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## The Effect of School Closings on Juvenile Delinquency in Detroit

Denise Gray  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Denise Gray

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Walden University  
2024

Abstract

The Effect of School Closings on Juvenile Delinquency in Detroit

by

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MA, Marygrove College

BA, Wayne State University

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

February 2025

## Abstract

Education and delinquency are two social issues that can impact youth's social and educational success. From 2007 to 2018, 17,597 public schools closed in the United States, affecting three million students. This study focused on the influence of juvenile crime and students' educational experiences in urban communities where a disproportionate number of public schools closed. The problem was limited research on how school closing impacted juvenile delinquency. This qualitative study explored the influence of public school closure on juvenile delinquency through the lens of defense attorneys. Travis Hirschi's social control theory and Robert Agnew's strain theory were used as the conceptual framework to explain the nature and cause of juvenile delinquency. The central research question was: What influence did public school closings have on juvenile delinquency in Detroit from 2008 to 2020? The study employed a pragmatic approach to qualitative inquiry to understand the participants' lived experiences. Data collection consisted of interviews with 11 juvenile defense attorneys using open-ended questions. Thematic coding was used to create and identify codes and themes relevant to the research questions. The data analysis procedure recorded similar words and phrases addressing the research questions. A codebook was developed to identify patterns that resulted in the identification of six major themes. One finding identified was the parent and child's perception of education, suggesting that parents' and students' views about education were not positive before school closings. The implications for social change resulting from this study were for policymakers to rethink closing public schools because of its harmful effects on juvenile delinquency.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	v
List of Figures .....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background of Study .....	2
Juvenile Justice .....	2
Education and Delinquency .....	4
Problem Statement .....	6
Purpose of the Study .....	9
Research Question .....	9
Conceptual Framework for the Study .....	10
Nature of the Study .....	11
Definitions.....	13
Assumptions.....	14
Scope and Delimitations .....	14
Limitations .....	15
Significance.....	17
Summary .....	18
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	20
Introduction.....	20
Literature Search Strategy.....	21

Juvenile Delinquency .....	21
Public Policy and Public Perception .....	22
Juvenile Delinquency: Risk Factors.....	24
Family Factors .....	24
Individual Factors .....	26
Neighborhood and Environment Factors .....	28
Juvenile Justice System.....	32
Defense Attorney .....	34
Student Mobility .....	35
School Disciplinary Policies .....	37
Attendance .....	41
School Closings .....	44
Summary .....	50
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	52
Introduction.....	52
Research Design and Rationale .....	52
Role of the Researcher .....	53
Methodology .....	54
Participants and Procedures for Recruitment.....	55
Analytical Strategy.....	56
Research Questions .....	56
Data Analysis Plan .....	57

Issues of Trustworthiness.....	57
Credibility .....	58
Dependability .....	58
Confirmability.....	59
Transferability.....	59
Authenticity.....	59
Ethical Procedures .....	60
Summary .....	61
Chapter 4: Results .....	62
Introduction.....	62
Setting	63
Demographics .....	63
Data Collection .....	64
Data Analysis .....	65
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	66
Credibility .....	66
Transferability.....	67
Dependability .....	67
Confirmability.....	68
Results	68
Theme 1: Predisposition Regarding Education.....	70
Theme 2: Accountability.....	71



Theme 3: Impact of Change.....	72
Theme 4: Adaptability .....	73
Theme 5: Delinquent Behavior.....	74
Theme 6: Youth Comprehension Level.....	75
Summary.....	76
Chapter 5: Interpretation of the Findings.....	77
Introduction.....	77
Interpretation of the Findings.....	79
Limitations of the Study.....	82
Recommendations.....	83
Recommendations for Future Study .....	83
Implications.....	84
Conclusion .....	85
References.....	86
Appendix A: Number and Enrollment of Closed Public Schools 2007-2018 .....	117
Appendix B: Youth Incarceration in the United States .....	118
Appendix C: Juvenile Population Characteristics in United States 2018.....	119
Appendix D: Prison Population in the United States 2017 and 2022 .....	120
Appendix E: 2018 Public School Enrollment by Race / Ethnicity .....	121
Appendix F: Interview Questions and Sub-Questions.....	122
Appendix G: Matrix for Recording Participants Activity in the Research Project.....	123
Appendix H: Code Book.....	124

List of Tables

Table 1. Juvenile Crime Rate Per 1000 Juveniles Wayne County Michigan by Age and Race .....	16
Table 2. Participants Demographics .....	64

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Prisons and Jails.....	45
Figure 2. Detroit Public Schools Enrollment Trends.....	50
Figure 3. Percentage of Themes Identified.....	70

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

This research explored the impact of public school closings and juvenile delinquency. *Juvenile delinquency* is a social problem affecting individuals, families, neighbors, victims, and perpetrators. Similarly, public school closings also present a set of social concerns and risk factors. In the United States, the rate of juvenile delinquency has declined. However, the number of youths held in juvenile detention centers, correctional and or residential facilities, because of deviant behavior, is disproportionate for youth in urban communities (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021). Additionally, nationwide, public school closings resulted in the need to relocate students to different schools. Appendix A shows the number of public schools closed in the United States from 2007 to 2018. During this period, 17,597 schools closed affecting three million students in the United States (Appendix A). Rumberger (2015) argued that closing schools increased the risk of dropping out, and the effect may extend beyond dropping out. Steinberg and McDonald (2019) examined the behavior of students affected by school closures in the Philadelphia School District. Steinberg and McDonald's research revealed that school suspension rates were high before closures and remained elevated for students relocated to other schools. Much literature on school closing and delinquency focused on factors like school misconduct, attendance, and performance (Cordes, Schwartz et al., 2016; Robison et al., 2017; Bowles & Scull, 2019). There was little known research on the impact of school closures and juvenile delinquency.

In urban communities, the more risk factors children experience, the higher the risk of delinquent behavior. A child's educational experience, such as poor grades, poor attendance, lack of interest in school, or lack of socialization, can be a risk factor increasing the propensity for illegal behavior (Gubbels et al., 2019; McCarter et al., 2020). The focus of this qualitative research was to explore the harmful effects of an education system that failed to meet the needs of its students and whether the solution to closing failing schools influenced illegal activity among youth.

In this chapter, I presented an overview of the juvenile justice system, discussed the role of public education, and introduced the study's conceptual framework. Finally, I discussed the need for this study and the social implications of exploring the influence of closing schools on juvenile delinquency.

## **Background of Study**

### **Juvenile Justice**

Juvenile delinquency and education continue to be of concern despite decades of research on juvenile justice and education reform. In this section, I provide an overview of juvenile justice reform and discussed education reform to establish a baseline for continued review of youth issues. In the past, young offenders were incarcerated and punished along with adult offenders (Radice, 2018). The treatment of juvenile offenders evolved during the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1899, the United States set up its first juvenile court system in Chicago (Schultz, 1973) to address public concerns about the treatment of young offenders. Proponents of the new system declared that it would protect youth-in-danger from becoming adult criminals. The new juvenile court system

also defined the illegal behavior of younger citizens as delinquency (Butts & Mears, 2001). In 1974, after criticism of the handling of young children in an adult justice system, Congress enacted the Juvenile Justice and Prevention Act (Office of Juvenile Justice and Prevention, 2019). The legislation provided protection and federal funding for states who would supply protection, care, and treatment to youth in the justice system. The principal objective was to rehabilitate young offenders. Despite enacting laws for juveniles, juvenile delinquency increased during the 1980s and 1990s. The increase in crime resulted in the public pressuring politicians and educators for answers to address the problem (Champion, 2001). In response to the nation's concern about public safety, policymakers enacted legislation to get tough on crime (Bishop et al., 1998). The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 was amended to include provisions that allowed states to prosecute juveniles as adults. Scholars contend that the Get-Tough Laws and other legislation enacted in the 1990s reduced juvenile delinquency (Dilulio, 1995). The United States addressed the social problems of juvenile delinquency through public policies and laws. Policymakers, educators, and stakeholders agreed that there was a decline in juvenile delinquency. However, the overall decline brought attention to the inequity in juvenile delinquency in urban areas with a predominately Black population (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021). The Casey Foundation indicated that Black and Native American youth continued to be overrepresented in the prison system. For example, during the reported period, youth arrest declined by 75% while the incarceration rate remained steady at 29% among African and Native American youth (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021). The Foundation reported that from 2005 to 2019, youth arrests

declined. However, there was no change in the number of youths arrested and confined during the same period (Appendix B). Despite juvenile justice reform, in the 21st century, policymakers and stakeholders continued to discuss and debate adolescent prevention to reduce the number of offenses. One approach toward prevention was to understand factors contributing to delinquency. According to Larsen (2014) and Rumberger (2015), the impact of public school closings on juvenile delinquency may be a contributing factor.

### **Education and Delinquency**

Public education in the United States failed for several reasons. The most common reason for students failing out of school was poor academic achievement (Chen, 2020). The school was a major social institution where youth socialized with others, learned social norms, and became a part of their community. The No Child Left Behind Act of 1997 outlined the constitutional rights of young people to be educated and parents' right to information about education (Behind, 2002). Student success can also fail because of factors outside the school building, such as parental involvement, family economic status, and inequity in funding. These factors are discussed in the literature review. Poor school performance increased the propensity for delinquency (Hoffmann, 2020). However, academics were one aspect of the school experience.

The role of schools varies from teaching academics to a gathering place for social and political functions. In this sense, schools were the focal point for civic and community strategies and giving community members a sense of belonging (Jacobson, 2016). The systematic approach of supplying instructions, sharing information, and

supporting social activities can influence and shape youth development (Ogbu, 2019). To minimize delinquent behavior, the school's role was to provide direction about attendance, academics, bullying and safety (Duggins et al., 2016; Irwin et al., 2021). When schools do not address performance, attendance, and safety the loss of interest in school increases delinquent behavior. One approach applied throughout the nation, to address poor performing schools, was cutting school funding, and closing the door of underperforming schools. The approach created education inequities (Tieken & Auldridge-Reveles, 2019).

In 2008, the United States' economic status plummeted into a recession, negatively impacting the economy and schools. Consequently, at the same time, public education experienced budget cuts resulting in school closings (Kretchmar, 2014). For example, in Appendix A, during the academic year of 2009-2010, 1,822 public schools closed and over 300,000 students were affected. When school administrators and policymakers decided to close public schools permanently, students were relocating to other schools (Langenkamp, 2016).

Although there was no single risk factor associated with the cause of juvenile delinquency, social scientists agreed that any condition that can give rise to human suffering was a risk factor (Emmelkamp, et al., 2020). The environment was one risk factor. Researchers examined the environment affecting school closings, such as neighborhood characteristics, and suggested that neighborhood factors created a potential risk for juvenile delinquency (Antunes & Manasse, 2022; Piscitelli & Doherty, 2018). Additionally, school mobility increased juvenile delinquency when schools closed due to



budget and academic performance (Gasper et al., 2010). However, there was minimal research on the impact of school closings on juvenile delinquency (Larsen, 2014; Rumberger, 2015). The implication for social changes is for policymakers and school administrators to rethink funding allocations for public schools and understand the potentially harmful effects of school closings on juvenile delinquency.

### **Problem Statement**

Although the City of Detroit closed schools primarily for budgetary reasons, the problem was that there was limited research on how school closing impacted juvenile delinquency. In the United States, public education experienced budget cuts resulting in school closings at both elementary and secondary levels (Green et al., 2019; Welsh & Little, 2019). Students attending schools scheduled to close were forced to attend other schools, which may or may not be located within their neighborhood. Evidence showed that when students change schools, their performance suffered (Cordes et al., 2016). On the other hand, research revealed that students from poor-performing schools who relocated to high-quality schools performed better. Most research on forced school closings focused on academic performance, dropout rates, and attendance (Gasper et al., 2012; Hoffmann, 2020; Rocque et al., 2017). Consequently, there was limited research on the influence of forced school closings and juvenile delinquency.

Rumberger (2015) indicated in his research that there was a need to explore the harmful effects of forced school closings other than academic achievement. Additionally, research reveals that students moving to different school districts are at a higher risk of dropping out of school (Langenkamp, 2016). Some reasons cited by researchers were

when students' routines were disrupted, they lost connection with friends, and their school performance declined (Billings et al., 2014; Rumberger, 2015). Further, research suggested that the methodology policymakers used to close school was unfair and may be racially curved to disenfranchise African American Students (McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019; Tieken & Auldridge-Reveles, 2019).

In 2009, the Detroit Public Schools Board officials announced that Detroit public schools would downsize its student population over 5 years (Michigan Department of Education, 2010). The school board's rationale for closing schools was to save money. The impact of school closings on students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders were not considered during the restructuring plans (Hammer, 2011). During the same period, Detroit ranked among the ten most dangerous cities in the United States ([www.worldatlas.com](http://www.worldatlas.com)). Consequently, the city of Detroit experienced two major social issues, failing public education and increased crime.

In 2016, Detroit had the highest violent crime rate compared to other Michigan cities and the United States per 100,000 population. In 2020, the city of Detroit's violent crime ranked number two among big cities with a population greater than 100,000 people (Hunter & Harding, 2021). Detroit's crime problem has been a concern for its mayors for decades. Most mayoral candidates campaigned to improve public safety and reduce crime in their cities (Farver et al., 2014). The combination of massive school closings and crime problems raised concerns about the risk factors for youth and criminal activity. Wilson (2014) suggested that reducing students' ability to attend school was linked to the school-to-prison pipeline theory. The school-to-prison theory meaning was that shifts in the

school environment, such as police presence, zero tolerance, or suspensions and exclusion, increased student contact with law enforcement (Hirschfield, 2018). Although the intent of discipline policies in schools was to maintain order, such policies negatively promoted the school to prison pipeline theory. Bacher-Hicks (2021) found that strict disciplinary policies and severe punishment perpetuated poor academic performance and increased the likelihood of Black people and Hispanics dropping out of school, being arrested, and incarcerated compared to other racial groups. School dynamics and political decisions about the direction of schools were two dynamics that increase the propensity of delinquency. This study explored the school closing environment and its impact on juvenile delinquency.

Researchers examined environments affecting school closing, neighborhood characteristics, school mobility, and academic performance, and minimal research was observed about the impact of school closings on juvenile delinquency (Larsen, 2014; Rumberger, 2015). Researchers examined the relationship between juvenile delinquency and family dynamics (Boboc, 2017; Herrenkohl et al., 2000), school attendance (Rocque et al., 2017), and school suspension (Mittleman, 2018). Despite a plethora of research on juvenile delinquency and education, no known research focused on juveniles and their educational experience in urban communities where a disproportionate number of public schools closed. Accordingly, policymakers' decisions about school closures need an understanding of the possible relationship between school closing and delinquency.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This pragmatic qualitative study aimed to explore the perceptions of juvenile defense attorneys on public school closures and their impact on juvenile delinquency. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the influence of public-school closure on juvenile delinquency through the lens of defense attorneys. The phenomenon of interest was that the City of Detroit closed approximately 129 schools in its district from 2010 - 2014 (Dixon, 2011; Garnett, 2014). As a result, this study explored common themes on the connection between school closures and juvenile delinquency. In Chapter 1, I discuss when schools close, and when students relocate to other schools. The closure interrupted their social connections (Chriss, 2007). Travis Hirschi's social control theory suggested that when youth are disconnected socially from their school, the consequences may lead to delinquency (Costello & Laub, 2020). This study created an opportunity for research to determine if school closures were a predictor of delinquency. Additionally, the study brought awareness to stakeholders of the undesirable impact of school closure on delinquency.

### **Research Question**

What were the perceptions of defense attorneys regarding the influence that public school closings have on juvenile delinquency in Detroit, relative to the crime rate, high school dropout rate, and academic achievement? Additionally, there were two questions aimed at addressing the problem of how school closings impact juvenile delinquency.

1. When you were working as a juvenile defense attorney in Detroit, what did juveniles accused of a crime say about their educational experiences?
2. How do juvenile attorneys perceive the impact of school closures on juveniles during the same period?

### **Conceptual Framework for the Study**

This study's conceptual framework was based on Travis Hirschi's (2017) social control theory and Robert Agnew's strain theory (2017). Both theories examine the effects of an individual's social connection with society to explain the nature and cause of juvenile delinquency. Hirschi's social control theory was also called social bonding (Costello & Laub, 2020). The social control theory identified four conceptualized aspects that keep youths from delinquent behavior: attachment, involvement, belief, and commitment to the norms of society. For example, when young people are attached to relationships with family and friends, they are less likely to commit crimes (Biscontini, 2023). Also, when youth participate in activities, including school, individuals believe in a value system and are dedicated to societal rules (Chriss, 2007). As a result, criminal inclination declines. On the other hand, Agnew's strain theory explains why young people engage in deviant behavior.

The strain theory of criminology explained deviant behavior as an outcome of society's strains or stress on individuals. Agnew (2017) argued that one source of delinquency was an aversive stimulus, such as adverse school experiences where students do not have the power or authority to escape. The consequence of students not having a say in transferring to another school can resort to deviant behavior. As in moving to

another school, such social control may influence a student's commitment. As a result, psychologists believe that the stress experienced by students who transfer to other schools unwillingly is potentially harmful. The student may participate in deviant behavior to cope with stress (Ødegård, 2019). If the pressure resulted from a negative school experience, a young person becomes disinterested and dropout. In this study, both theories helped to identify trends in understanding the impact of closed schools and delinquency.

This study aimed to understand how school closures impact juvenile delinquency. Larsen (2014) and Rumberger (2015) suggested that school closings impact learning and may be a factor leading to dropout. School dropout and academic failure were linked to criminal behavior (Gubbels, et al., 2019). Theory indicates that dislocating students from their home school may create stress and increase the likelihood of deviant behavior. The impetus of this research was based on Gasper et al. (2012), suggesting that there was a need to further study the long-term effects of delinquency and student mobility caused by school closures. This research added to a body of knowledge by understanding the nature and meaning of delinquency through attorneys' experiences.

### **Nature of the Study**

This study used a qualitative pragmatic approach to understand the influence of public school closings and juvenile delinquency. The research discovered emerging themes that explored “the how and why” of closing schools and delinquency. Public school (pre-K through 12) enrollment in the United States is expected to increase by 1% by 2029. However, Michigan is one of four states where enrollment is projected to

decrease by 2029 (Hussar, 2020). Given the projected state of public education, exploring meaningful generalization over time may also add to the knowledge of the “how and why” of school closings and juvenile delinquency. To make sense of the phenomenon of inquiry, I reviewed secondary documents to determine a baseline and interviewed participants who had direct contact with juveniles arrested in the City of Detroit.

Qualitative methods are pertinent to exploring a phenomenon. Pragmatic qualitative inquiry research allows me, the principal investigator, to explore and interpret practical responses from participants. Patton (2022) states that practical research is flexible and allows emerging themes to better answer and understand the research problem. This research explored Detroit’s public school closings and their resulting impact on juvenile delinquency following the economic crisis from 2008 to 2020. The research focused on the experience and perception of defense attorneys representing juvenile offenders and how the attorney interprets juvenile educational experiences. Selecting defense attorneys to describe their experience is unique because their role is multi-faceted. Their part is to understand how adolescents develop, learn about their social experiences, explore family dynamics, and learn about their school background (Puritz & Walker, 2010). The data collected consisted of secondary documents and recorded voluntary interviews.

Secondary documents included school closings data, school characteristics, juvenile delinquency rates, and the race of students and delinquents. The description of their responses was transcribed. I did not use a computer-based program to analyze qualitative data. The responses during the interviews were subjective because participants described their personal experiences (Patton, 2002).

## Definitions

Regarding this study, specific definitions are provided to clarify terms that may have multiple definitions. For example, a juvenile is a young person in most dictionaries and delinquent may represent anyone that fails to perform a task. In this study the combination of both terms represented a young person engaged in criminal behavior. Additionally, criminal behavior may result in an individual being accused of a crime. In this paper, individuals accused of a crime are called offenders. Offenders can also be a person convicted of a crime both youth and adults. Student mobility is a term at face value that may speak to a student moving around. However, in this paper student mobility speaks to students who relocate to different schools over the course of the educational experience. Additionally, public education is a term that has been used to include chartered and voucher schools. Although funding for public, chartered and voucher schools come from the same pool of federal dollars, the requirement for educators may differ. In public education teachers must be certified yet this is not always true for chartered or voucher schools (Michigan Department of Education, 2019).

*Juvenile defense attorney:* the attorney representing a juvenile defendant in a criminal prosecution (Law.Com Dictionary, 2022)

*Juvenile delinquency:* is an adolescent criminal act committed by anyone from ages 10 to 17 years old (Champion, 2001).

*Offender:* is a person accused of a criminal act or convicted of a crime (Law.Com Dictionary, 2022).



*Public education:* is defined as “federally funded school, administered to some extent by the government, and charged with educating all citizens” (Chen, 2021).

*School mobility:* is the involuntary movement of students due to school closings, and movement is not a result of family movement (Welsh, 2017).

### **Assumptions**

For this study, there were several assumptions I made. I assumed that all participants were truthful with their answers to questions presented in this study. As the researcher, I presumed the interviewees knew their clients' educational experiences. I expected that defense attorneys interviewed had training and skill-set specific to defending juvenile offenders. The American Bar Association (Podgor, 2010) states that one of the functions of a defense attorney is to serve clients as an officer of the court and an advocate. Therefore, it was expected that participants worked with incarcerated youths that attended a Detroit public school.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Earlier in this chapter, I indicated that the focus of the study was to explore the influence of public school closures on juvenile delinquency. Research indicates that the reasons for the permanent closure of public schools are performance and enrollment (Armario, 2016). Based on the information, there were no alternative strategies introduced to address poorly performing schools and enrollment issues instead of closure. On the other hand, information indicates that it costs more to incarcerate a young person than to educate them (Pran, 2011). Permanent school closings affected jobs. Teachers, administrators, support staff, building maintenance, and other staff are either relocated or

laid off. Consequently, teachers and school administrators were not considered participants. It was not cost-effective to search for personnel who may have left the school system, relocated, or retired. The period of this study, 2008 to 2020, reflects those students under the age of 18. As a result, this population was not included because of cost. However, the scope of this study could expand to a longitudinal quantitative study in which scholars could track students from each closed school or a qualitative study of prisoners who attended a closed school using longitudinal factors.

### **Limitations**

There were limitations to this study. Overall, juvenile delinquency in the United States declined. In the United States, African American youth represent the minority. Appendix C illustrates that there are approximately 11,118,967 Black people in the United States compared to 18,701,194 Hispanics and 38,516,794 Whites. As stated earlier in this study, the Annie E. Casey Foundation reported that there was a disproportionate number of African American youth arrested and charged with a crime compared to other races. For example, in Wayne County Michigan from 2008 to 2017, Black youth committed more crimes than White youth (Table 1). Caneppele and Aebi (2019) challenged the idea of decreasing juvenile delinquency rates citing that the reason for the decrease may be a flaw in recording juvenile crime data. On the other hand, Tcherni-Buzzeo (2019) explained that part of the reason for the decline was that youth may have exhibited more self-control. The inconsistent quality of the data reported limited specific information to the city of Detroit about youth arrest and charges. This

limitation was addressed in juvenile crime data reported in Wayne County Michigan (Table 1). The city of Detroit is in Wayne County.

**Table 1**

*Juvenile Crime Rate Per 1000 Juveniles Wayne County Michigan by Age and Race*

Year	Juvenile crimes	Crime rate per 1000 juveniles					
		Age/Race	10 to 12	13-14	15-16	White	Black
2008	5888		299	1517	4026	2162	3663
			5%	26%	68%	37%	62%
2009	5485		226	1360	3860	2063	3363
			4%	25%	70%	38%	61%
2010	4733		277	1207	3249	1761	2912
			6%	26%	69%	37%	62%
2011	3951		235	1002	2714	1366	2516
			6%	25%	69%	35%	64%
2012	3,393		208	913	2272	1179	2168
			6%	27%	67%	35%	64%
2013	3,012		163	824	2025	1013	1953
			5%	27%	67%	34%	65%
2014	2363		153	591	1619	866	1453
			6%	25%	69%	37%	61%
2015	2019		143	542	1334	799	1182
			7%	27%	66%	40%	59%
2016	1,902		128	559	1215	766	1110
			7%	29%	64%	40%	58%
2017	1586		107	442	1037	772	799
			7%	28%	65%	49%	50%

Source: Juvenile arrest data are from Michigan State Police. Population data are from Puzzanchera, C., Sladky, A. and Kang, W. (2018). "Easy Access to Juvenile Populations: 1990-2017." Online. Accessed August 16, 2018. Available:

<http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/>.

Additionally, participants in the study were limited to juvenile defense attorneys. Prosecutors and judges were not asked to participate to avoid bias. Conversely, public school teachers were not selected because many lost their jobs when public schools

closed. Therefore, teachers may not be objective. To address the limitations of this study, I developed specific criteria for each participant. The criteria used ensured that the participants worked as a defense attorney for juveniles and were not hired as a private attorney who might defend in many disciplines.

Finally, another limitation of this study was that “closings” discussed throughout the research had different meanings in different situations. This research referred to the permanent closure of the school building. The physical building was closed permanently or for an extended period. The closings did not include teacher strikes, pandemics, epidemics, or building maintenance.

### **Significance**

The study addressed a gap in research on the relationship between school closings and delinquency in the following ways. First, Rumberger (2015) recommended that officials consider the harmful effect of school mobility (student movement) before closing, further stressing the need to explore the causes of delinquency. School mobility was a student’s movement to other schools for reasons other than promotion or voluntary transfer. In this study, school mobility was the involuntary movement of students due to school closings, and the movement was not the result of family choices or decisions. Second, according to practitioners, there was a need to understand the harmful effects of student movement and the process responsible for the damaging impact on youth (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2010). Participants in the National Research Council’s workshop suggested that there were unanswered questions on the effects of the student movement. Therefore, this study explored the potentially harmful

effects of student movement and public defense attorneys' opinion and insight within the city of Detroit. Finally, Gasper et al. (2010) indicated the need for further research on the long-term effects of student movement and delinquency. The research examined the movement of students for one year. As a result, the study, Gasper et al. acknowledged that they could not "fully explain" the relationship between mobility and delinquency. This research provided information to stakeholders in shaping policies to reduce juvenile delinquency influenced by school closures. The study explored school closure and its impact on delinquency from the perspective of defense attorneys. Accordingly, policymakers' decisions about school closures are further informed on juvenile delinquency and delinquency risk factors, and practitioners gain additional insight.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the compounding issue of juvenile delinquency and public education in the United States and Detroit, Michigan. Problematic behaviors for young people continue to be a social issue in public settings, and policymakers attempt to eradicate it through juvenile justice reform prescriptions. In addition, political and financial concerns of public education in America were discussed. Researchers argue that the public school system in the United States fail students (Ladd, 2017). Reform, such as No Child Left Behing, had little impact on public schools closing due to mediocre performance, lack of finances, and insufficient support for students with disabilities (Adler-Greene, 2019; Giroux, 2018).

On the other hand, others argued that closing schools harm students. Agnew's (2017) strain theory states that students forced to move because of administrative

decisions are subject to behavior problems that may lead to criminal activities. Conversely, Hirschi's (2017) social control theory states that students who lack attachment and commitment, for example, the school environment, are at risk for deviant behavior. What is unknown is whether students subjected to forced school closure have the coping skills to resist criminal behavior. This study explored school closure and juvenile delinquency through the lens of defense attorneys. School closing was a significant negative and a tremendous positive for many. The next chapter, the literature review, explores those who say it has been a considerable negative. I then discussed findings from scholars who regarded school closings as positive. In thinking about the negative and positive, there were unanswered questions. The next chapter reviews the literature on what we know about delinquency and public policy, juvenile delinquency risk factors, school risk factors and delinquency, and the role of defense attorneys. Chapter 3 provides the method used to collect data and select participants. Participants in the study shared information on their interaction with juveniles in the juvenile justice system. Chapter 4 discusses the findings based on common themes from the interview questions. The themes compiled were code and analyze qualitative dates. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the study's conclusion and provides recommendations for future studies.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the influence of public-school closure on juvenile delinquency through the lens of defense attorneys. The study began with a personal observation of a social phenomenon in my neighborhood of 40 years: abandoned houses, no nearby public elementary school, and high crime rates. I began to ask why, what happened, and what if anything could be done.

The literature review begins with an overview of juvenile delinquency and risk factors. The theoretical premises of the study and literature review are general strain and social control theories. Both theories provide a theoretical base on the cause of juvenile delinquency. In this section, I discuss public policy and public perceptions of juvenile delinquency to substantiate the seriousness of the juvenile offenses, and its possible causes. The literature review continues with evidence-based risk factors that influence illegal behavior in young children. Studies show the impact of negative youth behavior and family dynamics on delinquency. A child's social and environmental experiences are other predictors that influence adolescent illegal activities. The literature discussed the juvenile justice system and the roles of the defense attorney in the juvenile justice system. Finally, the school was the second most experienced institution where children are engaged, the family environment being the first. The literature review looks at school closure factors contributing to juvenile delinquency. Student mobility, disciplinary policies, attendance, and school closings are reviewed concerning students' propensity to engage in criminal acts.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The research was conducted by reviewing several articles from the Michigan Department of Education website about school informational data. Additionally, archived news articles and public television documentaries on the fate of Detroit Public Schools were reviewed. Walden University's library was utilized to review scholarly articles on juvenile delinquency causes and prevention. The Sage Journal and ProQuest Central were two databases used because there was various journal articles based on keyword searches. The challenge was the terminology. I used Walden's Writing Center to learn search strategies. I toggled between the Criminal Justice databases, for articles on juvenile delinquency, and ERIC for educational indexes to explore why schools fail. Because there was no current research on the impact of forced school closings and juvenile delinquency, several databases were searched, concurrently. Finally, I explored the Michigan State Police website for articles and the National Center for Juvenile Justice to review policies, trends, and laws in relation to issues on juvenile delinquency.

### **Juvenile Delinquency**

As previously stated, juvenile delinquency is a social issue. In 2017, the United States criminal justice system housed more than 2.3 million prisoners (Appendix D). The number of incarcerated individuals in the United States is more than any other nation (Wildra & Herring, 2021). Although in 2022, the prison population in the United States dropped, they still ranked higher than other nations. There were 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 901 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, and 76 Indian County Jails in the United States ([www.vera.org](http://www.vera.org)). The number of juvenile correctional



facilities were a little more than half the adult state prisons. In relation, there were 98,500 public school in the U.S. in 2017. In comparison, juvenile facilities represent 10% of public schools (nces.ed.gov). The issue of juvenile delinquency continues to be a topic of national interest. The social control and strain theories explain why youth engage in criminal activities and why others may not (Agnew, 2017; Hirschi, 2017) There has been ongoing research, prevention programs, strategies, and funding to address the inadequacies in public education (Lane, 2017). In 2017, the Vera Institute of Justice reported that the average cost to house one prisoner was \$33,274 per year in 2015 (The Price of Prisons, 2017). In terms of public education spending, the numbers are alarming. In the United States, the average spending for public education in 2019 was \$13,187 per pupil (Chen, 2021). In the state of Michigan, the average spending per student for the 2020-2021 school year was \$16,742 (Michigan School District Revenue and Expenditure Report, 2021). In conclusion, spending on incarcerating young people is more significant than educating young people.

### **Public Policy and Public Perception**

Policymakers address juvenile delinquency by adopting legislation to help prevent and reduce the frequency rate. For example, the Get-Tough Laws, "Three Strikes You're Out," and policies lowering the age for adolescents to be tried as adults (Kovandzic et al., 2004; Mears, 2001) were implemented for government to get a handle on juvenile delinquency. The "Three Strikes You're Out" law was intended to impose harsher penalties for habitual offenders and reduce crime (Crawford, 2017). In most states, the legal age for an adolescent is between 10 and 19 years. Adolescents are defined as

“period between puberty and adulthood” according to Encyclopedia Britannica. In the state of Michigan, children between 14 and 17 can be prosecuted as adults for serious offenses (Michigan Compiled Law 764.1(f)1).

Detroit ranked among the top ten most dangerous cities in the United States for several years (Baldas, 2017). The FBI crime statistics, compiled by Forbes, revealed that Detroit was the most dangerous city with a population of over 250,000 in the United States in 2012, 2013, 2015, and 2017 (Baldas, 2017; Fisher, 2013). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention reported similar statistics for juvenile delinquency in Detroit. According to FBI crime statistics, juvenile arrest for violent and property crime has declined 50 % between 2006 and 2019 (Puzzanchera, 2020). Detroit consistently ranked in the top 25% of the states’ juvenile arrest rates for both violent and property crimes.

Despite statistical data showing a decline in the overall incident rate of juvenile delinquency, there is evidence that young adults "commit a disproportionate amount of the nation's crime" (Casey, et al., 2017, p. 3). Consequently, public perception of juvenile delinquency continues to be of concern, contrary to an overall decrease in the juvenile crime rate. The public's view is influenced in part by school shootings and the media's portrayal of such events (O'Toole & Fondacaro, 2017). School shootings by young offenders compel the public to insist on harsh retributions regardless of the age of the offender (O'Toole & Fondacaro, 2017; Roche et al., 2016). Public perception gives way to policymakers to examine juvenile reform (Roche et al., 2016). In the past decade, the U. S. Supreme Court banned the death sentence for juvenile offender found guilty of

capital crimes and declared it unconstitutional for juveniles to serve life sentences without the possibility of parole. Darden (2018) addressed two cases: *Roper v. Simmons* 543 U.S. 551, 2005 & *Miller v. Alabama* 567 U.S. 460, 2012, in which the Supreme Court ruled against the death penalty for young offenders. The link between public policy and juvenile justice reform transcends theories that examine other risk factors that influence delinquency and crime. Additionally, another key predictor for misconduct in adolescence family characteristics and dynamics.

### **Juvenile Delinquency: Risk Factors**

When youth experience multiple-risk factors, the probability of criminal activity may increase. In Chapter 1, the strain's theory (Agnew, 2017) suggests that youth may engage in delinquent behavior to cope with stresses associated with risk factors (Ødegård, 2019 & Wang & Fredricks, 2014). In addition, Hirschi's (2017) social control theory corresponds to risk factors in terms of attachment and involvement, albeit family, individual, or neighborhoods can also be significant factors. The United States government programs on youth categorize these risk factors into five domains: family, individual, peer, community, and school ([www.youth.gov/](http://www.youth.gov/)). A key predictor for misconduct among youth is family characteristics.

### **Family Factors**

The family is the first social institution that meets with a child. In studies on risk factors influencing juvenile offenses, family-related issues are among the most common causes of delinquency and crime of young children (Boboc, 2017; Herrenkohl et al., 2000). There are viable data that point to multiple risk factors within the family structure

that place strain on a child and lead to delinquent behavior (Nisar et al, 2015). Agnew (2015) described strain as an emotional condition that exists when a person expects to be treated in a certain way and is not. Specific family issues can induce stress for young children and result in deviant behavior. Research indicates that unstable upbringing may be a contributing factor to delinquency and aggressive behavior (Alarid et al., 2000). When a child is raised by a parent(s) with minimum parenting skills and limited finances, the family environment can be a factor that influences children to have anti-social and aggressive behavior (Kauts & Kaur, 2016). Adolescents who demonstrated elevated levels of antisocial behavior were associated with harmful behavior up to adulthood. Calvete et al. (2015) discussed the relationship between family violence and a child's behavior. The study supports the theory that a child's behavior is learned, and that learning starts at an early age. Additionally, the research indicates that the child learns that there are no consequences to violent functioning because both the parent who exhibits inappropriate behavior and the child who is not punished for their actions become ingrained. School-aged children exposed to violence, social problems, gangs, and other victimization may internalize their problems and are at risk of engaging in illegal activities (Barnett et al., 2015; de Vries Robbé et al., 2015; Finkelhor et al., 2014). Additionally, adolescents who are depressed, have behavior problems, or are bullied, are also at risk of ongoing delinquent behavior activities that may lead to adult criminal behavior (Baldry, 2014; Brook et al., 2015).

Further research conducted by Jarjoura et al. (2002) concluded that the lack of family resources impacts delinquency. More impoverished families often lack the

resources necessary to address the demands of day-to-day life, let alone a child exhibiting inappropriate behavior. Research suggests that when minors are engaged in illegal behavior, they are at risk of living a life of continuous criminal conduct into adulthood. In fact, research has shown that school-aged children exposed to violence, social problems, gangs, and other victimization, may internalize their problems and are at risk of engaging in illegal activities (Barnett et al., 2015; de Vries Robbé et al., 2015; Finkelhor et al., 2014). Continuous delinquent behavior also occurs when minors are engaged in ongoing contact with law enforcement. Parents and family members are disconnected from the child (Benekos & Merlo, 2019), and decisions regarding the child's social, housing, and education are decided by the juvenile court system.

### **Individual Factors**

Psychosocial correlates are used to explain why young people involve themselves in criminal activity (Taşkıran et al., 2017). In the criminal justice system, forensic psychologists are professionals who evaluate the state of mind of a criminal. Neurotic behavior is defined as a person who has anxiety, which may result in defensive action. People diagnosed with obsessive behavior tend to avoid reality rather than cope with life's challenges. Their lifestyle is self-defeating and is not productive. These individuals are okay with a life that is status quo or mediocre (Agnew, 2017; Margari et al., 2015). They feel inadequate yet will do nothing about it. The pressure from life's challenge can be attributed to childhood abuse or neglect (Garbarino & Plantz, 2017).

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2022) individuals who are neglected and abused as children are more likely to engage in juvenile delinquency, adult

criminal activity, and violent behavior than individuals who were not abused or neglected as a child. Child Welfare Information Gateways defines abuse and neglect, in part, as placing a child in imminent danger ([www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)). The psychological impact of violence is the removal of the child from home. Second, the children grow up to be child abusers; consequently, the abuse may lead to substance abuse and deviant behavior that may also lead to criminal activities.

Antisocial behavior has been associated with delinquency, according to Haynie and Osgood (2005). Haynie and Osgood and Farrington et al. (2012) suggested that peer influence may be a factor in delinquency and criminal activity. The impact of gang membership on society shows that gang members are more likely to be involved in violence than non-gang members (McGloin & Decker, 2010). The process for gang entry is to commit a crime. Based on the social learning theory, individuals learn from their environment when factors such as the need to associate are present. Hence, individuals can learn delinquent and criminal behavior through gang initiation and membership (McGloin & Decker, 2010).

There is substantial research that confirms risk factors associated with unacceptable juvenile behavior and criminal activity. Researchers Nisar et al. (2015) discussed the social factors that influence juvenile delinquency. Data were collected from 50 participants about family dynamics, peer relations, and economic status. The results confirm theories that family status, peer pressure, and financial status are factors influencing delinquency and crime (Nisar et al., 2015). The study was consistent with one

type of strain, goal obstruction, which suggests that when youth are unable to achieve school goals, it increases the likelihood of criminal behavior (Sykes et al., 2015).

Social factors, such as poverty, may lead to criminal activities. American journalists and screenwriters are skilled at portraying human interest stories on how people grow up in impoverished neighborhoods and families, yet they overcome obstacles and succeed in life. Living in poverty does not mean that an individual will engage in delinquent behavior. Yet, the intensity of poverty affects social adjustments, self-esteem, and other maladaptive behaviors, according to Jarjoura et al. (2002). Quantitative research contends that there is a correlation between poverty and crime. Specifically, the strain theory states poverty affects school preparation and performance as well as access to opportunities (Jarjoura et al., 2002, p. 161).

### **Neighborhood and Environment Factors**

Criminologists have evaluated strain theory (Agnew, 2017) to explain criminal behavior among youths. Snyder et al. (2016) examined the repercussion of several types of strain and stress of homeless youth to determine the behavioral effect. The results revealed that higher strain and stress caused by homelessness due to conditions of poverty, maltreatment, and discrimination, both racial and sexual orientation, resulted in higher levels of offending (Snyder et al., 2016). The study suggests that there should be mandated policies requiring training for service providers to address specific strain and stress experienced by youth.

Criminology is an interdisciplinary field of study in human behavior and social factions concerning crime (Dooley, 2016). Several theories examine social structures in

the neighborhood to explain, predict, or understand criminal behavior. The influence of population, housing, community involvement, and schools are prevalent/dominant neighborhood structures. Accordingly, adverse environmental factors such as disorderly neighborhoods and limited community involvement are risk factors for juvenile delinquency and crime (Patchin et al., 2006; Voisin et al., 2016). Sociologists Shaw and McKay (1942) proposed in their model of social disorganization that the higher the residential movement, the higher the rate of crime in the neighborhood. Additionally, sociologists argue that neighborhood characteristics such as residential mobility and racial heterogeneity explain the evolution of youth crime in an urban neighborhood (Kubrin & Wo, 2016; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Other studies on social disorganization suggest that the adverse effects of poverty, population trends, housing foreclosure, and school closings, are likely to increase the crime rate (Chilenski et al., 2015; Weisburd et al., 2014). Future research acquiesces that there is a connection between social urban economic changes and the evolution of youth crime in urban communities (Weisburd et al., 2014). Although in this research the emphasis was on the strain theory to help understand the relation between juvenile delinquency and crime and school closings, the social disorganization and broken windows theories suggest similar reasons for juvenile delinquency and crime (Jay & Conklin, 2017). On the other hand, the strain theory provided evidence on the community implications on crime. Community strain was higher in a neighborhood where there is evidence of decaying structures and social disorder. In these communities, there was a lack of respect for other residences, litter, graffiti, and defecating in public are some examples. Community strain was an aggregate



of negative events within a neighborhood and stress experienced by individuals living in the area (Antonaccio et al., 2017). Often these events occur in disadvantaged communities and foster delinquency and higher crime rates (Antonaccio et al. 2017; Graif et al., 2014). It is estimated that 90% of all juvenile delinquents experienced at least one stressful event preceding their criminal behavior (Jaggers et al., 2016). There are multiple ecological conditions in neighborhoods that affect criminal behavior as well.

The economic conditions of neighborhoods and their characteristics are determinants of their viability (Yun & Evangelou, 2016). When communities have proportionated populations, their residents are gainfully employed, it is a safe environment, and there is homeownership; these communities do well and sustain for more years than contrasting impoverished communities (Leonard, 2016; McCabe, 2016). At the beginning of the 21st century, the United States housing crisis reached its pinnacle. It had a devastating impact on the physical condition, population decline, and blight in neighborhoods. Government reports referenced lax lending standards of financial institutions as one of the causes resulting in increased debt for homeowners (United States, 2010). As a result, middle-income citizens were paying more for their homes than they were worth. Families either experience foreclosure, or they walk away from their homes to save money. The exodus of people moving out of neighborhoods left few controls over illegal activities in the area. Vacant homes for an extended period created opportunities for vandalism, theft, drug abuse, and hiding places for criminal activities (Jones & Pridemore, 2016). The literature covering people, and their environments suggests that conditions such as home foreclosures serve as a good predictor of increased

crime (Katz et al., 2013). In the city of Detroit, population decline resulted in increased homicide rates (Hollis, 2018). Residential communities with elevated levels of foreclosure, abandoned properties, and residential instability become a contagion for crime (Hipp & Kubrin, 2017). Remaining citizens feel unsafe and are likely to become physically and psychologically disinvested in their communities as a result (Raleigh & Galster, 2015).

The work of Braga and Clarke (2014) proposed a new method for analyzing high crime areas in neighborhoods. Instead of focusing on cities and communities, the data collection on crime should address smaller areas such as streets and intersections. The researchers' examination of social disorganization and opportunity theories found that there is a need for additional research that would utilize a more appropriate measurement of criminological inquiry in understanding crime problems. Kim (2016) used a different approach to examine structural characteristics and crime. Instead of reviewing Census data and defining their unit of analysis to small geographic tracts, Kim used smaller tracts to measure and understand crime. Smaller tracts intended to "better measure the physical and social environment of residents" (p. 1). The results reveal that structural characteristics in neighborhoods similarly impacted crime in the same manner when studying more significant segments of the community. The research conducted by Ellen et al. (2013) and Williams et al. (2014) found that crime increased in New York City and Chicago neighborhoods with higher foreclosure rates. Studies in the states of New York and Pennsylvania revealed that foreclosure and school openings are predictors of high crime rates (Ellen et al., 2013). Schools are one neighborhood structure that are predictors

of crime and victimization, but the research is limited to the effects of school closings on neighborhood crime.

So far, I have discussed the implications of neighborhood characteristics and juvenile delinquency and crime. Another significant structure is the juvenile justice system. School behavioral issues that are not addressed at the school level often result in adolescents having an encounter with the law. The next section covers the role of the juvenile justice system to rehabilitate young offenders and the role of the defense attorney.

### **Juvenile Justice System**

The aim of the juvenile justice system enacted by the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 was to rehabilitate young offenders and keep them out of the prison population of older offenders. Before juvenile justice reform, young offenders were tried as adults for serious crimes and were subject to adult penalties with no opportunity for rehabilitation. Proponents of strict laws and harsh penalties believed that punitive action reduced crime rates (Levitt, 2004; Redding, 2010). Statistics from the U. S. Department of Justice show a decline in crime and juvenile arrests from 1990 – 2010 by as much as 20% (Snyder, 2012). In the past decade, a 50% decline in juvenile delinquency was attributed to tougher laws. Opponents of punitive punishment say that the rules were not effective. Goshe (2015) argued that the United States' punitive juvenile justice system criminalizes young offenders. On the other hand, Lotti (2020) suggested that harsh policies for young people are a deterrence. However, Lotti followed young offenders in Wales for approximately 9 years. In his study, he found that 20% of those

exposed to harsh punishment were repeat offenders. Consequently, the allocation of resources for rehabilitation is minimal; the system does not educate young offenders, and the ideology that youth should be accountable for their action “does little to produce durable change” (Goshe, 2015, p. 53). The purpose and the impact of the juvenile justice system continues to be a debatable issue in the United States.

Critics agree that the juvenile justice system seeks the child's best interest by using multi-side approaches (Mallett, 2016) to adjudicate their case. However, research reveals that most young offenders enter the juvenile justice system with deficiencies in education and learning (National Juvenile Justice Network, 2016) which may impact the process including pleas and sentences. The consequences of increasing the penalties and zero tolerance in schools resulted in more adolescent arrests and charges as adults (Mallett, 2016). The impact of zero-tolerance policies changed the school environment. Measures to ensure safety in schools included police presence, metal detectors, security cameras, and school locker checks. Before the juvenile justice reform, which required all schools to receive federal funds to implement social controls for safety, school crime was not a significant factor in juvenile arrest and crime (Mallett, 2016). The get-tough laws decreased juvenile delinquency overall but increased the number of school arrests and criminalization of students (Maddow, 2015). Research suggests that young offenders subject to the get-tough laws and “Three strikes and You are out,” found that for juveniles it creates a greater chance of them being lifetime offenders or part of the school to prison population (Brown et al., 2020; Dancy, 2014). Although there are contrasting views on the effectiveness of punitive justice, there is a consensus that juvenile arrest and

crime are still a topic of discussion. Opponents of schools' zero-tolerance discipline policies argue that police officers responsible for enforcing the policy place too many students in contact with the law and enables the school-to-prison theory (Owens, 2017). The effectiveness and the role of the juvenile justice system continues to be a political discussion, and critics agree that reform has not been effective in serving the needs of young offenders (Leiber & Fix, 2019). Despite debates about the justice systems, juvenile offenders need advocacy and support through defense attorneys (American Bar Association, 2017).

### **Defense Attorney**

The primary responsibility of a defense attorney is to represent a defendant accused and/or charged with a crime. Defense attorneys who represent juveniles have unique roles. Juvenile defense attorneys must understand adolescent development, maturity, and competency levels to effectively communicate with the client (Puritz & Walker, 2010). Woestehoff et al. (2019) stated that defense attorneys will better understand the juveniles' overall competencies than prosecutors or the judges because of their level of interaction with the offender. In addition, defense attorneys play a crucial role in making recommendations to the court on the penalties imposed on youth offenders and recommending not guilty verdicts (Urbina & Guevara, 2009).

Risk factors perpetuating juvenile delinquency include problems in the home, school violence, and gang violence and participation (Jastrzebska, 2019). When juveniles charged with a crime experience the juvenile justice system process, they are at a greater risk of being a repeat offender into adulthood (Steinberg, 2019). Consequently, young

attorneys are concerned about the impact of punitive sentencing. Attorneys argue that the original intent of juvenile justice reform was rehabilitation instead of punishment. Part of rehabilitation includes continuing the education of juvenile offenders. Prior to young people being engaged in the juvenile justice system, research reveals that school related factors may disrupt the education process. Disruptive factors include school disciplinary policies, poor attendance, school closings, and student mobility.

### **Student Mobility**

The primary focus of this research is to examine the link between school-initiated closure and juvenile delinquency, from a defense attorney's perspective. The research is replete on the connection between student mobility and its implication for juvenile delinquency and crime. Student mobility is when students move from one school to another for reasons other than being promoted to the next grade level. There are several reasons, other than student promotion, for student mobility, which include school-initiated moves such as closure or redistricting, and disciplinary policies forcing the student to transfer. Additionally, student mobility occurs when families change residency or family structures change, such as divorce or death. The focus in this research is forced or school-initiated mobility.

When students transition to another school, they can become frustrated, and the risk of dropping out of school increases. Kirshner et al. (2010) investigated the experiences of high school students displaced due to school closure. The study used data that was based on Academic Performance and Student Experiences during the students' transition. The results of the research revealed that students involved in school closings

were adversely affected by the dropout and graduation probabilities and academic achievement. The dropout probability increased by 8%, and the likelihood of graduation decreases from 71% before closure to 49% after closure. Additionally, the academic achievement in reading, math, and writing declined for students who transferred to the new school. The significance of Kirshner et al.'s study is that it demonstrates the psychological and educational impact of school closures. In much the same way, the effect of the student movement is linked to the well-being of adolescents (Cordes et al., 2016).

The negative impact of residential mobility is the child's school performance and socialization (Cordes et al., 2016; Porter & Vogel, 2014). Movement because of poor and declining neighborhoods is disruptive, and student resilience to adjust declines the more frequently it occurs (Schwartz et al., 2017). Research suggests that students stable in their neighborhood perform better in school (Porter & Vogel, 2014). Interestingly, evidence indicates that the quality of the school was not a significant factor for parents' satisfaction. The reason parents were less concerned about school quality is that they were more concerned with their living conditions (Cordes et al., 2016). However, without a holistic support system from the school community, and government housing, residential movement not only affects student achievement but behavior as well (Voight et al., 2020).

Adolescents' well-being and social development are an integral part of their educational experience (Cordes et al., 2016). Social relationships are an essential part of adolescent growth (Langenkamp, 2016). Consequently, students involved in school

“hopscotch” are at risk of school disengagement (Fernández-Suárez et al., 2016; Mittleman, 2018; Snyder et al., 2016). Other theorists and sociologists suggest that lack of school engagement is a risk factor of dropping out of school, which leads to a propensity for delinquent behavior (Gasper et al., 2012). On the other hand, changing schools can be the result of educational policies and funding. Theories in criminology that explain why people commit crimes have one common trait, and that is negative emotions. Consequently, the emotional effect of changing schools influences one's decision to commit a crime (Walters, 2016).

In most urban areas, the school is the center of the community. The benchmarks for closing urban schools have been academic performance and finances (Sunderman et al., 2017). Educational policies regarding disciplinary procedures may insist that students are suspended, expelled, and attend an alternative school. Langenkamp (2016) purported that when students' routines change without notice, they lose connection with friends, and their school performance declines (Billings et al., 2014; Rumberger, 2015). Dropping out of school is one risk factor in predicting the propensity for deviant behavior among young children (Robison et al., 2017).

### **School Disciplinary Policies**

School disciplinary policies are to help protect and keep order in schools. In 1994, the United States government signed into law the Gun Free School Act (Gun Free School Act of 1994, 18 U.S.C. 922 (q) (2) (a)) in response to school shootings and violence. The law gave schools added authority to manage discipline with mandatory expulsion and suspension. The zero-tolerance policy meant that violating guns or other threatening



weapons possession on school grounds would lead to suspension, expulsion, or early school leave. The political process to address school safety and discipline resulted in the criminalization of schools (Hirschfield, 2008). Schools resemble prisons with police office, surveillance and security cameras, metal detectors, and mandatory identification (Mallett, 2016). When policies are not enforced, it could affect the education of not only the perpetrator but other students as well.

Educational policies about disciplinary procedures may insist that students are suspended, expelled, and attend an alternative school. In Barboza's (2015) study on the association between school exclusion, delinquency, and subtypes of victimization, the focus is on victims of bullying and cyber-bullying. Children between the ages of 12 and 18 years old took part in a cross-sectional design survey about their experiences of being bullied. The data were collected from a sample of 5,589 youth using a study from the National Crime Victimization database. The research discusses the profile of the bully and the psychological impact on the victim to find similar or distinct characteristics. The victims show the behavior of isolation and in some cases, aggression. As a result, Barboza suggests that bullying may be a precursor to school shootings. Also, Barboza's result shows a high correlation between juvenile delinquency, such as truancy and being a victim of bullying and cyber-bullying.

In recent years, concerns about discipline in schools have increased significantly. In 2019, Communities in Schools started a Gallup Poll on how teachers' preparedness in managing behavioral problems in the classroom fared. The poll revealed that 54% of the adults in the United States did not feel that teachers were prepared to effectively address

discipline in the community (Communities in Schools, 2019). Although students and teachers want to learn and work in a safe environment, harsh punishment can have negative consequences. Perry and Morris (2014) stated that, “frequent use of school level suspension disrupts school community” (p. 17). On the other hand, a positive school environment creates a culture of engagement and learning. In Perry and Morris’ (2014) study, the rate of out of school suspension was excessive and governed by authoritarian communication and threats from school leadership. In the study, the strain from threats and the experience of seeing other students being punished created anxiety among students. Perry and Morris’s (2014) research found that there was a decline in academic achievement for non-suspended students. The impact of punitive discipline also suggests racial inequities in punishment. Some critics argue that school-based criminalization resulting from the consequences of punitive disciplinary policies increased arrest in schools (Maddox, 2015).

The research suggest that African Americans experience more out of school suspensions and expulsion than other ethnic groups in public schools (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Gregory et al., 2015). During a 7-year study of disciplinary practices in Arkansas public schools, it was learned that Black students received longer and more severe punishment than their white peers. Anderson and Ritter’s (2017) study were based on the type, seriousness, and punishable days for the infraction. The top five violations were disorderly conduct, insubordination, fighting, truancy, and bullying. The intent of the study was to target school reform and suggest effective strategies in managing school

discipline. The study did not suggest training, but other research suggested teachers training.

The controversy of inequities in school disciplinary policies continues to be a topic for school reform. Alternative approaches include training for teachers. Negative behavior in the classroom is disruptive and impacts academic performance for remaining students (Gregory et al., 2015; Perry & Morris, 2014). On the other hand, teachers receiving specialized training and strategies for diffusing behavioral issues and not resorting to the school disciplinary process lowered the exclusion rate (Gregory et al., 2015). In Gregory et al.'s (2015) analysis, teachers taking part in the training and applied the skills learned were able to improve student engagement and interacting, thus creating a positive impact for all students. Another alternative to the negative consequences of punitive discipline is restorative justice.

Restorative justice in schools is a practice like the criminal justice system that focuses on restoration of the victim harmed (Payne & Welch, 2015). Instead of out of school expulsion students who violate school policies are given due process. The due process practice gives students options such as a conference, peer mediation, restitution, and community service instead of expulsion. Payne and Welch surveyed restorative justice practices in schools nationwide. Of the schools surveyed, schools with more Black students enrolled were less likely to use the practices of restoration than when whites were in the majority. Additionally, the restorative concept could decrease student misconduct and increase student's success (Payne & Welch, 2015). Restorative practices over suspension and expulsion support the argument that punitive practices increase

delinquent behavior. Students who have problems in school may not have the resilience or coping skills to correct their behavior.

The strain theory is concerned with the reasons why delinquent behavior emerges with adolescents experiencing life strain. The theory is used to explain that delinquency is less likely to occur when there are fewer stressors in a child's life. Consequently, students who violate the student code of conduct do not have the skills to resist further infraction, instead they resort to criminal coping. Adolescents turn to crime to cope with difficult issues that gave them stress (Thaxton & Agnew, 2018).

### **Attendance**

Poor attendance and lack of school interest are precursors to juvenile delinquency. For decades, the literature stated that children with poor school attendance are at a greater risk of behavioral problems than those with good attendance (Garry, 1996; Gubbels et al., 2019). Risk factors associated with chronic school absenteeism have a systemic relationship to a student's social development. For example, different elements of family dynamics are risk factors. Parenting styles are associated with a child's attendance and academic success. When parents have a positive perspective about education, they promote good attendance and performance (Kordi & Baharudin, 2010). In a study conducted by Valbona and Berisha (2019), the parenting patterns of approximately 200 participants revealed that children of authoritative parents did better in life, both as children and adults. Parents play a vital role in the social development of children. Consequently, when inconsistent oversight from parents or family members, attendance suffers, leading to a lack of interest. There is a correlation between parental involvement

and a child's academic success (Boonk et al., 2018). On the other hand, families may lack the financial resources to ensure that they attend school regularly. Some families may have childcare issues and keep a child out of school to care for younger siblings. The family environment is a risk factor for poor attendance and academic failure. Chronic absenteeism from school exists in family environments where there is a lack of support for the school, inconsistent rules, or anxiety (Fornander & Kearney, 2019). Hirschi's social bonding theory on delinquency warns that students who are not committed to, or attached to, school are at a greater risk of failure. Poor attendance is one factor that leads to disengagement from school.

Theory suggests that students' lack of interest in school increases their risk of poor attendance and academic failure (Bowles & Scull, 2019). In 2009, the Center for Disease Control reported that students connected to their school are less likely to engage in deviant behavior, substance abuse, and gang activity. Attendance issues lead to lower academic achievement and increase the likelihood of dropping out of school. Lochner and Moretti (2003) said that dropouts commit more crimes than students who graduate from high school. When youth are not in school, too often, during their idle time, they are engaged in deviant behavior (Jacob & Lefgren, 2003). Lochner and Moretti stated that students who drop out of school commit more crimes than students who graduate from high school. The family structure, disengagement from school, and peer pressure are not the only factors when considering the impact of chronic absenteeism and delinquency. School characteristics are also related to chronic absences of students.

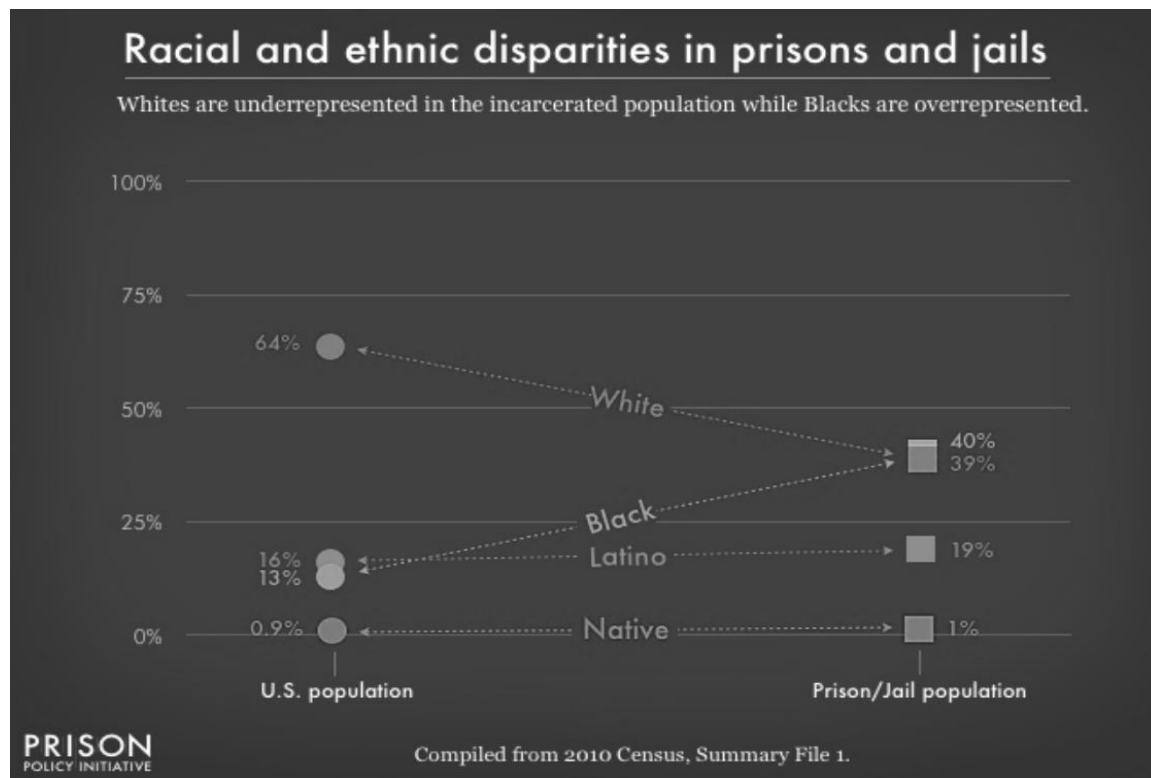
The school is a major social institution where youth socialize with others, learn social norms, and become a part of their community. There is ample research documenting the negative impact of poor school climate and delinquency (Davis et al., 2019; Peguero et al., 2019). According to the National School Climate Center (Thapa, 2013), school climate was measured by how school personnel, students, and parents feel about their school. Additionally, the Center said that an emotionally and physically safe school environment is one of the core characteristics of a positive school climate. When schools fail in providing a safe learning environment, improved academic performance, supportive and trained staff, and fostering a sense of belonging, delinquency and violence rates increase (Van Eck et al., 2017). The consequences are poor attendance and lack of interest in school. Hawkins and Weis (1985) stated that programs promoting positive socialization and incorporating social learning and social control theories could reduce delinquency. Socialization involves helping children to understand school-related rules. For example, creating awareness about the meaning and consequences of disciplinary policies.

School absenteeism is not always family or environmentally fostered. School disciplinary policies force absences and, in some instances, permanently expelled students from school. Time spent out of school is associated with antisocial behavior causing young people to have little interest in school (Haynie & Osgood, 2005). There is zero-tolerance for activities that implicate violence in many school districts. Critics argue that school disciplinary policies are a gateway to prison for adolescents (Monahan et al.,

2014; Pesta, 2018). School policies and characteristics are crucial for good attendance and achievement.

### **School Closings**

The permanent closing of schools in the United States is not a new phenomenon; it is one in which attention to its impact on delinquency was considered minimal. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that 1,160 schools permanently closed their doors between 2014 and 2015, and approximately 200,000 students had to relocate to other schools as a result. The Chicago Public Schools, at the end of their 2013 school year, closed 53 schools, affecting over 12,000 students. The Detroit and Philadelphia school systems reported a similar rise in closings. Declining enrollment was another reason given for massive school closings in the city of Detroit (Garnett, 2014). Figure 1 shows Detroit's student population and its decline from 2006 to 2016. Like many other schools closing their doors, the rationale was finances and low academic performance. Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia schools reported on staff and students' experiences and outcomes. The focus was on mobility, transfer, and academic achievement, and no discussion regarding the impact on delinquency (Brummet, 2014; Gordon et al., 2018; Jack & Sludden, 2013).

**Figure 1***Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Prisons and Jails*

The literature on school closings focuses on the impact of temporary or permanent closures and other dynamics resulting in permanent closures. Natural disasters are another factor resulting in permanent and short-term closings of schools. Students in New Orleans, Louisiana, were displaced by a natural disaster. The impact of the disaster created lost schooldays and academic issues (Davis et al., 2019). In addition, researchers examined school disciplinary records and revealed an increase in behavioral problems of displaced students (Tian, 2015). An overarching effect of school closings is the displacement of students (Kirshner et al., 2010). While some students will transfer to



another school, others will dropout displaced students are at risk of losing interest in school.

Adolescents' well-being and social development are integral to their educational experience (Cordes et al., 2016). Social relationships are essential for adolescent growth (Langenkamp, 2016). Consequently, students involved in school "hopscotch" risk school disengagement (Fernández-Suárez et al., 2016; Mittleman, 2018; Snyder et al., 2016). Other theorists and sociologists suggest that lack of school engagement is a risk factor for dropping out of school, which leads to a propensity for delinquent behavior (Gasper et al., 2012). Theories in criminology explain that one reason people commit crimes is due to negative emotions. Consequently, the emotional effect of changing schools influences one's decision to commit a crime (Walters, 2016). Finally, researchers report that when children are not in schools, such as closing schools during summer vacation and temporary closings, crime increases during regular school hours (Jacob & Lefgren, 2003). As mentioned in Chapter 1, school is a major social institution where youth socialize with others, learn social norms, and become a part of their community.

School closing research reveals that most students impacted are from disadvantaged neighborhoods and are African American (Lee & Lubienski, 2017). In 2020, the U.S. Department of Education report that minority students, including African Americans, represent most students enrolled in public schools (Appendix E). The impact further highlights education equality and preventing others from getting a good chance at success. Critics argue the constitutionality of access to education since school closure policies impact access to education (Ward & Williams, 2015). In effect, students forced

to leave their neighboring schools and relocate to other schools may be denied a fair chance at success. As stated earlier, in 2013, the Chicago Public School System closed 54 schools, many of which were in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Yaccino & Rich, 2013). Lee and Lubinski (2017) found that the Chicago public school closings affected students' access to equal education opportunities. Lee and Lubinski also examined the spatial distribution of where students lived and access to new schools. Agnew strain theory suggests that limited access to education can be compared to a negative stimulus increasing the propensity for juvenile delinquency and crime (Thaxton & Agnew, 2018). Hirschi's social bonding theory of attachment states that a lack of interest and involvement in school is a precursor to criminal activity. The school experience and policy decisions can foster a lack of interest. The issue of education inequality is a factor that may influence education success or lack thereof.

Education is an integral part of one becoming an active member of society. The U.S. Supreme Court stated in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) that if a child is expected to succeed in life, they cannot be denied the opportunity of an education. The goals of K–12 education for individuals include access to higher education and a constellation of personal benefits that follow college education, such as access to jobs with more vacation time and better health care; greater personal and professional mobility, better decision-making skills, and more autonomy at work (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998). Research further shows that education levels are correlated with health and wealth; the more education a person has, the healthier and wealthier they are likely to be (Poterba et al., 2018). At the same time, education is also considered

intrinsically valuable. Developing one's skills and talents can be enjoyable or helpful and a vital component of a flourishing life, regardless of the consequences this has for wealth or health. Consequently, access to public education is a fundamental right for children.

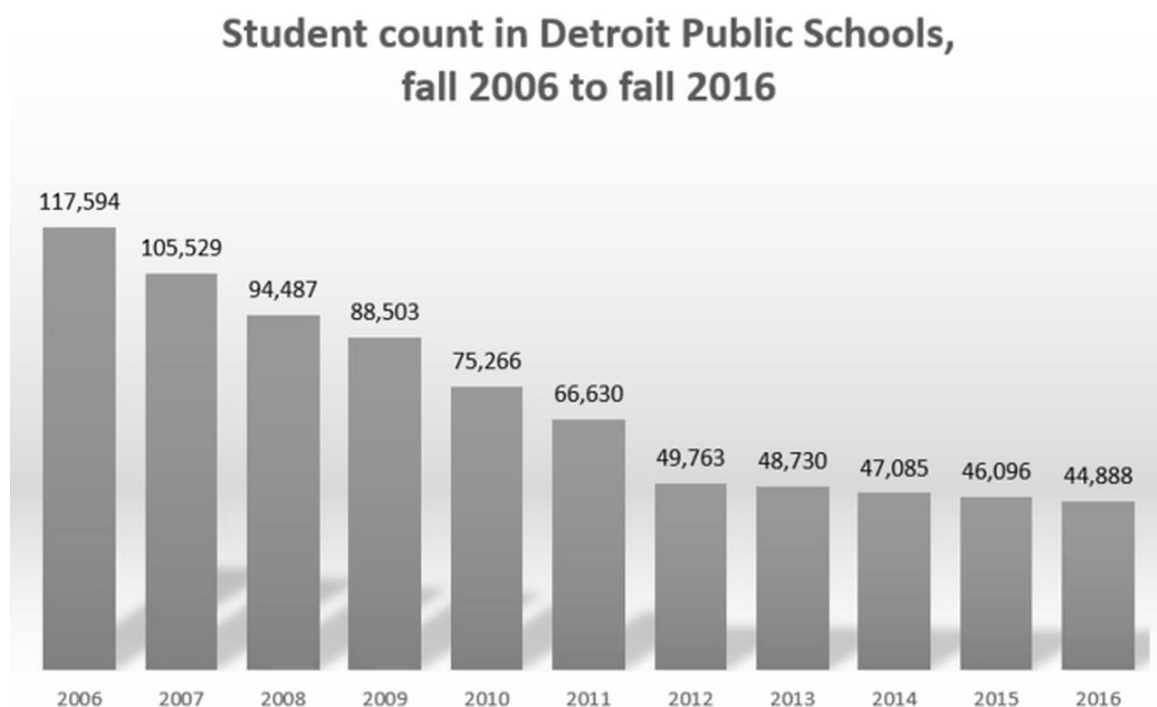
Policy decisions that place a child's education second to economics may impede a student's ability to achieve educational goals. Nisar et al. (2015) purported those children are the future of a nation. The results of Nisar's study further justify the need for policymakers to focus on policies and resources to improve children's social, economic, psychological, and educational health. When a nation's youth turn to criminal behavior, their actions minimize their ability to be an asset to society. Instead of being an asset to society, juveniles' behavior can be a liability. Critics argue the inequity in the cost of public education compared to juvenile incarceration because it costs more to incarcerate than to educate. Pran (2011) reported that in the state of Michigan, the government spent more money keeping juveniles in jail than on public education. Although this study did not address the financial challenges of the educational system, it revealed a better understanding of other factors influencing juvenile misconduct from the perspective of attorneys who served as their legal defense.

Although nationwide juvenile arrests and crimes decreased over time, there is a disproportionate number of African Americans in public schools that are arrested for criminal activity. Table 1 compares the number of arrests by age and race, and African Americans comprise the largest number of juvenile arrests in the U.S. Additionally, according to the 2010 Census, African Americans are overrepresented in jails and prisons throughout the United States (Figure 1). In this study, the focus was on young students in

the city of Detroit, which is in Wayne County, Michigan. In Wayne County, Detroit has the largest school district, Detroit Public Schools Community District (previously called Detroit Public Schools). As stated earlier, one of the limitations in this study was obtaining data specific to the city of Detroit. Consequently, juvenile delinquency data was used from Wayne County.

School closing has been regarded as a great negative for some researchers and a great positive for others. Akee et al. (2014) found that when school closed, crime reduced in the neighboring areas because kids had less time to interact with one another and consider misbehavior. On the other hand, Ward and Williams (2015), argued that closing school increases inequity in education by reducing a child's access to education. Gasper et al. (2012) discussed what happens to children of closed schools and mobility. Their research could not fully explain the impact of school mobility on juvenile delinquency. Further suggesting the need to explore unanswered questions on factors influencing juvenile delinquency.

Declining enrollment was another reason given for massive school closings in the city of Detroit (Garnett, 2014). Figure 2 shows Detroit's student population and its decline from 2006 to 2016.

**Figure 2***Detroit Public Schools Enrollment Trends*

*Source: Michigan Center for Educational Performance and Information*

1. Detroit Public Schools (Wayne County): 44,888

Detroit remains the largest district in the state with a student count of 44,888, but its enrollment has dropped 72% since fall 1991 when the district had 160,996 students.

### **Summary**

Many factors influence juvenile behavior. The literature discussed in this chapter shows that family dynamics is one area cited more frequently to impact behavior issues than other domains, such as individual, peer, community, and school. In this review, public perception persuades the laws governing the punishment or rehabilitation of youth involved in criminal behavior. The literature review acknowledges that there are

numerous factors influencing juvenile behavior. Neighborhood conditions such as poverty, homelessness, social and urban changes may foment delinquency. The literature reveals that student mobility is a risk factor for juvenile delinquency because movement disrupts a student's well-being. Consequently, school closing has drawn attention to literature as a risk factor because students must relocate. Defense attorneys are discussed in the literature of their interaction with delinquents and have been an underutilized source for prevention recommendations. This study explored factors affecting delinquent behavior and school closings. The next chapter discusses the methodology used to answer the research questions. The chapter discusses research design and rationale for qualitative inquiry. Additionally, I identify participants and recruitment process, reviewed the research questions and sub questions, discussed the data collection process, and discussed the plan for the qualitative analysis.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The study investigated the impact of public school closings on juvenile delinquency, focusing on juvenile defense attorneys' perspectives. The research aims to fill a gap in literature, as there was little existing research on how public school closings affected juvenile delinquency, especially in urban communities with high closure rates. I present the research design, recruitment of participants, research questions, sub-questions, and the plan for qualitative analysis. This qualitative research design explored the perception of juvenile defense attorneys on public school closings and their impact on juvenile delinquency. The context of the study is set in Detroit, a city that experienced numerous school closings in the post-2008 economic crisis, affecting thousands of students and contributing to increased delinquency. Accordingly, policymakers' decisions about school closings need to be more informed by understanding this relationship and possible unintended consequences. Juvenile defense attorneys were selected because they hold a unique perspective about juveniles. Juvenile defense attorneys interact with juveniles in legal trouble and shed more light on this gap in literature.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The study used a qualitative research design, employing a pragmatic approach to understand the participants' lived experiences. Qualitative research is suitable for exploring phenomena in natural settings and for developing themes to deepen understanding. The general practical approach to inquiry allowed the investigator to interpret participants' perceptions and experiences concerning the phenomenon of the

study. The phenomenon explored was school closure and its linkages and influence on juvenile delinquency. The research question was: What influence do public school closings have on juvenile delinquency in Detroit? The sub-questions allowed participants to draw their conclusions and generalizations, which resulted in identifying emerging themes (Patton, 2002). The participants in the study were defense attorneys who represented or interacted with juvenile delinquents. Open-ended questions were used to gather their insights on the impact of school closures. Appendix F lists the open-ended questions used in the study. Attorneys provided their perspectives and experience working with incarcerated youth. The participants were selected, and research inquiry was used because direct access to incarcerated youth, a protected population, was challenging. As such, seeking insights into this critical area of research focused on defending attorneys and their relationship with the targeted population. Parents were deemed biased in providing data for the same qualitative-gearred questions. Finally, secondary documents included the number of schools closed, students affected, and the juvenile delinquency rates.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher works in the criminal justice system and has professional relationships with attorneys, which could present potential biases. However, the researcher addressed this by separating personal opinions from professional analysis and ensuring objectivity through oversight from a research chair, committee, and Institutional Review Board (IRB). I addressed my potential bias by examining my epistemology as a scholarly practitioner. Dr. Michael Q. Patton's (Walden University, 2022) description of



epistemology clarified and established my understanding that to embark on a social change journey, I had to separate myself from the issues and “stand on the outside to look in.” In this study, I interviewed juvenile defense attorneys. Although I work in the criminal justice system and have contact with attorneys, the professional relationships were consistent with the study and unbiased. I knew one participant because the recruitment was from the Michigan Bar Association database of authorized practicing attorneys. The open-ended questions allowed participants to share their experiences. I did not identify any other biases or conflicts of interest that jeopardized the integrity of the study. My research chair and committee were available to assist me in resolving any biases or conflicts. Additionally, during the University Research Reviewer (URR) process no personal biases were cited. Finally, the role of the IRB was to ensure that human participants are protected. As a result, should the IRB identify biases or conflicts of interest, the issue(s) would have been corrected before proceeding with the research.

### **Methodology**

This study aimed to fill a gap in literature on the causes and reasons of juvenile delinquency. Rumberger (2015) suggested that there is a need for an in-depth understanding of the harmful effects of failing schools, resulting in school closures and juvenile delinquency. Gasper et al. (2012) stated that there is a need for additional research on the long-term effects of delinquency and student mobility caused by school closures. To achieve this, the study explored the lived experience of attorneys involved with juvenile offenders. The following section presents information on the participants and sample size, data collection procedure, and data analysis strategy.

### **Participants and Procedures for Recruitment**

This study addressed the understanding of how juvenile delinquency was related to public school closure through the perception of Detroit attorneys who represented or interacted with juveniles accused of a crime. Juvenile defense attorneys were uniquely positioned to provide their perspective(s), as they experienced working with incarcerated youth. One of their responsibilities was to defend and advocate for young people involved in criminal activity. Direct access to incarcerated youth for this period was challenging because of inconsistent data collection on youth detainment and youth are a protected population. Identifying or locating students impacted by the closing to obtain their perceptions was challenging at best, and likely impossible. Teachers who may have lost their jobs due to the closing were not considered because of possible biases, as well as parents of the children. Qualitative research focused on the participant's experience with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenon in this study was school closure and its influence on juvenile delinquency. Therefore, defense attorneys were selected to provide insight and their understanding of juvenile offenders' characteristics and the impact caused (or correlated) by school closings.

In this study, the perception of attorneys was used to measure the influence of public school closings and juvenile delinquency. Purposeful sampling was used to solicit twelve to fifteen defense attorneys who interacted with juveniles charged with a crime. In qualitative research, smaller samples yield in-depth understanding to the questions of inquiry (Patton, 2002). Participants were canvassed from the Michigan Bar Association (MBA) and the Detroit Bar Association. Both Associations are a depository for all

attorneys licensed in the State of Michigan. It is the most innovative tool for identifying practicing attorneys and their discipline. I sent a letter to the MBA explaining the study, and my background, and asked for volunteers to participate in the anonymous and voluntary interview process. The association had a section on its website titled "Let's Discuss Your Needs" ([www.michbar.org/](http://www.michbar.org/)) that served as the impetus of the request. Individuals, including students, could collaborate with staff to ensure that volunteer requests aligned with the prospective audience. The criterion for participants was that attorneys worked with or interacted with juvenile offenders for at least 3 years in Detroit between 2008 and 2020. The alternative recruitment plan was to network with local attorneys. The strategy to canvass attorneys within the Family Juvenile division of the local court in Michigan yielded more participants. I did not use social media as a recruitment method because of the potential for unwelcome guests.

### **Analytical Strategy**

The analysis for this study was the theme of qualitative inquiry. Patton (2002) stated that using the "emergent design flexibility" (p. 40) strategies allowed me, the principal investigator, to determine the findings. Through the perception of juvenile defense attorneys, this study investigated the influence of school closings and juvenile delinquency.

### **Research Questions**

The central research question was: What influence did public school closings have on juvenile delinquency in Detroit from 2008-2020? The problem is that there was limited research on how school closings impact juvenile delinquency. As a result, I

developed two research questions to focus on the experiences of each participant regarding the phenomenon studied:

RQ1: When you were working as an attorney in Detroit, what did juveniles accused of a crime say about their educational experiences?

RQ2: How do juvenile defense attorneys perceive the impact of school closures on juveniles during the same period?

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The in-depth interviews produced a sizable amount of data. The sample size was 11 participants, until data saturation was achieved. The first step involved organizing data by labeling transcribed documents. I ensured that each recorded interview was transcribed verbatim. There was backup for each recording using Zoom and digital recording for each interview. I printed the transcribed file and stored it in a secure cabinet along with the audio recordings. Next, I identified and named common responses using a manual analysis. I listened and read each response several times before recording common thoughts of each respondent. The criterion used to identify common themes was that 50 percent of the respondents had the same or similar response. The intent was to develop a coding system to identify patterns, trends, and themes within the responses. I did not use a software program to analyze qualitative data, because in the reading and reading the responses I developed thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2012).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, efforts should be made to ensure that the information provided during data collection has integrity and is meaningful. This study's conceptual

framework was the strain (Agnew, 2017) and social control (Hirschi, 2017) theories. The strain theory explains deviant juvenile behavior as an outcome of society's strains or stress on individuals. The social control theory claims that young people will not engage in deviant behavior when bonding within social settings, including school. Participants' responses should be credible and truthful to contribute to this fundamental knowledge and theories. The criteria used to determine the quality of the research was taken from Lincoln and Guba's (1986) framework on trustworthiness.

### **Credibility**

Credibility was established by asking participants the same, or similar, questions. The responses received provided a sense of consistency. I reminded participants that the information provided was anonymous and would contribute to a body of knowledge to help identify factors that potentially link delinquency to school closings. I also reminded them that the findings would not harm the education or juvenile justice system but seek knowledge for its understanding and improvement. Research on the cause of juvenile delinquency and the impact of education was ongoing in all respects and participants were reminded of this as well.

### **Dependability**

The data collected in qualitative research should state the same over time. That is, data collection, interpretation, and reporting are consistent (Nassaji, 2020). To ensure dependability, I used the same method in the process of collection, interpretation, and reporting. Finally, I read and re-read transcripts to ensure that the data stated, and its interpretation were understood and presented with accuracy and integrity.

**Confirmability**

In qualitative research, the researcher must ensure that the data presented is objective. To avoid bias and to interject valuable ideas, the committee chair, co-chair, and URR provided an objective review of data collected and its analysis. The goal of other scholars reviewing the data ensured that the meaning and interpretation were consistent, valid, and reliable.

**Transferability**

As stated in Chapter 1, no known research studies focused on juveniles, their educational experience, and school closings from the perspective of attorneys representing them. Therefore, a detailed account of the interviews, the people, the setting, and the findings were provided. Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggested that providing a robust description of the research lends to the consistency and stability of the instrument. The findings from this study were used to determine risk factors for juvenile delinquency. Consequently, the study can be replicated in other urban areas where stakeholders are interested in school closings and juvenile delinquency.

**Authenticity**

To ensure the authenticity of the participant's responses, I used direct quotes and excerpts from what was stated during the interviews. The intent was to convey the feeling and tone from the participant's perspective. Again, in qualitative research, the truth must be transmitted to ensure the information's reliability. Direct quotes and excerpts from the interview ensured that I presented multiple sides of the story, and those sides came from an authentic and confirmable source.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Ethics in research is a standard code of conduct by which the researcher, and his/her institution, ensure that no harm or unnecessary risk was imposed on the participant (Vicars et al., 2015). To meet the ethical concerns of this study, I consulted with and received approval from Walden University's IRB. In preparation for the IRB application and approval, I considered three themes for ethical consideration: informed consent, anti-deception, and confidentiality (Vicars et al., 2015).

Due to the nature of this study, it was crucial not to pose a threat to the participants, public education, or the juvenile justice system. During the recruitment and voluntary participation process, participants were informed of the nature of the study, its voluntary nature, and the anonymity of participants. The informed consent, titled Consent to Participate in Research, provided information on the study, data collection procedures, and how the data was analyzed. The consent form was presented and explained to participants prior to the interview. This approach allowed them time for questions and answers prior to their consent. I presented full disclosure about the study and was transparent in all regards. The names of the participants were not disclosed to protect their confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were informed during the recruitment process of the criteria for participation, and all participants were licensed attorneys through the Michigan State Bar Association. Participants were informed of the interview process and that the questions asked were the same for each participant. Participants were told that the interview could be terminated at any time. This information was vital to ensure that there was no unintentional bias or unintended consequences of data

collection, analysis, and presentation. Data collected were stored in a location unavailable to the public. Data collected were retained based on the university's requirement, a minimum of 5 years. Finally, I thanked the interviewees for their participation. I am committed to letting participants know when the research study was complete, published, and available for review to gain their trust and comfort.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I explained the qualitative inquiry approach to the study. I explained why I selected phenomenology inquiry from five different qualitative approaches. I explained why defense attorneys were more suited as participants instead of teachers who may have also had contact with the juvenal offenders indirectly targeted in this study. The data collection instrument described a series of open-ended questions intended to explore the phenomenon studied. Critically reviewing my role as a researcher was paramount to eliminating personal bias and viewing myself as a scholarly practitioner. Therefore, I described trustworthy and ethical issues to employ in the study. The next chapter describes the results of the study and mapped out themes identified during the interview.



## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

This qualitative study explores the perception of defense attorneys, who represent juvenile offenders, on the effects of public school closings on changes in juvenile delinquency rate. This chapter covers the study's results and how each theme was derived. This study addresses a gap in the literature on the impact public school closings have on juvenile delinquency rates. From 2007 to 2017, 17,597 public schools permanently closed due to enrollment and funding issues, moving two and a half million students to other schools outside their neighborhood (Appendix A). This study aims to answer the following research questions:

Central research question: What influence did public school closings have on juvenile delinquency in Detroit from 2008 to 2020?

RQ1: When you were working as a public defender in Detroit, what did juveniles accused of a crime say about their educational experiences?

RQ2: How do public defenders perceive the impact of school closures on juveniles during the same period?

This study used purposeful sampling to recruit and identify defense attorneys who interacted with juvenile offenders in the juvenile justice system. A total of eleven participants were interviewed between March 2023 and April 2024. All participants were attorneys practicing law in the City of Detroit, and their clients were primarily juveniles.

The participants were contacted by email. There was a follow-up phone call when the researcher identified herself as a student working on a research project. The nature of

the research project was explained to the participants, and each agreed to participate. The participants were intrigued by the topic and the fact that someone considered their voice regarding juvenile issues. I used a script to ensure that the information was consistent.

### **Setting**

The interviews for this study took place using Zoom. Participants' email addresses were verified, and interviews were scheduled. I conducted all interviews from a home office to ensure confidentiality, privacy, and no interruptions. Participants were asked to identify a secluded area in their home or office, again to ensure confidentiality. Participants were asked and agreed to audio recording of interview.

### **Demographics**

The targeted participants were attorneys representing or interacting with juvenile offenders in Detroit between 2008 and 2020. All the attorneys participating were in good standing with the State of Michigan Bar Association and, at the time of the interview, practiced law. All but three attorneys were not currently working in the juvenile justice system and only served juveniles upon request. The three participants' previous law concentration was as a juvenile defense attorney (Table 2).

**Table 2***Participants Demographics*

Participant	Current legal practice juvenile law/other	Served juvenile defense attorney 2008-2020	State Bar of Michigan membership status	Interview location
#1	Juvenile law	Yes	Good standing	Zoom
#2	Juvenile law	Yes	Good standing	Zoom
#3	Juvenile law	Yes	Good standing	Zoom
#4	Juvenile law	Yes	Good standing	Zoom
#5	Juvenile law	Yes	Good standing	Zoom
#6	Other	Yes	Good standing	Zoom
#7	Juvenile law	Yes	Good standing	Zoom
#8	Juvenile law	Yes	Good standing	Zoom
#9	Juvenile law	Yes	Good standing	Zoom
#10	Juvenile law and other	Yes	Good standing	Zoom
#11	Juvenile law and other	Yes	Good standing	Zoom

**Data Collection**

Eleven attorneys agreed to participate in this study. Participants were interviewed by the researcher using open-ended questions. I interviewed participants and recorded their responses on the Zoom platform. Participants selected their private settings for the interview. The duration of the interviews lasted 20 to 40 minutes. Each of the eleven recorded interviews was sent to the Otter AI application for transcribing. The participants recorded interviews and stored their transcribed documents in a secure storage area. Each participant was asked the same semi-structured open-ended questions detailed in Appendix F. The process of asking each participant the same questions ensured structure and consistency and reduced bias in data collection. The interview questions allowed the participants to share their experiences about:

1. School closing and its impact on juvenile delinquency.
2. How juveniles viewed their educational experience.
3. If there was any display of negative emotions relative to their school experiences.
4. Factors participants identified.

### **Data Analysis**

For data analysis, I began by reading each transcript to familiarize myself with the responses. During this process, I highlighted words and phrases that addressed the research questions and inference to the conceptual framework for the study. There are three primary questions and nine sub-questions (Appendix F). The conceptual framework was the social control and strain theories discussed in Chapter 1. Both theories examine nature and cause juvenile delinquency.

I used thematic coding to create codes and identify categories and themes to address research questions such as, "What influence did public school closings have on juvenile delinquency in Detroit from 2008-2020?" Finally, I used Microsoft Word to develop a table that listed the words and phrases for each question and each participant.

In the first cycle of the coding analysis, I used a mixed approach to ensure that the focus was on the participant's voice (Miles et al., 2014):

1. Vivo coding – words and short phrases of the participant
2. Value coding – the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior representing the participants' perspectives.

For example, codes such as value were defined as the worth or appreciation the participant's clients had on subjects such as grades, transportation, discipline, and school relationships. Participants' attendances were derived from the participants' knowledge of what they believed to be their client's school attendance status. The attitude reflected the participants' response to their client's view about education and the role of family and the education system. Finally, the behavior represented participants' perspectives of their client's emotions and their reactions to change. I again used Microsoft Word to create a codebook (Appendix H). The table consists of three columns. Column one lists the words and short phrases from the transcribed text. Column two summarizes the codes derived during the first cycle review. Column three identifies the emerging themes from the second cycle review.

The method for the second cycle review consisted of reviewing codes that were similar or went together. I grouped identical codes and sub-code titles from participants' responses. Next, I examined the relationship and frequency of codes to identify common patterns and themes. This process resulted in the identification of six major themes. The themes developed during the analysis process are discussed in the results section of this chapter. There were no inconsistencies in the participants' responses. Therefore, I obtained saturation with eleven participants.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

In this study, I used one-on-one interviews to investigate the impact of public school closings on juvenile delinquency through the lens of defense attorneys. I asked the

eleven participants the same open-ended questions (Appendix F) to minimize the possibility of interviewer bias (Patton, 2002). Participants were reminded that their responses were anonymous and would add to a body of knowledge to help identify factors that potentially link delinquency to school closings. Additionally, participants were reminded that their participation involved minimal risk, and the findings from the study were not intended to harm the education or juvenile justice system.

### **Transferability**

The code book in Appendix H provides a detailed description of the findings and the emerging themes. As stated earlier in the data collection section, the research questions were designed and asked to ensure structure and consistency in the data collection process. Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggested that robust descriptions support consistency and stability of the research instrument. The study can be replicated in other urban areas where school closings and juvenile delinquency are an issue.

### **Dependability**

As discussed in Chapter 3, Nassaji (2020) suggested that the data collection, interpretation, and reporting should be consistent to ensure dependability. All data were transcribed verbatim from the recorded interviews. I employed the same method in data collection: the same questions were asked, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed. I read and re-read the transcripts before moving to coding and identifying emerging themes. The interpretation of data was recorded in text format, and the research questions were addressed to ensure accuracy and integrity.

## **Confirmability**

In qualitative research, the data presented must be objective. I deviated from what was stated in my proposal, which was that I would hire someone to analyze the data. Instead, I developed a content-driven code book, and the committee chair and co-chair reviewed it. I reviewed several codes to ensure alignment with the categories. I made the adjustments, and the codebook was approved. The categories lead to emerging themes and meaningful interpretation of data. The review aimed to ensure that the data collected was consistent, valid, and reliable.

## **Results**

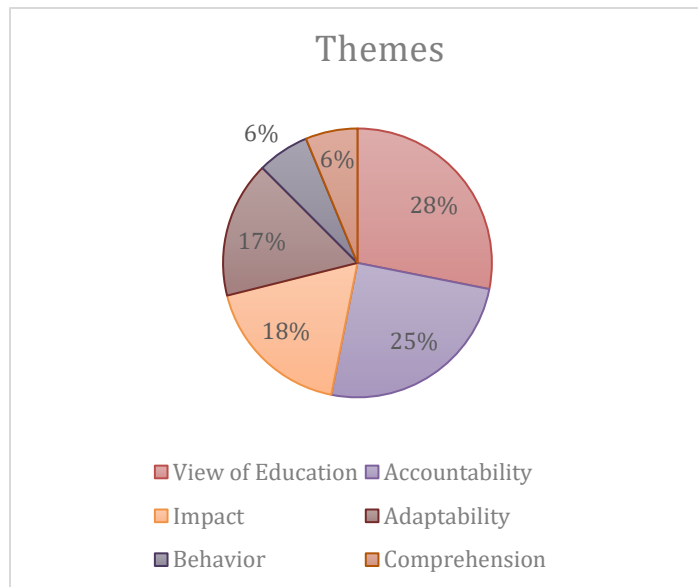
The code table from the study identifies six themes that answered the research questions. The research questions were stated earlier in this chapter. Although participants provided a wealth of information the themes identified were again responses relevant to the research questions (Guest et al., 2012). Research Question 1 on the influence of school closings on juvenile delinquency yielded responses across two themes. One was the impact of change because participants stated that students' "schools were taken away." Two, there were changes in delinquent behavior in that "case in court increase, lots of kids dropped out of school, and increase absenteeism." The second research question and sub-questions addressed what juveniles had to say about their educational experiences. Participants yielded responses under the themes, views on education, and accountability (see a summary of themes below).

The final research question and sub-questions addressed the participant's perception of school closing on juvenile delinquency. Participants' understanding fell

under the themes of impact for change and comprehension. The participants were concerned about the future and resources available to juveniles enrolled in schools that are closed or slated for closing. Participants felt that juveniles needed an adequate understanding of the crime they committed and the penalty of the crime. Finally, to validate the population the participants served, I asked them about the racial composition of the juveniles they defended. Participants reported 82% Black, 7% unreported, 5% White, and 6% others.

Participants responses were based on observation and perception of their lived experience with juvenile offenders. There were no responses in which participants referenced data based on theory. There was an occasion in which participants quoted a delinquent or their parent(s). Figure 3 represents the percentage of 128 responses that addressed the research questions, which resulted in six themes identified.



**Figure 3***Percentage of Themes Identified***Theme 1: Predisposition Regarding Education**

The most dominant theme was a predisposition regarding education from both students and families. These predispositions created a lack of involvement that appeared to escalate because of school closings. The study used theories like Hirschi's (2017) social control and Agnew's (2017) strain theory to frame the findings. For example, two elements of Hirschi's social control theory are 1) attachment and 2) involvement. Hirschi's theory suggests that weak connections to school increase the likelihood of deviant behavior. One key point revealed among participants was that juveniles and their families often lacked value for education. This finding correlates to Hirschi's concept of attachment and involvement. For example, Participant 9 stated that "parents don't appreciate education" and consequently, "kids don't value education. Participant 3 indicated that for parents, "education [is] not a priority." They added that "dealing with

families who don't put education to priority in children's lives." Participant 3 also added that parents felt their "child's education was not their responsibility." Participant 2 stated that defendants "did not have a positive experience" in terms of their education and defendants felt they were "never going to graduate." Participant 7 stated that the defendant's "whole idea of education is negative." Participant 11 responded that defendants "stopped going to school because it was hostile" and school was a "violent environment." Participant 9 stated that defendants feared going to school for two reasons: 1) "fear of attending school with staff and other students," and 2) "fear based on their walk or commute to get to school." Participant 10 said there was "peer pressure and lack of family support." On the other hand, Participant 5 said, "the majority did not enjoy school." Participant 8 stated that defendant would ask about their education and legal situation, "How is it fair?" and defendants "didn't see the point of going to school."

## **Theme 2: Accountability**

The next dominant theme identified was accountability. The education system was seen as failing to support juveniles adequately. This theme connects closely with the strain theory (Agnew, 2017) and shows how institutional failures can lead to adverse outcomes. The theory suggests that delinquency arises due to stress and strain on individuals, mainly when opportunities for success are blocked, leading them to deviate from societal norms. Accountability or blame suggests juveniles may not have the power or authority to escape adverse situations created by systems. Participant 3 stated that defendants felt that "the school never tried to help." Participant 10 indicated that students "don't get what they need in school," and Participant 1 stated that for children with

special needs “fall back or get left behind despite status.” Further responses suggested that the system is to blame for deviant behavior of young people include:

- Participant 3: “School seems like a social place and not a place of education”.
- Participant 3: “Social promotions” are problematic.
- Participant 3: “Need funding to make sure no child comes out of third grade without knowing how to read.” Also, in terms of the school, “They do not educate the children.”
- Participant 11 stated defendants, “Went to 12th grade and dropped out. Lost them in high school.”
- Participants 5 blamed parents: “If parents do not value education, the kids mirror their parents.”

### **Theme 3: Impact of Change**

This theme described the impact of change because of school closure.

Participants’ perception suggests an association between school closures and increased crime. Participants identified potential factors for delinquent behavior, such as transportation, lack of resources, and a lack of socialization and neighborhood engagement.

Participant 7 perception of the impact of school closures is “closing had a lot to do with the petition we’re seeing particular delinquents in Detroit.” Participant 3 added that “fewer kids attending school and more coming to court and foster care”.

Participant 9 suggested school closings “lead to long-term dropout and increased crime.”

Participant 2 responded with “transportation issues – unreliable transportation.”

Participant 11 addressed getting on a bus at night stating that defendants were “scared

waiting for bus at night.” Participant 3’s response regarding transportation was the “long ride not enough time, once home, eat and got to bed.” Participant 7 said, “replacement school too far.” The impact of limited resources was expressed by Participant 6, who stated that “closed schools for fiscal reasons but not putting money back into schools.” Participant 6 added that there were “no books or supplies.” Participant 2 said that the impact was “another disruptive factor” for defendants. Participant 9 stated that, "neighborhood schools taken away – can't walk – not going to school," supporting the concept of transportation and neighborhood issues created by system changes. The same participant also stated that the city of Detroit will see an "uptick in uneducated Black children because of city closures – Detroit – primarily black". Participant 7 said, “schools like churches should be part of the education of our community,” while participant 11 added that “school closes, community closes.”

#### **Theme 4: Adaptability**

This theme described youth's ability to adapt to social and environmental change and their emotional reaction to change. Hirschi's (2017) social control theory suggests that when young people are not attached, involved, or committed to school or other institutions, it increases the propensity for deviant behavior. Participants’ responses related to young people’s lack of interest in school. Participant 10’s response was that school closing, that students did not “want to go to school.” Participant 11 said defendants were concerned because “friends aren’t going to the same school” and “didn’t want to go to schools in other neighborhoods.” Participant 4 said defendants did not want to “transfer to different school not knowing anybody.” Participant 8 responded that

defendants “had no friends to hangout with and no after school programs.” Participant 3 stated that defendants had “challenges with transport, coping, and fighting” in addition to “coping with transition.” Adjusting academically was mentioned by Participant #1, who said defendants were “failing to advance,” “not performing or inability to perform,” and “embarrassment.” Participant 6 said that defendants felt they “were doing good by their definition until school was no longer there” and “changed their comfort level.” Participant 7 stated that “school a savior: get out of trauma in their household.”

### **Theme 5: Delinquent Behavior**

This theme described the behavior of young people in response to the school closing. As stated in Chapter 2, a child's educational experience, such as poor grades, lack of interest in school, or lack of socialization, can be a risk factor, increasing the propensity for illegal behavior (Jennings et al., 2016). Participants' responses to the influence of school closure and delinquency suggest that school closing promoted delinquent behavior. The strain theory (Agnew, 2017) suggests that deviant behavior results from the stress society can place on a child. Several participants indicated that young people stop attending school because of school closing. In response to the question of what influence did school closures have on juvenile delinquency, their responses were:

- Participant 1 responded that closings influence: “truancy.”
- Participant 6 responded that the influence “create barriers for children to have incentive to attend school,” “make it easier for them to just skip.”

- Participant 3 responded that, “misdemeanor court has become felonious court – a lot of it due to school closures,” and that there was an “influx of more serious cases there the closings.”
- Participant 8 found that “kids broke into schools and minor vandalization,” and that there were “school discipline issues.”
- Participant 11 said, “lots of kids dropped out of school.”

### **Theme 6: Youth Comprehension Level**

This theme describes the youth's comprehension level based on the participant's lived experience. There was no standardized testing instrument to measure comprehension. Most of the responses to the question "Did juveniles understand the charges and penalty of the charges against them?" revealed that juveniles did not understand but would say when asked about legal charges. Participant 3 stated, "Generally, they don't understand what is going on." Participant 3 also stated that “most of the time it’s up to the lawyer to explain.” Participant 1 said, “a lot of kids did not understand but would say yes.” Participant 9 said, "they are trained to respond in the affirmative when in trouble." The affirmative means saying yes even though they do not understand the seriousness of their offense. Although the responses are specific to the charges and penalties, they raise concerns regarding juveniles disconnecting from reality. Participant 3 also stated that they “may do a competency exam to make sure they do understand." The responses support the concept of strain theory (Agnew, 2017) in that students do not have the power or authority to escape their adverse school experience.

### **Summary**

This chapter covered the findings from the study, the implementation plan for executing the interview, and the characteristics of the participants. I explained the data analysis strategy, the code book's development, and the themes' identification. In the study, six themes were identified, each related to the conceptual framework: the general strain theory (Agnew, 2017) and the social control theory (Hirschi, 2017). Chapter 5 covers the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future studies, implications, and conclusions.

## Chapter 5: Interpretation of the Findings

### Introduction

The premise for this study, discussed in Chapter 1, was to explore the impact of school closing on juvenile delinquency rates. In 2009, the city of Detroit declared bankruptcy, and the mayor and Detroit city council were no longer governing authority. The city was under the leadership of an emergency financial manager. The emergency financial manager planned to permanently close 200 schools over 5 years. During the same time, juvenile delinquency rates declined in Wayne County, Michigan. However, the crime rate for African American youth in Wayne County was higher than any other ethnic group (Table 1). Detroit is the largest of 47 cities located in Wayne County. This qualitative study explored the influence of permanent public school closures on juvenile delinquency rate through the lens of defense attorneys who represented juveniles who lived in Detroit. The defense attorneys interviewed for this study reported that 83% of their clients were African American students.

One key finding from participants' responses was that children imitate their parents' point of view of education. Both parent and child did not view education as a priority. In other words, they did not see a reason for school, and subsequently, they did not need to attend school. The consequences of a negative view of education are serious for several reasons. First, when schools closed, getting to school was an issue. Participants reported that lack of transportation gave parents an excuse not to send their children to school. Second, Hirschi's (2017) social control theory suggests that when students are not in school, they are not socially interactive with their peers and are at risk



for criminal activities. Finally, the child's attendance and transportation issues impact graduation from high school and the ability to get a job. As discussed in Chapter 2, permanent school closings in the United States are not new; they are one in which attention to its impact on the rate of delinquency was minimal.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2024) projects that public school enrollment in Michigan will decline between 2022 and 2031. Based on NCES enrollment data, more schools are likely to close. Consequently, as more schools close, more young people may engage in criminal activity. Declining enrollment was one criterion policymakers used in determining school closures. However, based on participants' perceptions, the decision to close schools was inconsequential because their clients were not doing well in school and faced legal issues. Systematic blame for a child's school and delinquency issues culminated in accountability.

Findings from this study revealed that factors influencing delinquency were the educational system, policies on education, funding for education, and parents' views on education. Participants stated a lack of internal administrative support, limited financing, inappropriate policy decisions, and the family's attitude toward education were to blame. The systems had to be accountable for the child to continue in school and stay out of trouble. The systems were to blame for the lack of transportation.

Solving transportation issues is possible. However, in this study, responses to questions on the impact of mobility suggested that the lack of transportation was a principal reason for poor attendance, disruption in the education process, and frustration displayed in the child. Gasper (2012) stated that he could not fully explain the

relationship between mobility and delinquency in his research. The solution may be common sense: solve the transportation issue for all children relocating to schools outside their neighborhoods.

Finally, regarding the research on neighborhoods and environmental factors, this study revealed a minimal correlation between juvenile crime, school closures, neighborhood crime, and abandoned properties. However, participants provided additional insight into students' limited ability to adapt to the changing environment, resulting in school disengagement. Finally, the findings revealed that changing schools caused stress for students and increased delinquent behavior.

The themes that emerged in this study help to deepen the knowledge of school closings and juvenile delinquency. The results revealed that parents' and children's views on education influence delinquent behavior. The different ecological systems' lack of accountability caused disruption and stress for students. Stress and strain, according to Agnew (2017), may cause deviant behavior. Finally, the consequence of students adapting to involuntary changes in school and environment is a precursor to ongoing behavior issues.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

In the literature review of this study, family-related issues were a common factor influencing juvenile delinquency. For example, an unstable upbringing, poor economic family status, or a lack of parenting skills can lead to stress on children and their families, increasing the probability of deviant behavior among children. This study's dominant finding was the parents' negative view about education. Their view on education relates

to the literature on family factors influencing delinquency. Participant 3 stated that when school closes, it gives the parents an excuse not to go the extra mile to get their child to school. Participant 3 also noted that parents felt their child's education was not their responsibility. Parents' lack of appreciation for school results in their child mirroring the same sentiment, as reported by Participant 5. These findings gave additional insight into the role of parents and the parent's influence on the child's educational attainment.

The literature review also examined individual characteristics of young people, such as those abused or neglected, and the influence of abuse and neglect on delinquency. The research shows that children experiencing trauma may have anxiety, which could result in defensive behavior. This study revealed school closure affected juveniles in much the same way. The student's inability to control school closing and relocation resulted in stress, as reported by defense attorneys. As a result, juveniles did not want to go to school, got into fights that led to suspension from school, had challenges coping with the transition and transportation, and did not perform well in school. These findings are consistent with the Strain Theory that negative stimulus increases the propensity for juvenile delinquency.

In Chapter 1, I discussed that juvenile delinquency and school closing are social issues that give rise to human suffering. Additionally, the literature review in Chapter 2 discussed risk factors associated with juvenile delinquency: neighborhood and environment, student mobility, school disciplinary policies, school attendance, and school closings. The perception of juvenile defense attorneys suggests that in addition to the parent's view of education, there is a systematic issue to blame for both school closing

and juvenile delinquency. The second theme, accountability, blames the schools for not meeting the needs of all students, including special needs students. Lack of funding: Administrators and policymakers are not using resources to educate students, and there is a lack of funding. This study's findings also revealed that the role of education has changed. In chapter one, the role of the school was defined as a social institution where youth socialized, learned social norms, and became a part of their community. In this study, participants described the school's role as a social place, not a place to educate youth. Finally, one participant had concerns about the system's accountability because the participant stated that some students get as far as 12th grade and drop out.

The response from this study suggested that the impact of school closures increased crime among young people. In Chapter 2, I discussed that forced student mobility increased the risk of students dropping out of school. Similarly, closures resulted in transportation concerns, leading to fewer kids attending school, long-term dropouts, and increased crime. A significant finding from one participant was that there would be more uneducated African American youth in Detroit because of school closings. What concerned me was the potential harm of school closing and parents who did not prioritize school while their child was charged with a crime.

Again, as discussed in the literature review, other factors influencing juvenile delinquency are school disciplinary policies, poor attendance, and lack of academic achievement. Regarding these factors and the social control and strain theories, students cannot adapt to the changing environment and understand why they are sent to another school. This study revealed that school closings were disruptive to a young person's life,

and the consequences varied from not wanting to go to school, considering the unfairness of the change, to getting into legal trouble and not understanding the consequences.

### **Limitations of the Study**

In Chapter 1, it was stated that one of the limits to the study was the inconsistent quality of data reports on juvenile delinquency in the City of Detroit. Although the data may be conflicting, focusing on the perception of juvenile defense attorneys representing juveniles detained for a criminal offense gave a unique perspective on crime information on juveniles. Consequently, this study was limited to juvenile defense attorneys who met the criteria: 1) they were public defense attorneys, and 2) they represented or interacted with a young person accused of a crime during massive school closings in Detroit, Michigan.

Additionally, the definition of “closings” had different meanings. The school closing was defined for this study during the recruitment process and at the beginning of the interviews. Participants were informed that school closing meant the permanent closing of a school building. It was not closed due to teacher strikes, pandemics, weather, or building maintenance. To ensure that the meaning of closing was the same for each participant, I asked everyone the same questions and reminded them, when necessary, of the meaning of school closing. What I could have done differently was to better reinforce during recruitment and interview that my study’s definition of school closings was forced school closings because of funding, declining enrollment, and poor performance.

## **Recommendations**

Before this study, no known research specifically explored the cause of delinquency through the lens of attorneys representing a young person after getting in trouble with the law. This study's findings suggest that more research is needed to understand why children get in trouble when schools close fully, and they must relocate to another school. There are recommendations for future studies.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

First, the study was limited to the perception of eleven defense attorneys who represented or interacted with juveniles accused of a crime. In Chapter 2, the literature stated that the unique role of defense attorneys was to understand adolescent development, maturity, and competency (Woeslehoff et al., 2019). Further studies should identify former juveniles, examine their educational experience and attainment during school closings, measure juvenile legal comprehension, and determine their current socioeconomic status.

Second, the literature review discussed school disciplinary policies and practices. Perry and Morris (2014) suggested that school-level suspension disrupts the school community. Further, studies are needed to examine juveniles' behavior issues before relocating to another school. Identifying pre-existing behavior would help in understanding if the system transferred troubled students.

Third, this study revealed that parents' negative view toward education was mirrored by their children, leading to disengagement from school. Some of the parents

told the participants they had time to deal with their child in trouble. Further research should assess what support parents need.

Finally, this study explored the perception of defense attorneys in Detroit, Michigan. The research methodology of this study should be replicated in different school districts throughout the United States. In particular, the focus should be on schools with disproportionate public school closings.

### **Implications**

As stated in Chapter 1, the state of juvenile delinquency and education of youth continue to be of concern despite decades of research on juvenile justice and education reform. This study was needed to explore a gap in research on the impact of permanent public school closings on the frequency of juvenile delinquency. Rumberger (2015) suggested that permanent school closings due to funding may contribute to juvenile delinquency. The potentially harmful and long-term effects of forcing students to relocate to other schools due to permanent closures (Gasper et al., 2012; Rumberger, 2015) should not be ignored. Policymakers and school administrators must consider these factors and determine if the cost of school closures outweighs the consequences. The consequences include a failing education system, declining communities, and juvenile delinquency. As stated in Chapter 1, the social implication of this study is for decision-makers to rethink funding allocations and understand the harmful effect of school closings on juvenile delinquency.

## Conclusion

This pragmatic qualitative study explored the perception of juvenile defense attorneys on public school closures and its influence on the rate of juvenile delinquency. The study included eleven participants who were interviewed about their lived experience with juvenile delinquents during massive public school closings in Detroit, Michigan. The conceptual framework for this study was based on Travis Hirschi's (2017) social control theory and Robert Agnew's (2017) strain theory. Hirschi and Agnew's theories were used to explain the nature and cause of juvenile delinquency. The open-ended interview questions determined if there was an alignment with the theories explaining why youth behave the way they do during school closings. The findings suggest that young people lack control regarding school changes due to permanent school closings, and the stress of adapting to those changes could lead to juvenile delinquency.

I used a systematic analysis to identify codes and themes relevant to the research questions (Guest et al., 2012). Participants' responses were recorded in text format, and I read and re-read the responses to identify, analyze, and report patterns. The analysis yielded six themes on the impact of school closings and juvenile delinquency (Appendix H). As indicated earlier in this chapter, this study should be replicated in school districts with disproportionate school closings.



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## Appendix A: Number and Enrollment of Closed Public Schools 2007-2018

**Number and enrollment of public elementary and secondary schools  
that have closed, by school level, type, charter status.  
Selected years 2007-2008 through 2017-2018**

School Year	Total All Closed Schools	Total Enrollment
2007-2008	2,120	268,212
2008-2009	1,515	243,166
2009-2010	1,822	306,806
2010-2011	1,929	321,246
2011-2012	1,840	300,764
2012-2013	1,493	240,704
2013-2014	1,737	274,397
2014-2015	1,573	211,681
2015-2016	1,160	194,653
2016-2017	1,098	188,561
2017-2018	1,310	266,777

*Note: This table represents the total number of schools closed and enrollment only.*

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**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2021). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2019* (NCES 2021-009).



Appendix B: Youth Incarceration in the United States

# Youth Incarceration in the United States



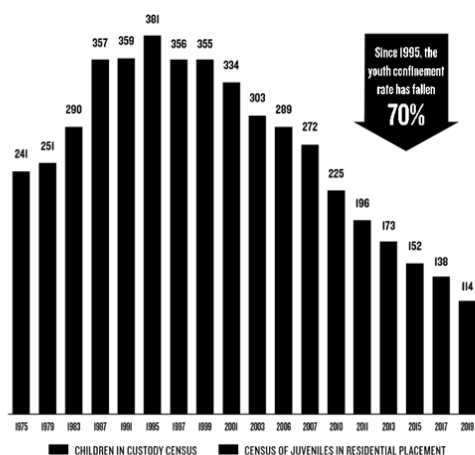
## THE GOOD

Public agencies have made enormous progress reducing youth incarceration between 1995 and 2019, reflecting the deep declines in juvenile arrests over the same period.

**Youth confinement rates were down 70% from 1995 to 2019, closely tracking the drop in youth arrests.**

Arrests of youth peaked in 1995 and have declined 74% since then.

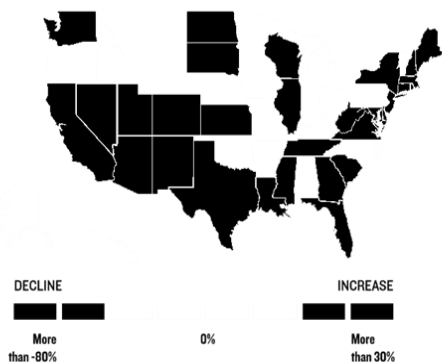
**YOUTH CONFINEMENT RATE**  
per 100,000 young people ages 10 through the age of majority in each state (1975-2019)



**Almost every state has reduced youth confinement.**

44 states and the District of Columbia had declines of 50% or more.

**CHANGE IN YOUTH CONFINEMENT per 100,000 (1997-2019)**



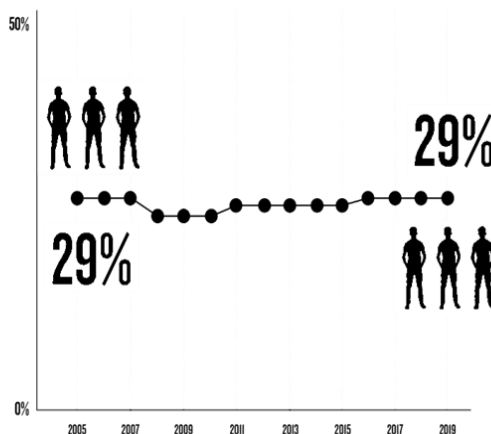
## THE BAD

However, some harmful practices remained stubbornly entrenched, such as an overreliance on incarceration once youth are referred to the juvenile justice system, especially for Black and Native American youth.

**Young people arrested and referred to court faced the same odds of confinement in 2019 as they did in 2005: one in three.**

The number of juvenile court cases fell by more than half from 2005 to 2019, from 1,647,700 to 722,600. But the share of those cases that resulted in confinement held steady at 29%.

**LIKELIHOOD OF CONFINEMENT (2005-2019)**



**Public systems still confined more youth for relatively minor offenses than for serious ones.**



More specifically, young people were locked up after they were charged or adjudicated for:

- damaging property without the owner's permission (21%);
- violating the terms of their probation agreements, such as missing appointments or curfew (14%);
- disturbing public order (14%);
- violating drug laws (4%); or
- committing status offenses, which are offenses that would not be illegal if committed by an adult, such as truancy, underage drinking or running away from home (4%).

**IN 2019, FEWER THAN ONE IN THREE** youth who were confined were locked up based on a Violent Crime Index offense (homicide, aggravated assault, robbery or sexual assault).

## Appendix C: Juvenile Population Characteristics in United States 2018

### Juvenile Population Characteristics

#### Juvenile Population

Q: How many juveniles are there in the United States population?

A: In 2018, 73.4 million Americans - about 1 in 4 - were under age 18.

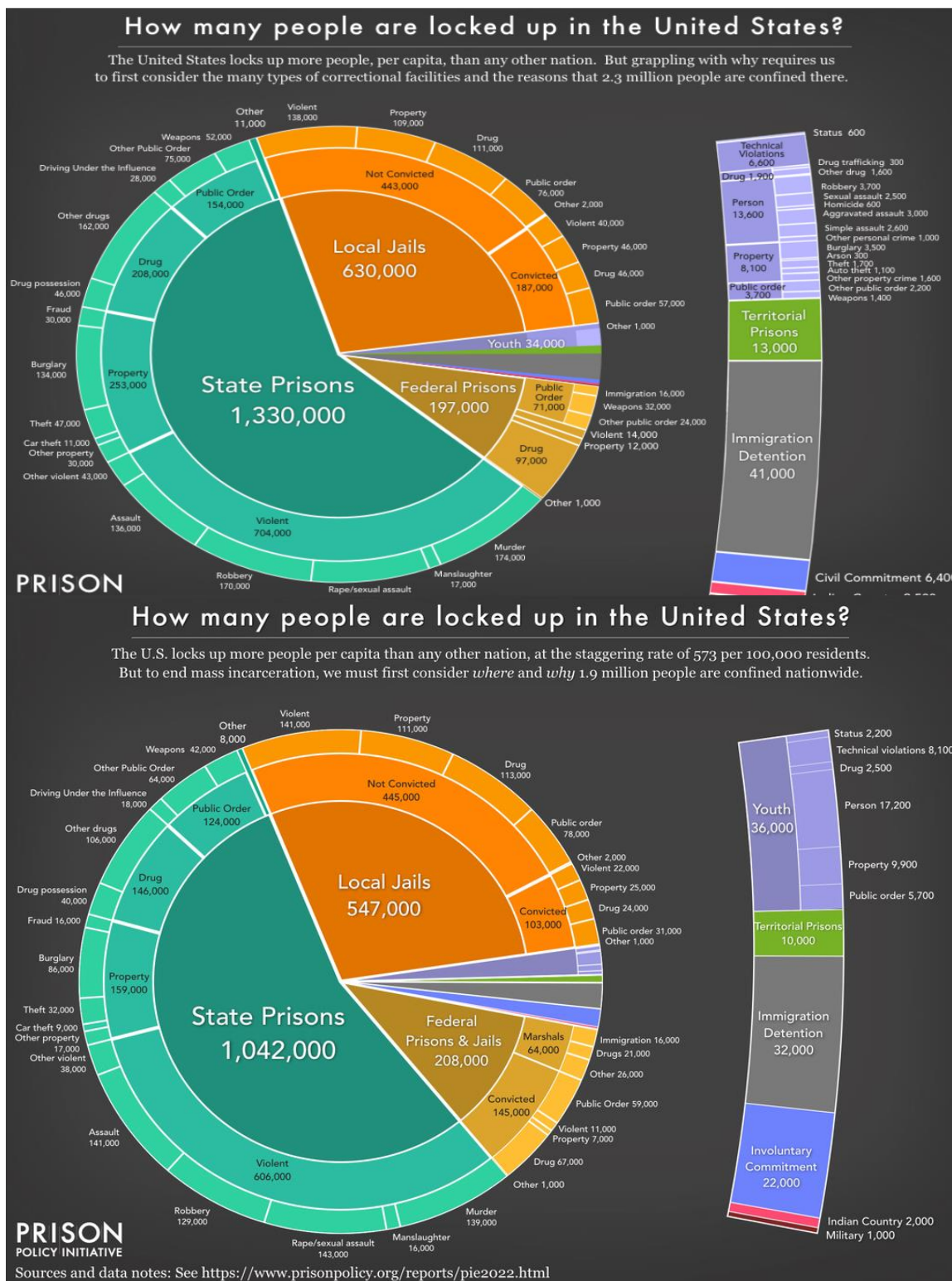
#### Youth (0 to 17) population profile detailed by age, sex, and race/ethnicity, 2018

Age group	Total	Male	Female	White*	Black*	American Indian*	Asian*	Hispanic
Total (ages 0-17)	73,399,342	37,490,849	35,908,493	38,516,794	11,118,967	726,040	4,336,357	18,701,184
0 to 5	23,820,393	12,181,713	11,638,680	12,312,580	3,653,006	235,009	1,412,099	6,207,699
6 to 9	16,185,524	8,266,479	7,919,045	8,377,464	2,472,827	162,278	952,274	4,220,681
10 to 12	12,555,569	6,411,304	6,144,265	6,567,641	1,905,215	124,746	735,830	3,222,137
13 to 14	8,323,958	4,247,536	4,076,422	4,464,601	1,225,075	82,093	495,578	2,056,611
Age 15	4,141,218	2,111,626	2,029,592	2,244,272	606,698	40,134	248,139	1,001,975
Age 16	4,130,744	2,106,746	2,023,998	2,241,940	616,751	40,422	240,358	991,273
Age 17	4,241,936	2,165,445	2,076,491	2,308,296	639,395	41,358	252,079	1,000,808

\*Race groups do not include persons of Hispanic ethnicity.

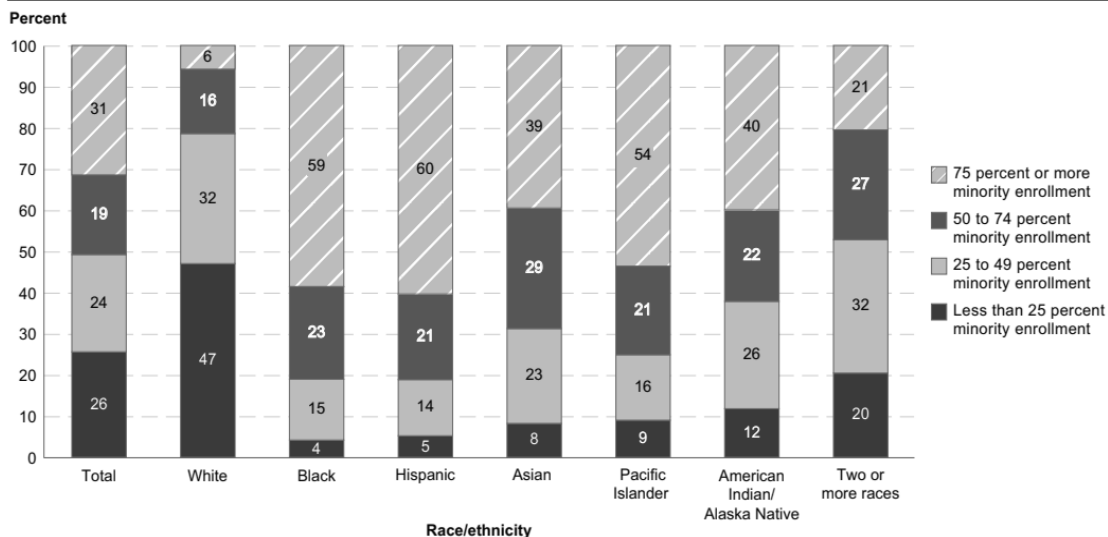
TABLE C-1

## Appendix D: Prison Population in the United States 2017 and 2022



Appendix E: 2018 Public School Enrollment by Race / Ethnicity

Percentage distribution of public elementary and secondary school students, by student's race/ethnicity and percent of minority enrollment in school: Fall 2018



NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Minority students include students who were Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and of Two or more races. Data reflect racial/ethnic data reported by schools. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2018-19. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 216.50.

## Appendix F: Interview Questions and Sub-Questions

1. What Influence did public school closings have on juvenile delinquency in Detroit from 2008-2020?
2. When you were working as an attorney in Detroit, what did juveniles accused of a crime say about their educational experiences?
  - a. When working as a juvenile defense attorney in the City of Detroit, what negative emotions did juveniles accused of a crime display in relation to their school experience?
  - b. When working as a juvenile defense attorney in the City of Detroit, what
  - c. other factors were discovered about the juvenile's school experience?
  - d. When working as a defense attorney in the City of Detroit, what stressors did juveniles accused of a crime experience related to school closures?
  - e. When working as a juvenile defense attorney in the City of Detroit, what constraints to coping did juveniles accused of a crime experience relating to school closures?
3. How do you perceive the impact of school closures on juveniles during the same period?
  - a. When working as a defense attorney in the City of Detroit, did juveniles understand the charges against them?
  - b. When working as a juvenile defense attorney in the City of Detroit, did juveniles understand the penalty of the charges against them?
  - c. When working as a defense attorney in the City of Detroit, what was the racial composition of those you defended?
  - d. When working as a juvenile defense attorney in the City of Detroit, describe the family's involvement from arrest to court proceedings.
  - e. When working as a juvenile defense attorney in the City of Detroit, how concerned are you about future school closings and African Americans?

## Appendix G: Matrix for Recording Participants Activity in the Research Project

Purpose of Study: *to explore the perception of juvenile defense attorneys on public-school closures and its impact on juvenile delinquency.*

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Pseudo Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Place of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Confidentiality Explained: Y \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: If Confidentiality is No

\_\_\_\_\_

Permission to Audio Record: Y \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: If permission is No

\_\_\_\_\_

Central Research Question: What influence did public school closings have on juvenile delinquency in Detroit from 2008-2020?	Response:	Response:
When you were working as a juvenile defense attorney in Detroit, what did juveniles accused of a crime say about their educational experiences?		
How do you perceive the impact of school closures on the juveniles during the same period?		

## Appendix H: Code Book

## Code Book:

## The Effect of School Closings on Juvenile Delinquency in Detroit

**Summary of Themes:**

<sup>1</sup> The most dominant theme was a predisposition regarding education from both students and families. These predispositions created a lack of involvement that appeared to escalate because of school closings. One key point revealed among most participants was that juvenile delinquents do not value education because it is not valued in the home.

<sup>2</sup> Accountability described responses pointing to who was to blame for closures and student issues. Participants shared that systems were to blame in that there was a lack of administrative action, a lack of support and monitoring, and juveniles viewed the juvenile justice system as unfair.

<sup>3</sup> This theme described the impact of change because of school closure, which resulted in participants identifying a potential for delinquent behavior, transportation issues, a lack of resources, and a lack of socialization and neighborhood engagement.

<sup>4</sup> This theme described youth's ability to adapt to social and environmental change and the emotional reaction to change. Participants' responses related to young people's lack of interest in school.

<sup>5</sup> This theme described the behavior of young people in response to school closing. Participants responses to the influence of school closure and delinquency suggested that school closings promoted delinquent behavior. The Strain Theory suggested that deviant behavior was an outcome of stress society can place on a child. Several participants indicated that young people stop going to school because of school closings.

<sup>6</sup> This theme described the youth's comprehension level based on the participant's lived experience. Most of the responses to the question "Did juveniles understand the charges and penalty of the charges against them?" revealed that juveniles did not understand.

**Summary of Students Race:**

Approximately 80 % of the participants clients were African American

Text		Code	Theme
		Beliefs, Attitude, Value Behavior	
<b>Did</b> not have a positive experience. <b>Education</b> is not a priority.		Poor outlook about education	Predisposed View of Education <sup>1</sup>

<p>School and respect for school has to be taught.</p> <p><b>Families do not</b> see education as a priority.</p> <p><b>The idea</b> of education is negative.</p> <p><b>The</b> importance of education has to be learned.</p> <p><b>Child</b> could see the handwriting on the wall, did not want to continue their education career.</p> <p><b>Did not</b> see the point of going to school.</p> <p><b>Resigned.</b></p> <p><b>Emotions</b> were a disregard for school.</p> <p><b>Parent</b> felt child's education was not their responsibility.</p> <p><b>Mom did not</b> enroll.</p> <p><b>Parents</b> do not appreciate education.</p> <p><b>Most did</b> not enjoy school.</p> <p><b>Education stopped</b> in middle school.</p> <p><b>Never</b> going to graduate.</p> <p><b>Not knowing</b> credits needed to graduate or credits did not transfer from other school.</p> <p><b>Do not do well</b> in school.</p> <p><b>Social promotions.</b></p> <p><b>Kids who were not bright</b> more delinquency.</p>		<p>Grades</p> <p>Attendance</p>	
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<p><b>School was hostile</b> – stop going.  <b>Violent</b> environment did want to go.  <b>Did not want to go</b> – grades, peer pressure, violence, bullying.  <b>Kicked out</b>  <b>Get to school late</b> – sent home.  <b>Problems in some classes</b> – they skip –</p> <p><b>Anger.</b>  <b>Mad</b>, because of teasing and how treated.  <b>Angry</b>, displayed in a negative way.  <b>Traumatized</b> - I have not been going to school.  <b>Afraid</b> – apprehension about going to school and environment.  <b>Fear</b> of attending school with new staff and other children.  <b>Fear</b> based on walk or commute to school.  <b>Embarrassed</b>  <b>Frustration</b> in trouble and want to get out.  <b>Frustration</b> how is this fair.  <b>Disregard</b> for school.</p>		Emotions - Anger – frustration	
<p><b>School</b> never tried to help.  <b>Blame</b> others, do not take responsibility.</p>		System to blame	Accountability <sup>2</sup>

<p><b>Re: their charge,</b> why do I have this, and others do not”: inequity.</p> <p><b>Do not</b> get what they need in school.</p> <p><b>Children</b> with special needs fall back or get left behind despite the law.</p> <p><b>School</b> seems like a social place and not a place of education.</p> <p><b>Social</b> promotions.</p> <p><b>Kids</b> not learning financial literacy.</p> <p><b>Need</b> funding to make sure no child comes out of third grade without knowing how to read.</p> <p><b>Disparity</b> – teachers pay does not compare to other professions.</p> <p><b>Society</b> and family allow kids to get through third grade.</p> <p><b>They do not</b> educate the students.</p> <p><b>Went to 12<sup>th</sup></b> grade and dropped out. Lost them in High School.</p> <p><b>If Parents</b> do not value education, the kids mirror their parents.</p> <p><b>Do not</b> know why they are going to a certain school. Mom told them to go to different school.</p> <p><b>The</b> school experience changed.</p>		<p>Support during change.</p>	
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<p><b>Lack of</b> adult support.  <b>Lack of</b> family dynamics – of 30 kids in a classroom only 3-4 parents engaged in their education.  <b>Class size</b> too large.  <b>Having</b> a caring adult.  <b>Hang</b> out in homes where there is no parental supervision.  <b>Parents</b> do not know who to use apps which report child's absence from school.  <b>Staff,</b> not enough  <b>Focus</b> on one's aptitude and not their struggles in school.  <b>Lack</b> of action when kids brought things to the principal's attention.  <b>Lack</b> of supervision when there were fights on school grounds or classroom.  <b>There is</b> constant conflict in school, yet school makes conflict a legal issue.  <b>School is</b> an environment they cannot get out of.  <b>Parents are</b> the catalyst to help with change.</p> <p><b>Discipline</b> too harsh.</p>		<p>Lack of administrative action, support, and monitoring.</p> <p>System injustices</p>	
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<p><b>Why is the court</b> involved.</p> <p><b>I was defending</b> myself against bullying and harassment.</p> <p><b>Why am I</b> in court when the other person started it.</p>			
<p><b>Transportation</b> – do not have transportation, difficulty getting to school.</p> <p><b>Getting on a bus</b> when its dark outside.</p> <p><b>Family</b> dynamics and transportation.</p> <p><b>Long ride to and from school</b> – do not have enough time to do things like homework – just eat and go to bed.</p> <p><b>New school</b> – too far.</p> <p><b>Neighborhood schools</b> taken away – cannot walk – not going to school</p> <p><b>Uptick in uneducated</b> Black children because of city closures – Detroit – primarily black</p> <p><b>Long term</b> dropout and increased crime</p> <p><b>Another</b> disruptive factor in their lives.</p>		<p>Issues with Transportation</p> <p>Perception of participant</p>	<p>Impact of change (perception)<sup>3</sup></p>

<p><b>The more schools close</b> – the worse it is for kids.</p> <p><b>Neighborhoods</b> close down and decline.</p> <p><b>Future</b> – nothing left to close, and this is devastating.</p> <p><b>Dim</b> future is dim for students.</p> <p><b>Attendance</b> – fewer kids attending school and more coming to court and foster care.</p> <p><b>Socialize</b> and form bonds in the neighborhoods – gone.</p> <p><b>Resources</b> – no books or supplies.</p> <p><b>Resources</b> – fiscal reasons but not putting money back into schools.</p> <p><b>Racism</b> – inequities in funding per child.</p> <p><b>Schools like churches</b> – should be part of the education of our community.</p> <p><b>Nothing</b> to replace closed schools and no back up plan.</p> <p><b>Remaining</b> schools must adjust.</p> <p><b>School closes</b> community closes.</p> <p><b>Delinquency</b> used to happen outside of school now inside school.</p>			

<p><b>Not wanting</b> to go to school.</p> <p><b>Transfer</b> to different school not knowing anybody</p> <p><b>Multiple</b> changes, not having stability.</p> <p><b>Fighting</b> – led to suspension</p> <p><b>Friends</b> aren't going to same school.</p> <p><b>Rival</b> gangs at the same school.</p> <p><b>Caring</b> for younger siblings</p> <p><b>Cannot</b> be a child a lot to deal with.</p> <p><b>Establishing</b> new friends, new relationships, and new teachers.</p> <p><b>Coping</b> with transition.</p> <p><b>Challenges</b> with transportation.</p> <p><b>Coping</b> with fighting.</p> <p><b>Gangs</b> – not knowing what gangs were in the neighborhood.</p> <p><b>Need to feel safe</b> – safety net not there.</p> <p><b>Inability to perform</b> – embarrassed – failing school.</p> <p><b>Could</b> not get positive peer support.</p> <p><b>No</b> friends to hangout with and no after school programs</p> <p><b>Desire to do better</b>, like school, want to go to school, and wish</p>		<p>No interest in school, attendance, dropping out.</p> <p>Disappointment because of change.</p>	<p>Youth's ability to Adapt to social and environmental change<sup>4</sup></p>
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<p>they could go more often.</p> <p><b>School</b> is like a savior to get away from household issue.</p> <p><b>Doing</b> good by child's definition until school was no longer there.</p> <p><b>Changed</b> their comfort level</p>			
<p><b>Truancy</b>  <b>Lots of kids</b> dropped out of school  <b>Increased</b> absenteeism</p> <p><b>More problems</b> doing well in school  <b>School</b> discipline issues</p> <p><b>Misdemeanor</b> court has become felonious court – a lot of it due to school closures  <b>Influx</b> of more serious cases  <b>Kids</b> broke into schools and minor vandalization</p>		<p>Attendance in response to school closings</p> <p>Behavioral issues</p> <p>Legal issues</p>	<p>Delinquent Behavior<sup>5</sup></p>
<p><b>Yes they understood</b>  – ask do you understand they say yes.</p>		<p>Young person's ability to understand</p>	<p>Comprehension level<sup>6</sup></p>

<p><b>Yes</b> – a lot of kids did not understand but would say yes.  <b>Yes</b>, some understand they did something wrong.  <b>No</b>, generally do not understand what is going on.  <b>No</b>, in most cases they did not find they did anything wrong.  <b>No</b>, do not realize the offense.  <b>No</b>, they are trained to respond in the affirmative when in trouble.  <b>No</b>, most of the time its up to the attorney to explain.  No, may need to do a competency evaluation.</p> <p><b>Commute</b> to school.</p>			
<p><b>Show</b> up as needed or to avoid neglect charges.  <b>Some parents</b> saw their child’s detainment as an opportunity to perhaps get rid of a problem in their household.  <b>Some parents</b> did not give a da**</p>		Parents disconnect	Something Surprising (AHA Response)
<p><b>School disruptive</b>  <b>Larger</b> class size  <b>Nothing left</b> to close  <b>Future</b> dim</p>		Attitude about future	Poor outlook for the future of education in Detroit and African American students



<b>Funding</b> inequities <b>Neighborhoods</b> going down <b>No socialization</b> and bonding for kids <b>Community</b> closes <b>Transportation</b>			
Transportation Issue		Transportation	Repeated Responses