviews were used to explore the school leaders' perceptions of the evidence-based strategies in place to support the reduction of discipline disparities. Intentional thought was given to the process of providing clear, concise information to the participants before, during, and after the interview. The letter of consent gave the

potential participants details about the study. To aid in the acquisition of data that reflected the interviewees' recollection of strategies and perceptions, I developed an interview protocol.

The creation of additional resources is an added strength and hopeful outcome of the professional development. Professional development is a forum used to improve teachers' skills to better meet the needs of their students, thereby improving teacher–student relationships in the classroom (Nguyen et al., 2019; Osha et al., 2015). This project study resulted in a plan for professional development to support the school leaders with assisting teachers with cultural awareness and classroom management. The planned staff training will address the evidence-based strategies needed to improve the classroom structures and decrease the disproportionate number of suspensions in high school. A plan for implementation of cultural competency training offers the educators of the local high schools a long-term training solution.

The project from this study was designed based on the research findings, but there is the possibility of limitations. The limitations could take place when there is not complete buy-in from stakeholders. There has not been a commitment to purchase the book suggested for this training, which could cause difficulty with presenting the new information. Fundamentals such as cost have the potential to be the root of limitations. The plan for implementation of the professional development has not been finalized. Budget and time constraints are limitations of this project study.

Recommendations for an Alternative Approach

The problem investigated in this study was the disproportionate number of suspensions for Blacks students impacted by a lack of cultural understanding. A recommended alternative approach for improving school culture and climate is ongoing professional development using professional learning communities. The integration of professional learning communities might support the school leaders with carrying out the evidence-based strategies. Other alternative approaches include an online training format, a blended learning format, and a training for school leaders to enable a train-the-trainer format to allow building leaders to train faculty on campus.

Scholarship

I chose to study the school leaders' perceptions of strategies in place to support the reduction of discipline disparities in the local school district. Disproportionate suspensions negatively impact Black students, and such disciplinary measures result in lost learning time, decreased academic achievement, and increased incarceration. Findings from this study may contribute to the understanding of the disparity in the system and the large number of Black students being suspended. The research helped me to improve my professional practice as an assistant principal and instructional leader. Through the time-consuming journey of scholarship, I gained a tremendous amount of knowledge concerning the implementation of evidence-based interventions to support teachers and school leaders. I hope to use the experience to make contributions to assist with creating a school culture of equity and to reduce suspensions and help Black students remain in the classroom and succeed in school.

Project Development and Evaluation

The development of this project began with a purpose. The purpose of my study was to gather information regarding school leaders' perceptions of how to reduce the disciplinary actions taken with Black students in the public schools of a county school district in a Southwest U.S. state. This purpose changed many times throughout the research. The length of time I took to complete each phase of the capstone played a significant role in the revising and revisiting of my point of view. The next stage of development led me to the frame, method, and analysis for this research.

During the preliminary stage, the research regarding various conceptual frameworks led me to Knowles's (1975) and Price's (2019) theories of culturally responsive school leadership and adult learning. The conversations with my committee members helped me with the selection of qualitative methodology. The data analysis for research was driven by the desire to have a study based on validity and merit. After outlining the background and finding a local issue to be addressed, I examined scholarly peer-reviewed articles relating to disproportionate and inequitable discipline practices.

The following questions helped with evaluating the problem at the local school district: What is missing from the available information? What would be the consequences for not having additional information about the problem with disproportionate levels of suspensions for Black students? The systemized research was a method of exploring the experiences administrators had with reducing rates of discipline referrals for Black students.

Finally, I developed the following research questions: What strategies do school leaders use (if any) to reduce discipline referral rates, including suspensions, among Black students? What obstacles do school leaders perceive to reducing discipline referral and suspension rates among Black students? The questions were established to guide the study. The two research questions led to the exploration of the school leaders' perceptions relating to the climate and cultures surrounding the implementation of the restorative justice practices and culturally responsive teaching. Additional reviews of the literature occurred throughout the research.

Leadership and Change

Change revealed itself with each literature review. My goal with this study was to become a better leader in the field of instructional school leadership. What arose during this research process was the love for new knowledge. My role as a lifelong learner and instructional leader continues to be achieved as I apply myself to the extended plan. The journey of questions, literature reviews, methods, and analysis opened the door to new questions, new insights, and a change in leadership. Throughout the research process, I investigated, revisited, and revised while examining the passion leaders are investing in the success of underprivileged students. A change in leadership will be demonstrated as I continue to share my knowledge with the implementation of the project based on the research.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The goals of the project design and the established practices for providing teachers with cultural competency training are vital to the continued development of

effective school leaders. Too many Black students are getting suspended or expelled compared to their peers of other races (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Training teachers for effective discipline and best practices for behavior modification is a step in the right direction to mitigate this global problem (Elias, 2013). The project study outcomes are meaningful because they allow teachers to become effective in cultural responsiveness while also growing and developing their skills as culturally competent educators. The project promotes self-reliance, critical thinking skills, and advocacy through rigorous instruction and course materials.

The project may provide the teachers and administrators at the local school district with practices and procedures to improve the classroom environment. The project offers essential components to support an already inspired group of school leaders. The project has the potential to stimulate a professional learning community involving shared knowledge and a drive for social change. The message behind the professional development is grounded on strategies to improve the implementation of evidence-based practices that will support all students in the classroom. The goal is to strengthen the foundation at the local high schools and decrease the number of suspensions and expulsions. I plan to share my knowledge with the teachers and administrators so the students will have access to an equitable class that can influence the educational journey in a positive manner. Educators interested in helping decrease disproportionalities will be able to use this project study.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The project's implications for social change are a significant component of this project study. The influence on positive change exists on many levels. Implications in the study's limitations are at the school and district levels. This project's applications are based on my interpretation of the perceptions of teachers and administrators. Understanding there is a potential for bias based on my experiences, I used the information from the interview transcripts and notes to formulate the plan for the project. The methodological choices I used for this research kept the participants' thoughts and opinions a priority.

The basic qualitative approach to this study provided school leaders an opportunity to share the knowledge that may support future research. The implications for future research involve the reflection of several pedagogical practices. Qualitative studies on cultural competence training could support this study's results. Additionally, a mixed-methods study that includes both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine school leaders' perceptions of reducing disciplinary disparities could reveal additional solutions. Finally, a quasi-experimental study that measures disciplinary action taken among Black students before and after the professional development could provide more information on project efficacy.

Conclusion

There continue to be behaviors in local district schools that are harmful to the learning environment of Black students. Teachers rely on exclusionary consequences to change the problematic circumstances. The purpose of this study was to gather

perceptions of school leaders of how to reduce the disciplinary actions taken with Black students in the public schools of a county school district in a Southwest U.S. state. The project, a professional development program titled Pause the Perceptions, is designed to provide school leaders with the professional training to implement fair, equitable, and effective classroom management procedures in their respective local schools. The data revealed a need for additional training to support the application of methods relating to cultural competence. The school leaders of the schools offered versions of evidence-based practices employed by individual teachers. The inconsistency and the variation in determination for meeting expectations in the school may be a contributing factor to the high levels of suspensions for Black students. The data collected and analyzed from this study indicated that teachers need professional development related to cultural awareness to implement equitable disciplinary practices.

The participants' level of willingness to share information about the phenomenon demonstrated a commitment to the purpose. The plan for professional development and the integration of a district-wide cultural competency training might help the teachers and administrators carry out the evidence-based strategies at a higher level of intensity to address the discipline disparities among Black students. My role as a facilitator to promote positive change will be to share the project with the district leadership team. Expectations for the collaborative forum include producing a plan for implementing a version of the project located in Appendix A.

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Appendix A: The Project

The genre chosen for the project is a three-day Professional Development. An outline below gives an overview of the proposed project. The targeted audience is the high school teachers from the local school in a southwestern state.

The purpose of this professional development is to provide three days of cultural competency training in order to increase confidence, knowledge, and effectiveness in these teachers. The goals of this project were established based on the data collection, which focused on a need to provide a collaborative forum. Additionally, the proposed goal will assist the local school district with joining forces to expand the systems in place to support all students in the classroom.

The proposed learning outcomes will establish an environment that embraces the components of a professional learning community. The stated goals include gaining a better understanding of the evidence-based strategies to implement fair, equitable, and effective classroom management procedures for all students and augmenting an ongoing plan for leadership, which will address the disproportionate number of suspensions for Black students.

Daily Schedule

Implementation Schedule:

Professional Development

Day 1: Knowing Your “Why”:

Time: 8 am – 3 pm for all high school teachers

Duration: 7 hours

Day 2: Cultural Competency Training:

Time: 8 am – 3 pm for all high school teachers

Duration: 7 hours

Day 3: *Rea; Talk* Book Study:

Time: 8 am – 3 pm for all high school teachers

Duration: 7 hours

Daily Agenda

Day 1: Knowing Your "Why"

Resources needed: a laptop computer, SmartBoard, and projector

8 am – 8:30: Breakfast

8:30 – 9:30 Team Building Activity

- Name Game
- Stand Up, Sit Down

9:30 – 11:30: Demographics of Our District

Computers (online search)

11:30 – 12:30: Lunch

12:30 – 1:30: Bridging Racial, Class, and Cultural Differences

- Breakout session
- Bias Quiz and Reflection
- Activity: Sharing perceptions

1:30 – 2:30: Motivational Framework for Culturally Inclusive Teaching

- Pre-Assessment
- Inclusion
- Attitude

2:30 – 3:00: Closing

- Evaluation

Day 2: Cultural Competence Training

Resources needed: a laptop computer, SmartBoard, and projector

8 am – 8:30: Breakfast

8:30 – 9:30: Team Building Activity

- Two Truths, One Lie
- Desert Island Intelligence

9:30 – 11:30: Ted Talk: A Tale of Two Teachers (Video)

- 3 Types of Teacher Diversity Training
- Multicultural Critical Reflective Practice

11:30 – 12:30: Lunch

12:30 – 1:30: The Intersections of Culture and Learning

- Strategies for Culturally Relevant Teaching

1:30 – 2:30: Motivational Framework for Culturally Inclusive Teaching

- Competence
- Meaning

- Post-Assessment

2:30 – 3:00: Closing

- Evaluation

Day 3: Real Talk

Resources needed: a laptop computer, SmartBoard, and projector, *Real Talk* book by Adolph Brown

8 am – 8:30: Breakfast

8:30 – 9:30: Team Building Activity

- Hello, My Name Is…
- Hot Takes

9:30 – 11:00: Love, Light, and Insight (video)

- Family and Community Engagement
- Servant Leadership

11:00 – 12:00: Lunch

12:30 – 2:00: *Real Talk* Book study

- *Real Talk* lessons reflection
- Think, Pair, Share

2:00 – 2:30: Design Thinking Process

2:30 – 3:00: Closing

- Evaluation

The PowerPoint Presentation

Pause the Perceptions

Knowing Your "Why" ⋆ Cultural Competency Training ⋆ *Real Talk*

Implementation Timeline

Day One

2023 Summer Staff Development

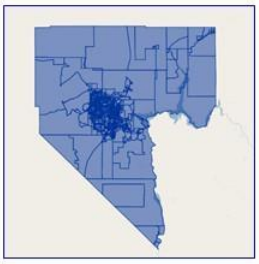
Knowing Your "Why"

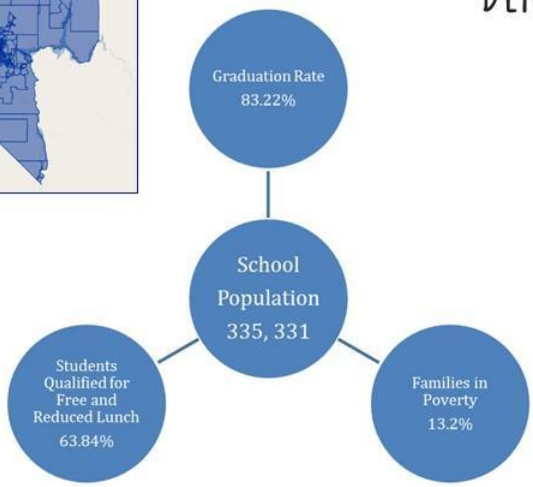
- Demographics of Clark County School District
- *Beyond the Bake Sale* - Bridging Racial, Class, and Cultural Differences
- Motivational Framework for Culturally Inclusive Teaching

By the end of this presentation, you will ...

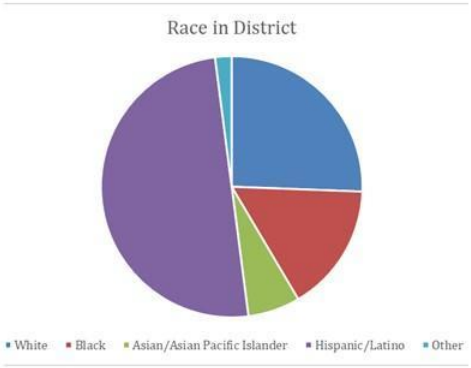
Be able to understand what culturally relevant teaching is.
Be able to recall the preconditions for culturally relevant teaching.
Be able to identify characteristics of culturally relevant teaching
Be able to utilize culturally relevant teaching strategies to enhance your pedagogical practices in your classrooms.

Learning Outcomes





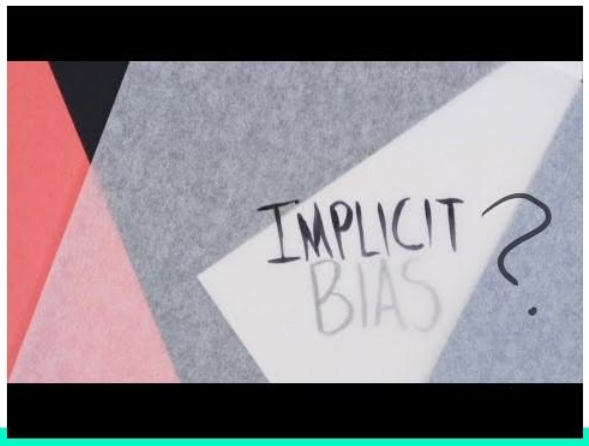
Demographics of our district



Bridging racial, class, and cultural differences

Please independently complete the checklist. As you finish, begin to reflect on how you and your school can help design a plan for improving ways to create a culture of learning and achievement.

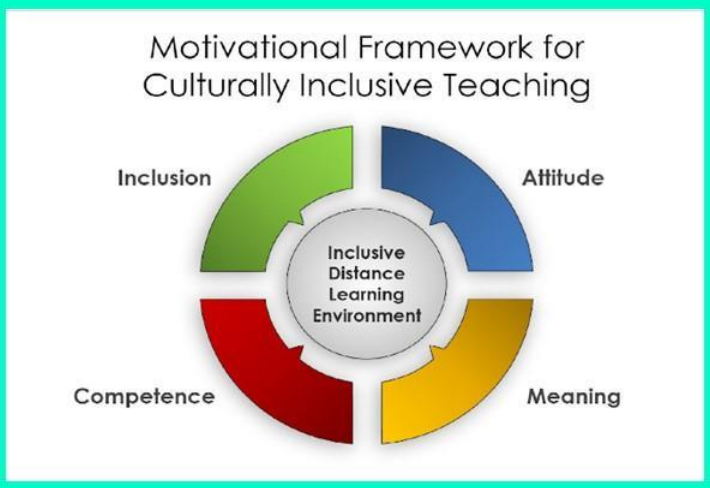

How Closely is your School's Parent Involvement Program Linked to Student Learning?



Peanut Butter and Jelly, and Racism

REFLECTION

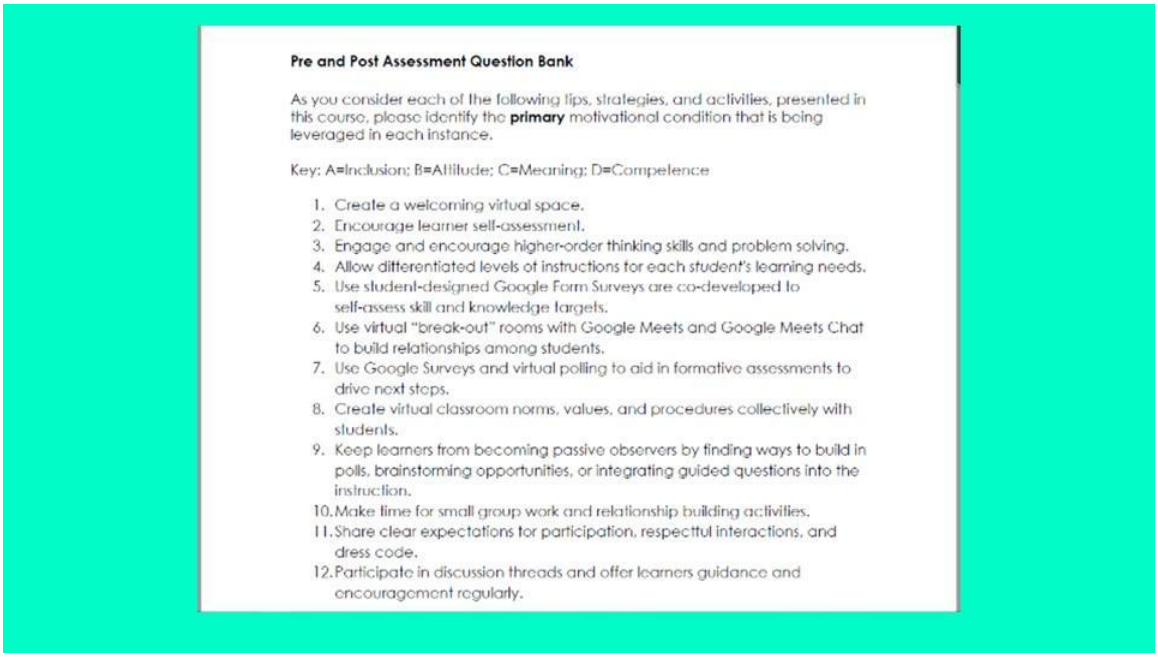
- What's the difference between implicit bias and racism?
- How did the video use PB & J to explain implicit bias?
- What is blindspot bias?
- Prof. Dolly Chugh suggests that the "fog" of bias and cloaked associations comes from sources such as media, news, conversations we hear at home, and our education. What messages about race and racism have you absorbed from these sources?
- Anything else you consider noteworthy (or that you want to be sure to remember)?



Motivational Conditions

The Motivational Framework for Culturally Inclusive Teaching provides a strengths-focused orientation to teaching and learning. It consists of four motivational conditions that maintain student diversity and intrinsic motivation at the foreground of planning, teaching, and assessing. The four conditions are:

- Establishing Inclusion: Students and teachers feel respected by and connected to one another
- Developing a Positive Attitude: Creating a favorable disposition toward learning through relevance and personal choice
- Enhancing Meaning: Creating challenging, engaging learning experiences that include student perspectives and values
- Engendering Competence: Creating an understanding that all students are effective in learning something they personally value and can apply in practical situations.



Pre and Post Assessment Question Bank

As you consider each of the following tips, strategies, and activities, presented in this course, please identify the **primary** motivational condition that is being leveraged in each instance.

Key: A=Inclusion; B=Attitude; C=Meaning; D=Competence

1. Create a welcoming virtual space.
2. Encourage learner self-assessment.
3. Engage and encourage higher-order thinking skills and problem solving.
4. Allow differentiated levels of instructions for each student's learning needs.
5. Use student-designed Google Form Surveys are co-developed to self-assess skill and knowledge targets.
6. Use virtual "break-out" rooms with Google Meets and Google Meets Chat to build relationships among students.
7. Use Google Surveys and virtual polling to aid in formative assessments to drive next steps.
8. Create virtual classroom norms, values, and procedures collectively with students.
9. Keep learners from becoming passive observers by finding ways to build in polls, brainstorming opportunities, or integrating guided questions into the instruction.
10. Make time for small group work and relationship building activities.
11. Share clear expectations for participation, respectful interactions, and dress code.
12. Participate in discussion threads and offer learners guidance and encouragement regularly.

INCLUSION

The first Motivational Condition, Establishing Inclusion, focuses on building trust with students across differences so that the educator creates a social-emotional partnership for deeper learning.

We must make time to build positive learning alliances with, and among, students through mutual trust. When this condition of Inclusion is present, individual learners feel respected and connected to their classmates, teachers, and the school

STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSION:

- Treat all students with respect
- Collaborate and cooperate with the students
- Treat all students equitably and avoid any and all types of discrimination

ACTIVITIES FOR INCLUSION

- Collaborative learning
- Peer-editing
- Multicultural projects

ATTITUDE

The first Motivational Condition, Establishing Inclusion, focuses on building trust with students across differences so that the educator creates a social-emotional partnership for deeper learning.

We must make time to build positive learning alliances with, and among, students through mutual trust. When this condition of Inclusion is present, individual learners feel respected and connected to their classmates, teachers, and the school community.

STRATEGIES FOR ATTITUDE:

- Classes are grounded in students' experiences, conversion, and interests
- Students openly voice their ideas and opinions in the class
- Differentiation of content

ACTIVITIES FOR ATTITUDE:

- Clear and specific learning goals
- Learning activities that promote student interest
- Setting and supporting student goals

DAY TWO

2023 Fall
Staff Development

Cultural Competence Training

- ➢ A Tale of Two Teachers
- ➢ The Intersections of Culture and Learning
- ➢ Motivational Framework for Culturally Relevant Teaching

The goals of this professional learning module are to:

1. Provide an equity-focused approach to inclusive teaching practices
2. Classify learning strategies into four motivational conditions to support an equitable and inclusive learning environment for every student
3. Consider how personal and institutional strategies and practices fit into the Motivational Framework to leverage learning and an increased sense of belonging for all school community members.

Learning Outcomes

A Tale of Two Teachers

REFLECTION

The Three Types of Teacher Diversity Training

1. **Conservative**
2. **Liberal**
3. **Critical**

THINK * PAIR * SHARE

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE BELIEFS AND PRACTICES THAT ARE REQUIRED TO HAPPEN BEFORE CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING CAN TAKE PLACE?

The Intersections of Culture and Learning

The Intersections of Culture and Learning

MEANING

The third Motivational Condition, Enhancing Meaning, focuses on challenging and engaging learners with intellectual rigor through deep thinking, critical inquiry, meaningful discourse, and creative expression. The goal is for educators and learners to co-create diverse learning experiences about relevant topics, framed in engaging formats. When this motivational condition is leveraged, learners feel challenged, engaged, and often enter a “flow state” of productive work where each is totally absorbed, and time quickly passes.

STRATEGIES FOR MEANING:

- Inquiry-based learning
- Questions that go beyond facts
- Building on students’ strengths and prior knowledge

ACTIVITIES FOR MEANING:

- Projects based on critical thinking and questioning
- Assignments based on inquiry

COMPETENCE

The fourth, and final, Motivational Condition, Competence, focuses on creating confidence among learners that each is progressing towards authentic, fixed, learning targets.

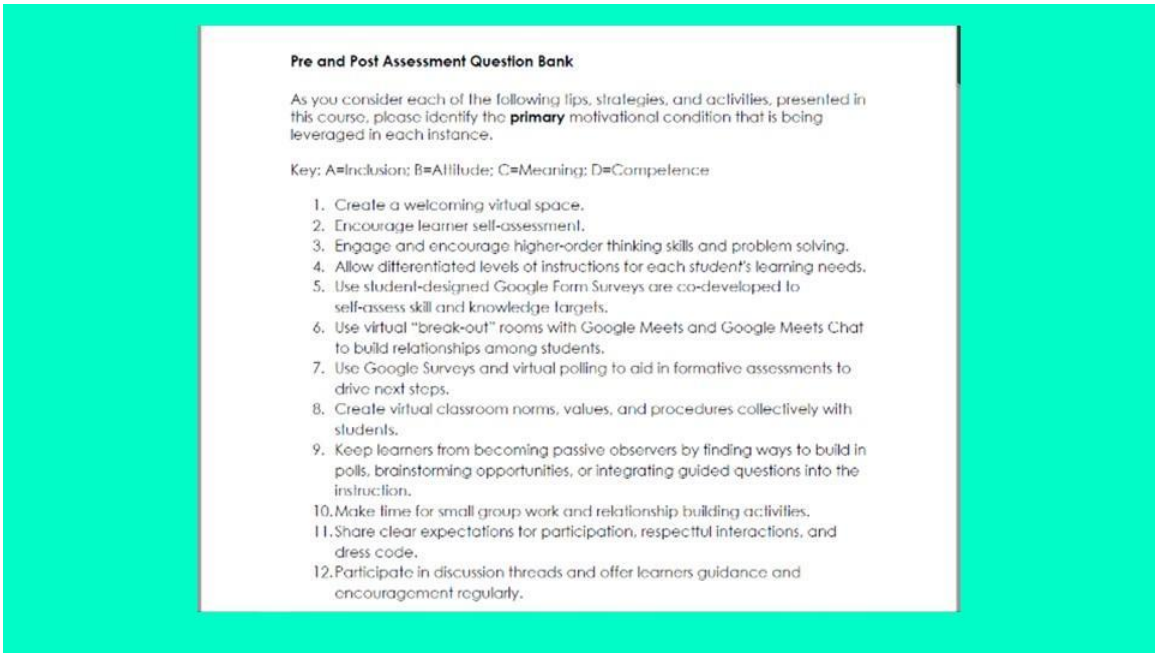
Learners are able to easily articulate their personal plan to attain goals and progress toward demonstrating mastery of pre-established skills and knowledge.

STRATEGIES FOR COMPETENCE:

- A clear criteria for student success
- Fair grading policies
- Real-world connections
- Self-assessment

ACTIVITIES FOR COMPETENCE:

- Peer-feedback
- Authentic assessments
- Portfolios
- Self-reflections
- Strategies for standardized testing



Pre and Post Assessment Question Bank

As you consider each of the following tips, strategies, and activities, presented in this course, please identify the **primary** motivational condition that is being leveraged in each instance.

Key: A=Inclusion; B=Attitude; C=Meaning; D=Competence

1. Create a welcoming virtual space.
2. Encourage learner self-assessment.
3. Engage and encourage higher-order thinking skills and problem solving.
4. Allow differentiated levels of instructions for each *student's* learning needs.
5. Use student-designed Google Form Surveys are co-developed to self-assess skill and knowledge targets.
6. Use virtual "break-out" rooms with Google Meets and Google Meets Chat to build relationships among students.
7. Use Google Surveys and virtual polling to aid in formative assessments to drive next steps.
8. Create virtual classroom norms, values, and procedures collectively with students.
9. Keep learners from becoming passive observers by finding ways to build in polls, brainstorming opportunities, or integrating guided questions into the instruction.
10. Make time for small group work and relationship building activities.
11. Share clear expectations for participation, respectful interactions, and dress code.
12. Participate in discussion threads and offer learners guidance and encouragement regularly.

Day Three

2023 Winter Staff Development

Real Talk

- Love, Light, and Insight
- Real *Real Talk*
- Design Thinking Process

By the end of this presentation, you will ...

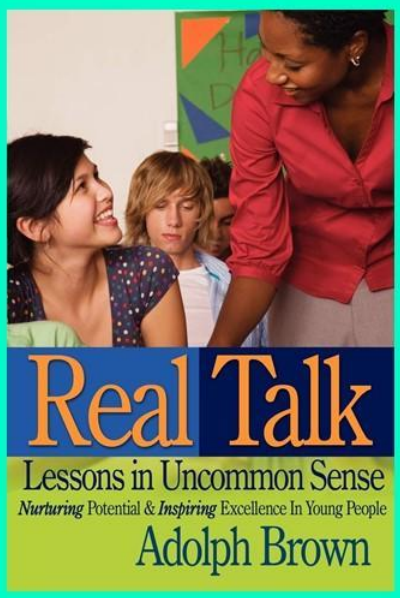
Be able to identify and change implicit bias
Examine your beliefs, actions, and instructional practices
Be able to create a greater sense of self-awareness and a renewed focus on inclusivity and equity for all students
Reflect on progress and share your insights with your friends and colleagues

Learning Outcomes

Love, Light, and Insight

REFLECTION

- What was your reaction to learning that, "Research shows that our racial biases are often more about who we choose to help than who we don't. And we tend to help people who are similar to us"? What are some examples of this that you have seen or experienced in your own life?
- Describe diversity, cultural competency, and/or equity training that you've participated in the past. How effective was it?
- How might this new information impact your teaching?

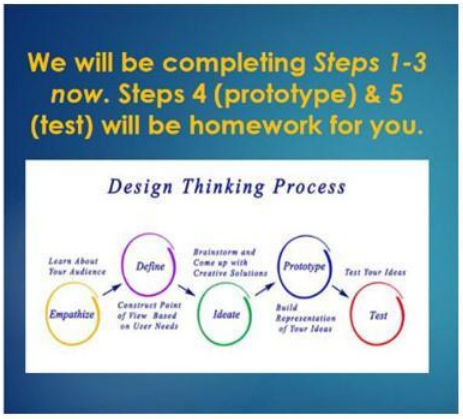


Think * pair * share

Which of Dr. Brown's Real Talk lessons in uncommon sense will help ensure your teaching is culturally relevant and competent? Explain your response?

Lessons in Uncommon Sense

Design thinking process



On the blank sheet of paper provided:

Step 1 (Empathize): Individually think about your class (and future classrooms).

Step 2 (Define): Define the needs of your curriculum and practice for successfully implementing culturally relevant teaching.

Step 3 (Ideate): In a team of 2-3, help each other brainstorm ideas and creative solutions to having a culturally relevant practice in your classrooms.

Appendix B: Disciplinary Data by Ethnicity for the Study District

Table B1

District: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity Receiving Disciplinary Actions in 2017

Group	% of students by discipline type or total enrollment							Discipline total
	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian	Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Black	White	2 + races	
Students receiving ISS	0.4	2.2	1.6	45.1	30.0	14.4	6.3	17,975
Students receiving only 1 OSS	0.5	2.5	1.6	41.4	32.0	15.7	6.4	10,333
Students receiving more than 1 OSS	0.4	1.2	1.1	36.4	42.9	11.5	6.4	4,526
Expulsions with educational services	0.8	1.2	1.6	37.7	39.7	13.5	5.6	1,516
Expulsions under zero-tolerance policies	0.6	1.8	1.4	45.1	29.4	15.4	6.3	494
Transferred to alternative school	0.9	1.2	1.5	38.8	38.4	13.5	5.9	1,167
Referral to law enforcement	0.2	1.6	2.4	34.2	45.9	11.7	4.1	582
School-related arrest	0.0	0.0	2.3	34.3	54.3	6.9	2.3	175
Total enrollment (student *N* = 328,587)	0.4	6.3	1.6	46.6	**14.2**	**24.4**	6.5å	

Note. ISS = in-school suspension; OSS = out-of-school suspension. Number of OSS = 22,937.

Table B2

High School 1: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity Receiving Discipline, 2016-2017

Group	% of students by discipline type or total enrollment							Discipline total
	AI/AN	Asian	H/PI	Hispanic	Black	White	2+ races	
Students receiving ISS	0.7	6.7	1.3	22.8	16.8	43.0	8.7	149
Students receiving only 1 OSS	0.0	1.3	2.6	25.6	9.0	53.9	7.7	78
Students receiving more than 1 OSS	0.0	16.7	0.0	29.2	16.7	29.2	8.3	24
Expulsions with educational services	0.0	25.0	0.0	8.3	16.7	41.7	8.3	12
Expulsions under zero-tolerance policies	0.0	20.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	60.0	0.0	5
Transferred to alternative school	0.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	37.5	12.5	8
Referral to law enforcement								0
School-related arrest								0
Total enrollment	0.5	11.6	1.0	17.5	**4.4**	**57.0**	8.0	

Note. N = 3,387. AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; H/PI = Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; ISS = in-school suspension; OSS = out-of-school suspension.

Table B3

High School 2: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity Receiving Disciplinary Actions in 2017

Group	% of students by discipline type or total enrollment							
	AI/AN	Asian	H/PI	Hispanic	Black	White	2+ races	Discipline total

Students receiving ISS	0.0	2.6	1.0	25.0	37.0	25.5	8.9	192
Students receiving only 1 OSS	0.0	5.0	0.0	22.8	33.7	32.7	5.9	101
Students receiving more than 1 OSS	0.0	0.0	0.0	29.0	38.7	22.6	9.7	31
Expulsions with educational services	0.0	2.9	0.0	25.7	48.6	20.0	2.9	35
Expulsions under zero-tolerance policies	0.0	8.3	0.0	41.7	16.7	25.0	8.3	12
Transferred to Alternative School	0.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	58.3	12.5	4.2	24
Referral to law enforcement	0.0	0.0	0.0	37.5	50.0	12.5	0.0	8
School-related arrest	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	1
Total enrollment	0.6	5.5	1.6	23.5	**14.6**	**46.6**	7.7	

Note. N = 3,156. AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; H/PI = Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; ISS = in-school suspension; OSS = out-of-school suspension.

Table B4

High School 3: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity Receiving Disciplinary Actions in 2017

Group	% of students by discipline type or total enrollment							
	AI/AN	Asian	H/PI	Hispanic	Black	White	2+ races	Discipline total

Students receiving ISS	0.5	2.1	0.5	21.0	41.5	23.1	11.3	195
Students receiving only 1 OSS	0.7	2.9	0.7	22.8	39.0	24.3	9.6	136
Students receiving more than 1 OSS	2.6	5.1	0.0	18.0	41.0	20.5	12.8	39
Expulsions with educational services	0.0	0.0	0.0	27.6	51.7	17.2	3.5	29
Expulsions under zero-tolerance policies	0.0	0.0	0.0	30.8	38.5	23.1	7.7	13
Transferred to alternative school	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3	45.8	20.8	0.0	24
Referral to law enforcement	0.0	9.5	0.0	19.1	47.6	4.8	19.0	21
School-related arrest	0.0	0.0	0.0	66.7	33.3	0.0	0.0	3
Total enrollment	0.6	4.2	1.9	27.5	**18.2**	**39.0**	8.6	

Note. N = 3,140. AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; H/PI = Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; ISS = in-school suspension; OSS = out-of-school suspension.

Table B5

High School 4: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity Receiving Discipline, 2016-2017

Group	% of students by discipline type or total enrollment							Discipline total
	AI/AN	Asian	H/PI	Hispanic	Black	White	2+ races	
Students receiving ISS	0.2	0.8	0.7	54.5	37.8	3.4	2.7	1,035
Students receiving only 1 OSS	0.5	0.9	1.4	39.6	47.5	4.6	5.5	217
Students receiving more than 1 OSS	0.0	0.0	0.9	24.5	67.9	1.9	4.7	106
Expulsions with educational services	0.0	0.0	0.0	23.1	64.1	5.1	7.7	39
Expulsions under zero-tolerance policies	0.0	0.0	0.0	45.5	45.5	0.0	9.1	11
Transferred to alternative school	0.0	0.0	0.0	22.2	59.3	11.1	7.4	27
Referral to law enforcement	0.0	0.0	0.0	22.2	66.7	5.6	5.6	18
School-related arrest	0.0	0.0	0.0	16.7	75.0	0.0	8.3	12
Total enrollment	0.1	1.7	0.7	61.9	**27.8**	**4.4**	3.3	

Note. N = 2,874. AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; H/PI = Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; ISS = in-school suspension; OSS = out-of-school suspension.

Table B6

High School 5: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity Receiving Discipline, 2016-2017

Group	% of students by discipline type or total enrollment							Discipline total
	AI/AN	Asian	H/PI	Hispanic	Black	White	2+ races	
Students receiving ISS	0.0	0.0	1.4	17.1	60.0	10.0	11.4	70
Students receiving only 1 OSS	0.0	2.0	3.4	21.5	50.3	12.8	10.1	149
Students receiving more than 1 OSS	2.8	0.0	0.0	19.4	66.7	5.6	5.6	36
Expulsions with educational services	0.0	6.3	0.0	25.0	50.0	18.8	0.0	16
Expulsions under zero-tolerance policies	0.0	0.0	0.0	60.0	40.0	0.0	0.0	5
Transferred to alternative school	0.0	6.3	0.0	25.0	43.8	25.0	0.0	16
Referral to law enforcement	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	66.7	16.7	16.7	6
School-related arrest	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	2
Total enrollment	0.4	4.3	1.7	35.7	**34.2**	**15.7**	8.0	

Note. N = 2,801. AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; H/PI = Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; ISS = in-school suspension; OSS = out-of-school suspension.

Table B7

High School 6: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity Receiving Discipline, 2016-2017

Group	% of students by discipline type or total enrollment							Discipline total
	AI/AN	Asian	H/PI	Hispanic	Black	White	2+ races	

Students receiving ISS	0.6	1.2	1.2	52.3	35.1	6.3	3.5	174
Students receiving only 1 OSS	1.1	0.0	1.7	40.0	50.3	4.6	2.3	175
Students receiving more than 1 OSS	2.3	0.0	0.0	27.3	63.6	4.6	2.3	44
Expulsions with educational services	0.0	0.0	0.0	42.9	51.4	2.9	2.9	35
Expulsions under zero-tolerance policies	0.0	0.0	0.0	58.3	33.3	8.3	0.0	12
Transferred to Alternative School	0.0	0.0	0.0	41.9	51.6	3.2	3.2	31
Referral to law enforcement	0.0	0.0	0.0	40.0	53.3	6.7	0.0	15
School-related arrest	0.0	0.0	0.0	40.0	60.0	0.0	0.0	10
Total enrollment	0.4	2.2	1.2	71.8	**15.3**	**7.0**	2.2	

Note. N = 2,785. AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; H/PI = Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; ISS = in-school suspension; OSS = out-of-school suspension.

Table B8

High School 7: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity Receiving Discipline, 2016-2017

Group	% of students by discipline type or total enrollment							Discipline total
	AI/ AN	Asian	H/PI	Hispanic	Black	White	2+ races	
Students receiving ISS	0.6	1.3	0.4	35.2	53.1	4.7	4.7	471
Students receiving only 1 OSS	0.6	1.2	0.6	45.3	40.3	4.1	7.9	340
Students receiving more than 1 OSS	0.8	1.2	0.4	32.5	56.0	5.6	3.6	252
Expulsions with educational services	2.1	0.0	0.0	25.5	61.7	4.3	6.4	47
Expulsions under zero-tolerance policies	6.3	0.0	0.0	25.0	56.3	6.3	6.3	16
Transferred to alternative school	2.6	0.0	0.0	21.0	63.2	5.3	7.9	38
Referral to law enforcement	0.0	0.0	0.0	22.2	66.7	11.1	0.0	9
School-related arrest	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	80.0	20.0	0.0	5
Total enrollment	0.4	3.3	1.1	51.5	**30.9**	**8.5**	4.3	

Note. N = 2,494. AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; H/PI = Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; ISS = in-school suspension; OSS = out-of-school suspension.

Table B9

High School 8: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity Receiving Discipline, 2016-2017

Group	% of students by discipline type or total enrollment							Discipline total
	AI/AN	Asian	H/PI	Hispanic	Black	White	2+ races	
Students receiving ISS	0.0	0.0	0.0	12.5	87.5	0.0	0.0	8
Students receiving only 1 OSS	0.0	0.8	0.0	32.1	50.8	9.7	6.7	134
Students receiving more than 1 OSS	0.0	0.0	1.3	24.4	62.8	9.0	2.6	78
Expulsions with educational services	0.0	0.0	0.0	35.3	52.9	5.9	5.9	17
Expulsions under zero-tolerance policies	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	4
Transferred to alternative school	0.0	0.0	0.0	28.6	64.3	0.0	7.1	14
Referral to law enforcement	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	80.0	0.0	0.0	10
School-related arrest	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	4
Total enrollment	0.3	3.1	1.3	47.3	**32.2**	**11.9**	3.7	

Note. N = 2,085. AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; H/PI = Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; ISS = in-school suspension; OSS = out-of-school suspension.

Table B10

High School 9: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity Receiving Discipline, 2016-2017

Group	% of students by discipline type or total enrollment							Discipline total
	AI/AN	Asian	H/PI	Hispanic	Black	White	2+ races	

Students receiving ISS								0
Students receiving only 1 OSS	4.8	0.0	0.0	57.1	4.8	28.6	4.8	21
Students receiving more than 1 OSS	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	25.0	25.0	0.0	4
Expulsions with educational services	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1
Expulsions under zero-tolerance policies								0
Transferred to alternative school	0.00	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1
Referral to law enforcement								0
School-related arrest								0
Total enrollment	1.0	1.8	0.8	47.1	**1.1**	**45.6**	2.6	

Note. N = 732. AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; H/PI = Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; ISS = in-school suspension; OSS = out-of-school suspension. Note school has only 1.09% Black students, n = 8.

Table B11

High School 10: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity Receiving Discipline, 2016-2017

Group	% of students by discipline type or total enrollment							Discipline total
	AI/AN	Asian	H/PI	Hispanic	Black	White	2+ races	
Students receiving ISS	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.4	0.0	75.0	3.6	28
Students receiving only 1 OSS	0.0	0.0	0.0	30.8	0.0	69.2	0.0	13
Students receiving more than 1 OSS	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	1
Expulsions with educational services								0
Expulsions under zero-tolerance policies								0
Transferred to alternative school								0
Referral to law enforcement								0
School-related arrest								0
Total enrollment	3.7	0.0	0.4	15.3	**0.4**	**78.2**	2.1	

Note. N = 518. AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; H/PI = Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; ISS = in-school suspension; OSS = out-of-school suspension. Note school has less than 1% Black students, n = 2.

Table B12

High School 11: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity Receiving Discipline, 2016-2017

Group	% of students by discipline type or total enrollment							Discipline total
	AI/AN	Asian	H/PI	Hispanic	Black	White	2+ races	
Students receiving ISS	0.9	2.6	0.6	37.8	40.9	11.8	5.5	347
Students receiving only 1 OSS	1.2	1.7	1.2	34.9	41.9	12.8	6.4	172
Students receiving more than 1 OSS	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3	55.6	4.4	6.7	45
Expulsions with educational services	0.0	0.0	0.0	26.8	65.9	4.9	2.4	41
Expulsions under zero-tolerance policies	0.0	0.0	0.0	23.1	69.2	7.7	0.0	13
Transferred to alternative school	0.0	0.0	0.0	24.2	66.7	6.1	3.0	33
Referral to law enforcement	0.0	0.0	0.0	38.5	46.2	7.7	7.7	13
School-related arrest	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3	66.7	0.0	0.0	3
Total enrollment	0.4	4.3	1.8	48.9	**21.3**	**17.9**	5.5	

Note. N = 2,620. AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; H/PI = Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; ISS = in-school suspension; OSS = out-of-school suspension.

Table B13

High School 12: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity Receiving Discipline, 2016-2017

Group	% of students by discipline type or total enrollment							Discipline total
	AI/ AN	Asian	H/PI	Hispanic	Black	White	2+ races	

Students receiving ISS	0.7	2.6	2.2	30.7	29.2	25.3	9.4	586
Students receiving only 1 OSS	0.9	3.7	1.9	22.4	28.0	35.5	7.5	107
Students receiving more than 1 OSS	2.2	0.0	0.0	17.4	50.0	17.4	13.0	46
Expulsions with educational services	0.0	7.1	0.0	28.6	50.0	14.3	0.0	14
Expulsions under zero-tolerance policies	0.0	0.0	0.0	28.6	57.1	14.3	0.0	7
Transferred to alternative school	0.0	10.0	0.0	30.0	40.0	20.0	0.0	10
Referral to law enforcement	0.0	100.00	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1
School-related arrest								0
Total enrollment	0.4	4.1	2.1	26.3	**15.8**	**42.9**	8.4	

Note. N = 3,029. AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; H/PI = Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; ISS = in-school suspension; OSS = out-of-school suspension.

Table B14

High School 13: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity Receiving Discipline, 2016-2017

Group	% of students by discipline type or total enrollment							Discipline total
	AI/ AN	Asian	H/PI	Hispanic	Black	White	2+ races	
Students receiving ISS	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2
Students receiving only 1 OSS	0.0	0.0	0.0	36.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	11
Students receiving more than 1 OSS	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2
Expulsions with educational services								0
Expulsions under zero-tolerance policies								0
Transferred to alternative school								0
Referral to law enforcement								0
School-related arrest								0
Total enrollment	0.5	12.8	1.8	36.5	**8.9**	**32.1**	7.2	

Note. N = 1,822. AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native; H/PI = Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; ISS = in-school suspension; OSS = out-of-school suspension. School 13 is a career/technical academy.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Introduction

1. What is the name of the position at your high school?
2. What are your roles and responsibilities as a principal/assistant principal?
3. Briefly describe your student and staff populations.

Research Question 1: What strategies do school leaders use (if any) to reduce discipline referral rates, including suspensions, among Black students?

4. How does the school or district track or analyze student discipline data? [Prompts: Are the data analyzed by race/ethnicity or repeat offenses? Are results shared with principals or school staff?]
5. Describe how behavioral expectations and discipline procedures are communicated to students.
6. At the building level, describe the discipline procedures in place for teachers to follow for office referrals.
7. How do you know whether teachers consistently follow these procedures?
8. Describe any disciplinary framework in place to determine suspensions (either in-school or out-of-school). Prompts: Who developed the framework? Were students involved? Teachers? Is it district or school created?
9. How is school counseling involved in the discipline procedures?
10. What professional development has your staff participated in regarding classroom management, discipline, and behavior management?

11. What professional development has your staff participated in related to culturally responsive teaching, if any?
12. Does your school use any programs like positive behavior interventions or supports, social-emotional learning, check-in/check-out, or restorative justice? Please describe them and their effects.

Research Question 2: What obstacles do school leaders perceive to reducing discipline referral and suspension rates among Black students?

13. What obstacles do you face in reducing discipline referral and suspension rates among Black students?
14. National statistics show that Black students tend to be referred and suspended more than White students for the same infractions. How do you think discipline disparities could be changed for the better in schools?
15. Have you found that teachers may be over referring or inappropriately referring students to the office? Please describe those situations.