

A CASE STUDY OF LEADERSHIP AND DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES USED BY
SECONDARY SCHOOL LEADERS TO SUPPORT EQUITY FOR BLACK MALE
STUDENTS

By

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Estella, who always believed in me, encouraged me to put God first, and made selfless sacrifices for my siblings and me. From walking to the grocery store to catching a ride to church on Sunday mornings, she showed me what it means to be humble, to persevere through the good and the bad, to count my blessings in spite of all situations and circumstances, and to always do what is right—even if I have to do it alone. Her unwavering desire for me to obtain the best education and her unspoken strength supported me through this endeavor. I thank her for the unconditional motherly love and for setting a standard for me to be the best man I can be in life. I love you, Momma!

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Abstract

The school-to-prison pipeline has plagued black males for many years. When school leaders apply disciplinary consequences such as in-school and out-of-school suspension, they inadvertently foster the push-out of black males by removing them from the classroom. When black males are removed from the classroom through suspension, the opportunities to excel in social and academic environments significantly decrease. The social construction of race in the context of school discipline supports how black males are stereotyped by the way they dress, their cultural background, and their everyday demeanor (Simson, 2014). Because of this stereotypical societal perception, black males are often generalized as being defiant, disrespectful, and dangerous. It is important for educational leaders to have an awareness of how black males are perceived in school and create opportunities for equitable disciplinary practices towards black male students.

The purpose of this study was to explore leadership and disciplinary practices used by secondary school leaders to support equity for black male students. The researcher used qualitative research to conduct three instrumental case studies. Three high schools were used as part of this research: one suburban and two urban. The researcher interviewed and observed three high school principals and high school assistant principals. The exploratory questions that guided this research are listed below:

1. What factors, as perceived by school leaders, play a role in equitable school disciplinary practices for black male students?
2. What data sources do school leaders principals utilize that may influence disciplinary practices towards black male students?
3. What discretionary practices do school leaders use or take into consideration that support equity when handling a disciplinary incident that directly involves black male students?

4. How do school leaders develop and train faculty and staff members to reflect a shared vision to support equity for black male students?

This study was designed based upon research done on the Critical Race Theory and the Racial Threat Theory. The racial threat theory suggests that minorities are perceived to present an economic, political, and criminal threat to the dominant social group. The Critical Race Theory suggests that racial stigmatization, stereotyping, and implicit biases are based on a long history of racial prejudice in the United States. Inequity in school discipline for black males has been an ongoing issue for several years. Qualitative research examined how school leaders support black males and maintain equity in leadership and disciplinary practices for black male students. Several components are considered to support equity, and those components range from building positive relationships to promoting parental involvement in education. The researcher offers policy implications on disciplinary practices and recommendations for further research for school leadership.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Disciplinary issues occur due to a cause or purpose which may not directly relate to the educational leader. Some disciplinary issues are real, while others are perceived. A real disciplinary problem is one that arises because a student is infringing on the real freedoms of the educational leader or other members of the school. A perceived disciplinary problem is one in which the school leader is the cause of the issue; he or she perceives there is a problem when, in fact, there is not; this type of discipline occurs frequently in the school setting. School leaders often confuse a real disciplinary problem—where the student’s behavior takes away from the learning environment and safety of the school—with a disciplinary problem that may be avoided with appropriate leadership (Thompson, 1994).

Historically, public schools are very safe. However, school disciplinary consequences seem to be increasingly punitive. Punitive consequences raise questions about the impact of disciplinary actions on students, schools, and the courts (Fowler, 2011). In many states across the nation, school discipline has increasingly moved from the schoolhouse to the courthouse. School leaders who make discretionary decisions to suspend, expel, and/or criminalize students for misbehavior contribute to the push-out, dropout, and ultimately the school-to-prison pipeline. There is no question that every student must be held accountable for his or her actions, but a school leader’s decision to suspend, expel, or refer a student to an alternative school for nonviolent misbehavior disproportionately affects black male students (Fowler, 2011). When a student is suspended out of school multiple times for multiple reasons or for the same reason, it creates serious problems such as an increased dropout rate and an increased entry of individuals into the juvenile justice system (Fenning, Pulaski, Gomez, Morello, Maciel, Maroney, & Maltese 2012). The single greatest predictor of future involvement in the juvenile system is the history of a student’s disciplinary record at his or her school site. Students involved in one to two incidents

that result in a referral are 23.4 percent more times likely to be referred to the state's juvenile justice system. In addition, each additional referral increases the likelihood by 1.5 percent that the student will be referred to the state's juvenile justice system (Fowler, 2011). Better disciplinary options such as detention, time-out, work detail or positive behavior support do exist, and it is important for educational leaders to promote and reinforce positive behaviors and redirect negative behaviors.

Black male students are being suspended from school for less serious offenses such as disrespect and insubordination. Disciplinary policies and procedures—such as zero-tolerance—may use an umbrella approach in which several types of offenses may fall under one category. With the zero-tolerance disciplinary policy, school leaders are often able to justify suspensions. However, some disciplinarians do not think logically about the overall effects of punishment on the student's academic career before making the decision to remove the student out of school (Fowler, 2011).

Black male students are referred to school leaders for misbehavior that is less serious and more often based on subjective interpretation than white male students (Fowler, 2011). Black youth comprise only 17 percent of the nation's public school students, but they account for 32 percent of the students suspended out of school (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). Black males have the highest suspension rates, followed by white males, black females, and white females (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). "According to a 2009 report of the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, black male students are four times more likely than white male students to be suspended and/or expelled from school" (Caton, 2012). "A recent study of 19 secondary schools in the Midwest found that black males were sent to the principal's office more than their counterparts for more subjective reasons such as disrespect and a perceived threat; and by removing black males from class, they are more likely

to set off the chain reaction to the school-to-prison pipeline” (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, Bachman, 2008; Caton, 2012). “The outsourcing of discipline to external agencies has placed students, especially black males, in a position in which they are more inclined to be formally prosecuted rather than simply given in-house discipline. Criminalization of black males in high school is a gateway for the prison system” (Caton, 2012).

“The home environment is an important indicator of the behavior of adolescents. When parents monitor the behavior of their children and are supportive, involved, and responsible, their children are less-likely to participate in inappropriate behaviors” (Ganao, Silvestre, & Glenn, 2013). Many times, Black-American families have strong extended-family structures in place, which helps mitigate the negative effects of an absent father; but often times, black males do suffer the effects of absent-father households; and as a result, negative feelings may develop within the child, and discipline issues may arise (Ganao, Silvestre, & Glenn, 2013).

Problem Statement

Severe school punishment, such as suspension, places students on a path toward social exclusion, educational failure, and potentially economic depression (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011). “Leaving school prematurely compromises a student’s ability to participate fully as a citizen in this society. As a group, school dropouts not only cost society a loss in future productivity, but they are also disproportionately responsible for costs in crime and vandalism, and ultimately in social and economic dependency” (Taylor & Foster, 1986)

While studies show that the overrepresentation of black male students in disciplinary referrals is not related to a higher rate of misbehavior, black males are referred for misbehavior that is less serious and more based on subjective interpretation than white students (Fowler, 2011). Suspension plays a prominent role in discourses about school violence since it is seen as a way to separate a violent or disruptive student from the rest of the student body for a short

duration until there has been a change in the student's behavior or a behavior plan is developed. While violent behavior is clearly marked through fighting or the use of weapons, the actions that fall under the rubric of disruptive behavior are more ambiguous (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Black males who are classified as special education students are three-and-a-half times more likely to be sent to in-school suspension; almost six times more likely to receive out-of-school suspension; four times more likely to be sent to disciplinary alternative school; and three times more likely to be expelled than white male students overall (Fowler, 2011).

Severe disciplinary consequences such as suspensions and expulsions determined by the public school system may eventually cause a student to drop out of school. Because suspension creates a loss of instructional time for students and because it is a method used to temporarily remove those who have problems in school—rather than resolve their problems within the school environment—the practice of suspending students may jeopardize their opportunities for future social advancement. When the practice of school suspension is applied unevenly to a racial, ethnic, or gender-specific group of students, that group's collective opportunity for advancement is threatened (Taylor & Foster, 1986). The disproportionately high rate of suspensions of black male students throughout secondary schools holds serious policy implications for them as a collective group. Suspension does not serve the best interests of black male students, nor does it correct the behavior problem. It does, however, eliminate educational opportunities for the duration of the suspension and abandons the black male to the worst of all places he could possibly be—the streets. “Any practice which encourages black males to leave school, even temporarily, is tantamount to a prison sentence since the majority of black inmates in local jails and state and federal correctional institutions have not finished high school” (Taylor & Foster, 1986).

Often times, the school leader's solution to a problem is to remove the student from the educational environment. The practice of school suspensions may be part of the larger failure of the educational institution and the school's administrative team (Taylor & Foster, 1986).

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose and significance of this study is to explore leadership and disciplinary practices used by secondary school leaders. This study is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the role of the school leader and to gain a deeper understanding of leadership and disciplinary practices used at their school sites to support equity for black male students. "According to the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection, over 3.25 million students, approximately seven percent of all students enrolled in K-12, are estimated to have been suspended at least once" (Losen, Martinez, & University of California, 2013). On average, for each day public schools are in session in America, approximately 18,000 public school students are suspended in-school or out-of-school for a least one day. Based on the 2008 Office of Civil Rights data from every state, 28 percent of black males at the secondary level were suspended, compared to just ten percent of white males. When students believe school leaders have high expectations of them, their probability of out-of-school suspension is decreased by 26 percent, and their probability of in-school suspension is decreased by 28 percent (Hinojosa, 2008). The OCR reports that 95 percent of suspensions fall into two categories: disruptive behavior and "other" (Losen, Martinez, & University of California, 2013). According to Russell Skiba and Mark Rausch, authors of *Race Is Not Neutral: A National Investigation of African-American and Latino Disproportionality in School Discipline*, Indiana University, four reasons appear to account for the common use of suspension or expulsion for non-violent or repeated school code violations of black males:

1. Improve the student's behavior;

2. Obtain the parents' attention and seek active parental involvement;
3. Deter other students from misbehaving; and
4. Ensure that the school environment is conducive to teaching and learning

The term *disruption*, as it is used in school policies about suspension, assumes that there is a fixed meaning for the term that is widely shared by school leaders. However, disruptions appear to be highly contextualized social interactions. The interpretation of *disruptive* depends on the interpreter's socio-cultural context in which potentially disruptive events occur (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Certainly suspending disruptive students may improve teaching conditions by relieving some of the school leader's burden and stress; but understanding cultural, racial, and gender differences and increasing the engagement in and outside of the classroom may cause a decrease in disruptive behaviors of black male students (Losen, Martinez, & University of California, 2013). By learning more about how secondary school leaders apply disciplinary practices through leadership at their school site, researchers can gather information to help address the problem affecting black males in secondary education.

Theoretical Framework

Racial Threat Theory is positioned within the conflict perspective, and the theory through the lens of racial equity analyzes the power imbalance between dominant and minority groups in society. Racial Threat Theory suggests that minorities are perceived to present an economic, political, and criminal threat to the dominant social group. Because of this perceived threat, the dominant group responds by imposing punitive social controls in order to maintain dominance. While the Racial Threat Theory was originally applied to criminal justice research, the growing overlap between school discipline and criminal justice has recently led educators to apply this theory to school discipline practices (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). "Because minority students can constitute a threat to the cultural hegemony of predominantly white teachers and school

personnel, Racial Threat Theory also informs the understanding of how cultural differences in communication, social behavior, hairstyles, dress, and demeanor contribute to the disproportionate application of exclusionary school discipline” (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014).

In the United States, the educational level of an individual determines their primary standard of living, optional career choices, and overall social status. In public schools, blacks are seemingly underserved by educational institutions. The University of Texas conducted a study the results of which showed that 44 percent of all blacks in America are functionally illiterate, while only 15 percent of whites are in this category. In addition, 35 percent of the American population is functionally illiterate, with the illiteracy rate for blacks approaching 50 percent—with black males at over 50 percent (Taylor & Foster, 1986).

Equality amongst all of the schools in America officially happened on May 16, 1954, with the *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* Supreme Court decision. This court ruling ushered in a new era of integration that became the standard for defining equality in America’s schools under the constitutional law (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). During the *Brown* era of the 1950s, school disciplinary practices centered on corporal punishment and public embarrassment, wherein the law protected teacher and administrative use of reasonable force as long as the punishment promoted discipline and was not used to intentionally inflict pain (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). Schools could not be accused of criminal offenses, but families could challenge school’s disciplinary practices based on their civil individual and procedural rights. In the 1960s and 1970s, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsions arose as alternatives to the harsh practices of corporal punishment and embarrassment. In-school suspension was often cited as the most humane and reasonable form of discipline because it allowed students to remain in school and would not impede their academic achievement (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014).

“The zero-tolerance policy first appeared in 1989 and was intended to send an unequivocal message that violence and drug use, in any extent, would not be tolerated on school property. This policy originally required schools to expel students suspected of involvement with on-campus drug possession or use, violence, or gang-related activity” (Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, Cauffman, 2014). Zero-tolerance proliferated rapidly following the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, which required a one-year expulsion for possession of a firearm. A series of rampage-style school shootings between 1990 and 1999 played a critical role in the ideological appeal and rapid expansion of zero-tolerance (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). Because of the zero-tolerance policy, students who violate school rules are punished harshly with suspensions or expulsions; and that may increase their risk of being targeted for the Juvenile Justice System (Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, Cauffman, 2014).

School discipline has emerged as a civil rights dilemma in education post-*Brown vs. Board of Education*, and more specifically within the last three decades. On January 8, 2014, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and Attorney General Eric Holder released a series of guidelines, which urged schools to abandon the zero-tolerance disciplinary policy. States’ education leaders contend that the zero-tolerance policy does not promote the legal or democratic principles of equal educational opportunity. The zero-tolerance policy has continued to punish minority students more harshly and more frequently than their white counterparts. The zero-tolerance policy has been a national phenomenon, but urban, high-minority schools disproportionately apply the zero-tolerance policy and punitive disciplinary consequences (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014).

According to the U.S. Department of Education in 1997, educational leaders of schools with 50 percent or more minority enrollment reported the highest prevalence of zero-tolerance use. High-minority schools are more likely to use punitive disciplinary responses in dealing with

misbehavior. Such schools are likely to take punitive measures to control inappropriate behavior instead of implementing restorative measures when more black students are enrolled in the school. Often times, school leaders do not consider the total amount of misbehavior, the socioeconomic status of students, or the lack of ethnicity training provided to faculty and staff when handling student discipline (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). By frequently applying suspensions or expulsions, educational institutions have limited the success of many black male students. Even though some black male students manage to escape suspension, a well-rounded education is not guaranteed. Black males who are suspended must handle an additional strike, while already experiencing less educational opportunities than whites; this, in return, limits opportunity for future employment (Taylor & Foster, 1986).

Zero-tolerance initially focused on objective criminal activity, but two decades after the institution of the zero-tolerance policy, many schools expanded the mandate of zero-tolerance to cover a range of subjectively defined behaviors, such as disrespect and insubordination, that have little to no impact on school safety. Minority students are often referred to the office for subjective offenses, and racial discipline disparities are more likely to be found in the minor, subjective offense category (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). The increasing number of minority students that are disciplined for subjective reasons—combined with suspensions—has resulted in astounding levels of exclusionary disciplinary practices. During a national survey of 74,000 tenth grade students by the U.S. Department of Education, it was noted that 50 percent of black students had been suspended or expelled, compared to 20 percent of white students. The study also noted there was an increase of suspensions and expulsions for black students from 1991 to 2005, but white students showed a decline in suspensions and expulsions (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). The disproportionate number of suspensions of black males align with discriminatory practices protected and supported by educational policies. Black men are faced

with high rates of unemployment, substance abuse, mental illness, and incarceration; these deficiencies stem from elements of a failed educational system and racial discrimination (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore leadership and disciplinary practices used by educational leaders that support equity in discipline among black male students. This study seeks to thoroughly examine the disciplinary practices used by principals and assistant principals at the secondary level. The research questions that will guide this study are these:

1. What factors, as perceived by school leaders, play a role in equitable school disciplinary practices for black male students?
2. What data sources do school leaders utilize that may influence disciplinary practices towards black male students?
3. What discretionary practices do school leaders use or take into consideration that support equity when handling a discipline incident that directly involves black male students?
4. How do school leaders develop and train faculty and staff members to reflect a shared vision to support equity for black male students?

Through the use of the research questions presented above, the researcher will be able to identify leadership and disciplinary practices that secondary school leaders use to support equity for black male students. In addition, the researcher will conduct interviews to collect more information and subsequently use sub-topic questions to thoroughly understand leadership and disciplinary practices used by school leaders to support equity for black male students.

Methodology

To gain a deeper understanding of leadership and disciplinary practices used by secondary school leaders that result in equity among black male students, the researcher will use an instrumental case study qualitative research method. “The case study research approach . . . explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving sources of information such as observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports” (Creswell, 2013; de Souza, Hyde, & Kehoe, 2014).

The researcher will conduct case studies at three high schools that were purposefully recommended by the Assistant Director of Educational Access, Opportunity, and Alternatives. Data from August to December of 2016 was disaggregated from all 27 high schools in the district, and Genesis High School, Malachi High School, and Titus High School are three high schools with disciplinary incidents affecting black males that are proportionate to the percentage of black males enrolled on campus. Genesis High School has a total population of 2,477 students. Eight percent of the student population are black males, totaling 222 black male students enrolled on campus. There are 419 recorded disciplinary incidents, with 19 percent representing black male students, totaling 83 incidents. Genesis High School best represented all other suburban schools with a low minority discipline rate and a low minority percentage of enrollment. Malachi High School, an urban high school, has a total population of 1,721 students. 15 percent of the student population are black males, totaling 254 black male students enrolled on campus. There are 437 recorded disciplinary incidents, with 19 percent representing black male students, totaling 91 incidents. An examination of data across the district reveals that Malachi High School was the top school with proportionate discipline, compared to other schools with 15 to 20 percent of the student population consisting of black males. Titus High School, another urban school in the district, has a total population of 2,033 students. Black males

constitute 43 percent of the student population, totaling 897 students enrolled on campus. There are 1,031 recorded disciplinary incidents, with eight percent representing black male students, totaling 81 incidents. Titus High School was number one in the district for having a high enrollment of black male students and the lowest number of disciplinary incidents representing black male students.

There were other high schools in the district with a minority rate of 10 to 20 percent and 25 to 35 percent, but the data for those schools were not proportionate with the racial ethnicity of the school. A careful review of the data reveals that Genesis High School, Malachi High School, and Titus High School were the best schools for three case studies. The intent of all case studies is to examine various leadership and disciplinary practices that school leaders use to support equity among black male students on the school's campus. Through instrumental case study qualitative research, an in-depth understanding of leadership and disciplinary practices will be gained. Through interviews and observations, the researcher will gather data about the school from the school leader recorded by use of an electronic recording device. The researcher will analyze data and identify common themes across all three educational institutions. At the conclusion of the research, the researcher will explain the overall findings of the case study.

Definition of Terms

Equity. The quality of being fair, impartial, and just

Equality. The state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities.

Zero Tolerance Policy. A predetermined procedure used by schools that addresses intolerable misbehaviors by students.

School Culture. The perceptions of a school environment shared by a group of individuals.

Insubordination. Constant and intentional refusal to obey a direct or implied order, reasonable in nature, and given by and with proper authority.

Discipline Referrals. A written documentation of a student's misconduct.

In-School-Suspension. A mandatory leave assigned to a student as a form of punishment that can last from one day to several weeks, during which time the student is allowed to attend regular school but he may not attend regular classes.

Out-of-School-Suspension and Expulsion. A temporary exclusion from the traditional educational setting that is used as a form of punishment; this exclusion can last from one day to several weeks, and the affected students are not allowed to attend regular school or extracurricular activities, nor may they occupy school grounds.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to secondary school principals from three high schools in central Florida concerning disciplinary practices used to support equity for black male students. One high school is located in the suburbs of central Florida, and the other two high schools are urban schools within central Florida. This study is limited to urban and suburban schools and does not include information pertaining to schools in rural locations in central Florida. Analysis of data obtained applies only to the participants in this study. This study is dependent on the ability of participants to be familiar with current school disciplinary practices. A limitation of this study is that school principals may assume they could be perceived as failures by acknowledging that discipline problems exist in their schools. These factors may influence responses and could possibly skew the results of the study. The study is based upon answers given by secondary school principals to open-ended questions through oral responses; it is assumed that the participants are thoughtful, forthright, and honest in providing accurate answers to the questions that are asked during the study.

Summary

Chapter 1 provides a general introduction and rationale of the study. In addition to a theoretical framework, background of the study and a personal perspective is included. The researcher explains the dissertation topic and provides exploratory questions, a brief description of the research design, the relevancy of the study, definitions of important terms, and limitations of the study at the conclusion of the chapter.

Chapter 2 includes a review of literature surrounding the components of school leadership and disciplinary practices. Each component will have literature to support various sub-components, such as the zero-tolerance policy, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, racial inequality, culture, and student responsibilities to support how principals use disciplinary techniques as a corrective measure to change behavior, and yet maintain racial and gender equity.

Chapter 3 demonstrates the use of qualitative research. The researcher will provide research interview questions, participant selection, and a brief summary defining the specific features of each case study. Chapter 4 allows the researcher to present the data. Data will be collected from three high school principals and assistant principals through the use of interviews, observations, and artifact collection. The data are transcribed from the professional transcription company CastingWords Transcription.

Chapter 5 includes a summary of major findings. The primary research questions from Chapter 1 will be answered, and literature from Chapter 2 will be used to support any findings. The conclusion relates directly to the research questions and objective. Recommendations are provided following the conclusion of the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Within the last five years, society has witnessed school disciplinary practices via social media and on the news. Discipline has become an increasing problem across America due to the number of incidents involving violence at school and within the justice system of the United States. According to David Simson, who is a 2013 graduate of University of California Los Angeles Law School and author of *Exclusions, Punishment, Racism and Our Schools: A Critical Race Theory Perspective on School Discipline*, punitive school discipline procedures have increasingly taken hold in America's schools (Simson, 2014). Punitive disciplinary procedures have had a negative effect on African American youth—particularly black males. Policies that are one-size-fits-all and that do not support equity for minority students lead to such serious social problems as the school-to-prison pipeline, high school dropouts, and the push-out phenomenon, all of which ultimately hinder black male students from obtaining the best education possible and growing up to be productive members of society (Simson, 2014). The literature in this chapter supports the claim that black male students are disproportionately disciplined in public schools. The researcher reviewed several scholarly journals, educational documents, and court cases to identify the problem and support the need for further research on the topic of equitable disciplinary practices for black male students.

Leadership

Educational leaders are individuals who shape the goals, motivations, and actions of others. Frequently, educational leaders initiate change to reach existing and new goals, which takes much ingenuity, energy, and skill. Educational leaders must also manage. Managing is maintaining efficiently and effectively current organizational arrangements. While management often exhibits leadership skills, the overall function is toward maintenance rather than change

(Bush, 2007). In the day-to-day tasks that school leaders must tackle, they are not always aware if they are leading or managing. Schools that are not performing at the standard set by the district may require school leaders to focus extra attention to the basic management of the organization versus leading with a visionary approach. An example of a leader who focuses on a managing approach would be enforcing regular and timely attendance by learners and educators and maintaining order and discipline in classrooms (Bush, 2007). “[W]hile effective leadership practice provides a general framework for creating successful schools in theory, it does not necessarily prevent instances of prejudice in practice. Conventional educational leadership models are typically organized around management as the driving principle” (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Lugg & Shoho, 2006; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014)

Tony Bush, author of *Educational Leadership and Management: Theory, Policy, and Practice* identified leadership models that are aligned with managerial models.

Table 1.

Management Model and Leadership Model.

<u>Management Model</u>	<u>Leadership Model</u>
Formal	Managerial
Collegial	Participative Transformational Interpersonal

The models listed in the left column coincide with Bush’s identified management models. The right column presents leadership models. The collegial management model (the sharing of power equally among a group of colleagues) represents transformational leadership. Disciplinary actions imposed by administrators that support equity may fall under the transformational leadership model. There are eight dimensions that conceptualize transformational leadership:

1. Create a school vision

2. Organize school goals
3. Support intellectual stimulation
4. Make individualized support available to students and staff
5. Be a functioning example of best practices and important organizational values
6. Model high expectations
7. Establish a productive school culture, and
8. Build structures to foster participation in school decisions.

Transformational leadership goes beyond creating change; it implements on-the-ground change that is rooted in equity at all levels (Leithwood, 1994). In addition to transformational leadership supporting change for the equity of all individuals, the framework of social justice leadership strives to create schools that are more equitable too. “Transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others” (Shields, 2010). Transformative leadership meets the social justice needs of complex and diverse education systems while focusing on improving the quality and effectiveness of the organization. Through transformative educational leadership, inappropriate uses of power and privilege that create inequity and injustice are challenged (Shields, 2010). Improving social skills, enhancing equity, and appropriately structuring knowledge and beliefs of leaders are common elements of transformative leadership. The concepts of transformative leadership and social justice are aligned, as they both share a similar goal of identifying and restructuring frameworks that support inequity (Shields, 2010). “Transformative leadership as a theory has developed in ways that are congruent with the uses of transformation and transformative learning in other fields of social science and education.” In 1986, William Foster discussed transformative educational leadership, and he believed leadership must be critically educative; it must look at the conditions

in which we currently live, and it must also decide how to change these conditions (Shields, 2010). In 1990, Thomas Sergiovanni, author of *Adding value to leadership gets extraordinary results*, stated that “transformative leadership is first concerned with higher-order psychological needs for self-esteem, and, then with moral questions of goodness, righteousness, duty, and obligation” (Sergiovanni, 1990). Social justice leadership strives to not partake in historical inequities and marginalizations. Social justice leadership is based on a moral obligation of reclaiming and advancing equity. Seeking to change what is socially and morally incorrect to correct is the definition of a social justice mindset (Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). Social justice leaders aspire to create caring communities where relationships matter (Marshall & Olivia, 2009). Social justice leadership is also concerned with the pedagogical implications of social justice; to create equitable schools, leaders must have concerns about social justice that reach into the realm of disciplinary decision making (Furman, G.C., & Shields, C.M., 2005; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014).

Leaders who seek and practice social justice leadership must self-reflect. Practicing social justice leadership requires a systematic analysis and critique of the world and all that is external to the leaders. Social justice leaders must carefully examine their own beliefs and practices (Furman & Shields, 2005; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). School leaders are accustomed to systems in which they operate; and through social justice leadership, they are tasked with critiquing and challenging the system. Therefore, school leaders must constantly examine and re-evaluate their frame of mind and be aware of how the systems in which they operate shape the manner in which they interact with other individuals. Leaders who practice social justice often view the outside world and actively analyze power structures in order to interrogate the policies and procedures that shape schools and that influence social inequalities and marginalization based on race, class, gender. (Dantley & Tillman, 2009; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). Carolyn

Shields, author of *Transformative leadership: Working for equity in diverse contexts*, describes transformative leadership as a framework of analyzing justice and democracy. Both concepts (*social justice* and *transformational*) have a common goal of examining and deconstructing traditional paradigms of school disciplinary practices that foster inequitable outcomes for certain racial, ethnic, and gender social classes. In addition, both concepts restructure disciplinary practices so they are more proactive. Because social justice leadership challenges school leaders to think beyond the traditional realm of school discipline, principals who practice social justice leadership may fall into patterns of leadership where their disciplinary practices do not reflect the rhetoric of equity and justice (Miller & Martin, 2014; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014).

School Climate

School climate refers to the quality and character of school life and how individuals interact with each other (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Shirley & Cornell, 2012). A positive school climate generates values and expectations that make students feel safe, emotionally secure, and motivated to learn and behave appropriately (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Shirley & Cornell, 2012). Three factors that are important to an overall positive environment are the following:

1. School leaders being responsive to student requests for help with bullying, threats of violence, and other inappropriate peer-to-peer misbehavior
2. The perception that students view discipline for aggressive behavior to be equitable
3. And the perception that teasing and bullying are not widespread at school

“Black male students may feel less supported at the school and experience the school environment as more threatening and aggressive than Caucasian male students” (Shirley & Cornell, 2012).

In a recent study of 7,318 high school students sampled from 291 schools, Eliot, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, authors of *Supportive school climate and student willingness to seek help go bullying and threats of violence*, found that a positive school climate where students feel they have the support of the school leaders often promoted student willingness to seek help for bullying and threats of violence. Social and emotional support in schools may be especially important for black male students. The relationship between black male students and their teachers is vital in providing and fostering a positive school climate (Demaray & Malecki, 2002; Shirley & Cornell, 2012).

Racial and ethnic bullying may be defined as repeated verbal insults or more serious forms of abuse based on an individual's race or ethnicity, and this type of behavior can have a major effect on the climate of the school (Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Shirley & Cornell, 2012). Individuals are aware of and perceive racial and ethnic discrimination beginning in middle childhood and increasing through adolescence (Brown & Krishnakumar, 2007; Shirley & Cornell, 2012). Black males experience more racial/ethnic bullying from their peers, including racial slurs and discriminatory disciplinary practices, than white students do (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Shirley & Cornell, 2012). Black students who report negative treatment at school because of their race are more likely to engage in problem behaviors such as skipping class, cheating, and being sent to the principal's office. Also, black students who reported racial/ethnic bullying such as slurs and insults and who feel they do not have the support of the school principal are likely to engage in misconduct such as lying, vandalism, theft, and possibly violent/aggressive behavior (Peskin, Tortolero, & Markham, 2006; Shirley & Cornell, 2012).

An attitude regarding student-to-student aggression is another factor that relates to student misconduct. If students perceives that peers favor and participate in inappropriate behaviors, they may break school rules, become anti-social, or participate in aggressive violent

behaviors (Cornell & Loper, 1998; Salba & Guerra, 1998; McConville & Cornell, 2003; Shirley & Cornell, 2012). During a recent research study, it was noted that students at the secondary level who had negative attitudes were more likely to receive office referrals for discipline infractions. Many black male students received disciplinary referrals that resulted in suspensions due to school staff perceptions of excessive verbal and physical aggression (Reed, 1988; Shirley & Cornell, 2012). Certain environmental factors, such as living in a single-parent family home and impoverished neighborhoods, often result in aggressive attitudes and behaviors. In addition to experiencing racism, African-American males living in a deprived educational, legal, social, and economic system and feeling vulnerable may commit interpersonal violence that results in disciplinary action (Reed, 1988; Shirley & Cornell, 2012).

Schools must be safe and supportive for effective learning to take place. Establishing a positive and respectful school climate may prevent student misbehavior. Clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences must be in place to prevent and address misbehavior. Support systems may assist school leaders in managing student behavior by providing various levels of assistance and interventions based on students' needs. Improving their problem solving skills, taking responsibility and ownership for their actions, and developing resiliency may help students engage and thrive in the learning environment. Schools with clear behavior expectations and appropriately applied consequences of violations will help curtail misbehavior, increase student engagement with extracurricular and social activities, and improve student academic achievement. Educational leaders must provide professional development to equip staff with strategies to reinforce appropriate behaviors and respond to misbehavior fairly and equitably. An equitable and fair response is without regard to a student's race, religion, ethnicity, or gender. School leaders must regularly evaluate disciplinary policies and practices and monitor progress toward climate and discipline goals (George, Kincaid, & Pollard-Sage, 2009).

Schools must have school-wide positive behavior interventions and systems of support as a method to establishing a positive school culture that allows all students to achieve social and academic success. These positive behavior interventions and systems of support begin with faculty, staff, and students recognizing and preventing problem behaviors; school leaders must teach appropriate social behavior skills and positively acknowledge appropriate behavior. Having a multi-tiered approach to behavior intervention that coincides with correcting behavior will effectively offer students the support they need (George, Kincaid, & Pollard-Sage, 2009).

The students' perceptions of school climate may be related to discipline problems. "Students in schools with higher suspension rates had, on average, more negative perceptions of the school climate" (Bacon, Schwartz, & Rothfarb, 1991; Mattison & Aber, 2007). Students' perceptions of school climate have been found to play a role in boys' behavioral problems (Kuperminc, 1997; Mattison & Aber, 2007). Black males who enjoyed attending school and had a positive experience had fewer social and disciplinary issues than those who did not enjoy school as a learning environment. A positive school environment may serve as a safe place for black male students (Bacon, Schwartz, & Rothfarb, 1991; Mattison & Aber, 2007).

"Racial differences have been observed in perceptions of racial climate at the secondary level of education. Perceptions of equal treatment and/or fairness may differ across race: white students may perceive their schools to be fairer than black students" (Bacon, Schwartz, & Rothfarb, 1991). High schools with a diverse climate or an atmosphere that promotes peer-to-peer collaboration among students, regardless of racial and ethnic background, have been found to promote racial development and togetherness (Pellebon, 2000; Mattison & Aber, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

The United States has a long history of attempting to use the courts and legal remedies to resolve social injustice. By the turn of the 20th century, the doctrine of separate vs. equal was the

law of the land. African Americans in the South were required to use racially separated schools, trains, streetcars, hotels, barbershops, and restaurants, and other public accommodations. The job market was also segregated, resulting in low-paying employment opportunities for African Americans (Tate, 1997).

In the 1980s, the Critical Race Theory was developed as an intellectual project and movement by black scholars who desired to examine relationships among law, race, racism, and social power in ways that other civil rights organizations could not or had not. Throughout American history, race has not been socially and legally designed to promote equity or equality among individuals; instead, it has been formulated to privilege the white and subordinate people of color. (Simson, 2014). Critical Race Theory supports the progress of scholars of color because their endeavor for racial equality challenges how Americans and the American legal system function and support racial equity as a whole (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Pellar, & Thomas, 1995; Gilborn, 2006). Critical Race Theory is woven into the United States' legal scholarship, where it developed in opposition to powerful perspectives, not only the conservative points of view, but also the profound tradition of level studies which dismantled liberalism and rarely addressed the role of severe racism in schools in the United States (West, 1995; Gilborn, 2006). In 1995, authors Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate, in the *Teachers College Record*, took initial steps towards taking a Critical Race Theory mindset and applying it to the field of education. Critical Race Theory does not offer insight that claims to explain racial situations and predict what will occur under a certain set of conditions; however, it is a set of beliefs about how significant the understanding of race and racism is in America and how the beliefs of individuals influence racial inequity in the United States. A vast majority of the studies in Critical Race Theory in education focus exclusively on schools in the United States (Gillborn, 2005).

The starting point for Critical Race Theory is a focus on racism and how important it is in society and education. Critical Race Theory begins with several insights, but one observable insight is that racism is normal in American society and education. Because racism is a common and ingrained feature of everyday life in American society, it appears to be natural to people in particular cultures. The laws that prohibit injustice and demand for blacks to be treated as equal to whites only increase the injustice for blacks in America. Critical Race Theory has virtually no control over the business-as-usual forms of racial inequity that black individuals are faced with on a daily basis (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). The term *racism* describes disrespectful acts of hatred and may apply to subtle acts of power that may cause detriment to one or more minority groups (Gillborn, 2005). Institutional racism is the failure of an organization to provide appropriate, professional, and equitable service to individuals of color, minority culture, or ethnic origin. Institutional racism can be identified in processes, attitudes, and behavior; and in return the racism causes institutional prejudice, individual ignorance and thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping of minority ethnic individuals (MacPherson, 1999). Critical Race Theory amounts to more than a perspective on institutional racism; it involves a critical perspective on the nature of the United States' politics and society (Cashmore & Jennings, 2001). This theory deciphers civil rights law—regardless of limitations—only to claim that laws to resolve racial inequity are often undermined prior to being completely enforced. (Tate, 1997).

Critical Race Theory's examination of liberalism derives from the apparent understanding of racism as broad and often hidden. There is outward frustration with the inability of the United States legal system to address anything except the most disrespectful, cruel, and intentional versions of racism (Gillborn, 2005). In addition to Critical Race Theory, the anti-racist movement has urged the need to favor and respect the viewpoints and experiences of various minority groups (Brandt, 1986). The term "anti-racism" is used in many educational

systems throughout the United States. Anti-racism established credibility by revealing the conservative approaches of common acts of racism, which drew the attention of liberals who realized the status quo frequently practiced routines that were not in the best interest of the black community (Gilborn 2005; Gilborn 2006). The approach of anti-racism challenges the common sense through which the public views how racism operates and by which it is legitimized (Gilborn, 2006). Critical Race Theory and anti-racism were amended in the 1980s, but another country, such as the United Kingdom, desired to establish standards of race relations in schools back in the 1970s. The Race Relations Amendment was established on 1976 (amended in 2000), and it placed a new duty on all British public schools and the Department of Education to have a written policy on race equity and equality; to assess the impact of their policies on ethnic minority pupils, staff, and parents; and to monitor levels of attainment of ethnic minority pupils in all schools. This act provided a unique opportunity for a concerted focus on raising the academic attainment of ethnic minority pupils and establishing practices and policies that supported equity for minority students; every British school has to practice and mainstream racial equity (Ashton, 2003). The amended legislation of this act placed new duties on more than 45,000 public authorities, including every state-funded school in England, Scotland, and Wales. The new duties include the following:

1. Establishing a clearly written policy on race equality to support equity
2. Monitoring their activities for signs of bias focusing on student discipline; and
3. Actively planning to abolish racial inequality.

The new duties are mandatory and require public authorities to be proactive in their pursuit of racial equality to support equity. The public education sector—and schools in particular—are struggling and lagging behind other public sectors in their attempt to meet the new requirements (Gillborn, 2005).

According to data gathered for the Commission of Racial Equality in London, 3,000 public authorities were asked to complete a survey, and only 20% of school leaders replied, compared to an overall response rate of 50% (Schneider-Ross, 2003). After a detailed review of surveys, the Commission of Racial Equality stated that several respondents in the education sector had not established any clear ideas, goals, or targets for racial advancement. Schools appear skeptical about the value of the work they have completed to support racial equity. In addition, school respondents provide negative responses when questioned about the outcomes surrounding the changes they have made. Sixty-five (65) percent of schools believe the work has produced positive benefits, compared with 68% of local government respondents, 74% of respondents in criminal justice and policing, and 80% in higher education. It is highly unlikely for school leaders to see a need for further guidance and recommendations on equity issues. Based on the lack of positive responses about the benefit surrounding the work schools have done to support racial equity, it appears schools are complacent about their duties and are uninterested in further progress (Schneider-Ross, 2003).

As in the United Kingdom, American school leaders place students into the racial categories such as black and white. Different racial criteria may be noticeable, depending on the particular context of the situation; but depending on the nature of many incidents leading to a disciplinary decision, certain criteria—in particular, dress, accent, demeanor, and who the student associates with on a daily basis—are highly influential in the racial assignment process of the decision maker (Simson, 2014). Through societal stereotypes and implicit biases, the disciplinarian evaluates the behavior of the student within an existing framework of social meanings associated with the student's racial category (Simson, 2014). Educational scholars of color agree that the histories, cultures, and languages of black students have been devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted from the formal educational environment (Delgado, 2002; Stovall,

2005). Critical Race Theory is not a natural, fixed, or biological concept, but instead it is a social and legal construction. Racism is endemic to American life; Critical Race Theory becomes integral to the complex, intricate, and discrete functions of racism in the school setting (Stovall, 2005). Critical Race Theory sought to provide five key points:

1. Acknowledge and discuss the extensive, daily reality of racism in American society which serves to disadvantage minorities—particularly blacks;
2. Expose and annihilate “color-blind” policies and practices that establish dissimilar treatment of minorities;
3. Authorize and advocate for the voices and narrative of minorities as sources of judgement of the dominant social order which purposefully devalues them;
4. Resist civil rights law and liberalism to address their inability to dismantle and expunge discriminatory sociopolitical relationships;
5. And amend challenges to race-neutral and multicultural movements in education which have made the behavior of white students the standard for all others (Stovall, 2005)

The goal of Critical Race Theory is to establish a call to action in addressing the difficult situation of racial inequity that black students face in education; the primary purpose is to identify the function of racism as an everyday aspect of educational institutions. Through various efforts, the work of Critical Race Theory aims to create alliances with well-established groups who have committed to meeting the needs of black students; this group may consist of community members, district personnel, students, or teaching staff. The most critical component to the establishment of Critical Race Theory as an authentic analysis of current educational structures is the recognition of racism as a system of oppression. Critical Race Theory is a challenge to traditional theory that calls for a “one-size-fits-all” approach to education and

discipline. Critical Race Theory calls for unconventional approaches in challenging leadership practices in public schools (Stovall, 2005). In addition to challenging the traditional theoretical approach, Critical Race Theory incorporates the concept of intersectionality. Intersections provide intuitiveness into the lives of the underprivileged who experience difficulties due to social hierarchies; this method is used to evaluate how the intersections with each hierarchy influence the dynamics of another (Crenshaw, Thomas, Peller, & Gotanda 1995; Stovall, 2005). For educators, the question is not if or how discrimination can be abolished while maintaining the vitality of other interests linked to traditional values and standards; but educators want to know how traditional interests and societal norms serve as vehicles to limit and bind the educational advancement of black students of color through equity (Tate, 1995; Stovall, 2005).

A Bias Approach and Racial Stereotypes

Loud, disruptive, confrontational, aggressive, and ghetto are adjectives that society uses to describe the behavior of black individuals. These adjectives, which were developed during slavery, serve to reproduce social hierarchies of race and gender. In the context of education and school discipline, race and gender stereotypes function as a method to segregate black students and to reinforce cultural beliefs about deficiencies in social skills in black culture and justify the need for social correction (George, 2015.) “Racial discipline disparities are a consequence of American History and of the biases and stereotypes created by that history.” Research by the United States Department of Justice and Education recently acknowledged school disciplinary practice disparities across the nation and challenged school leaders to uphold their obligations and responsibilities in the administration of school discipline to create equity in discipline for all students (George, 2015).

Racial and gender bias in student discipline refers to differential punishment for students who commit identical offenses but are of different races. While race and gender do not play an

active role in discipline conditions on a school referral, they are strongly related to the initial referral and the cross-school variation in discipline severity (Kinsler, 2011). In recent years, many schools and state departments of education have worked to redirect school discipline policies and practices in an effort to correct racial disparities and to reduce suspensions—which exclude students from their education (Blad, 2013). The school discipline policy manual or the student code of conduct is used to convey behavioral expectations. Parents, students, and teachers must be made aware of the expectations. “Mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and found in virtually every school in the United States, codes of conduct are the primary policy mechanisms through which behavioral infractions and their associated consequences are conveyed to the larger school community” (Fenning, Pulaski, Gomez, Morello, Maciel, Maroney, & Maltese 2012). According to the United States Department of Education, black American males without disabilities are more than three times as likely as their white peers without disabilities to be expelled or suspended. In addition, more than fifty percent of the students who were involved in school-related arrests or referred to law enforcement for incidents are black American (Boyce, Barnes, & Eckes, 2015). Unfortunately, race, gender, and the socioeconomic status may be a reflection of the education level of an individual in American society. Because of this biased reflection, there is a possibility of finding racial disparities in school discipline that may be associated with low-socioeconomic individuals; and this reflection places minorities of a low socioeconomic status at risk for suspension. Yet when the relationship of SES to disproportionality in discipline has been explored directly, race and male gender continue to make a significant contribution to disproportionate disciplinary outcomes independent of SES (Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, & Tobin, 2011).

Implicit bias reflects the attitudes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. It is important for educators to be aware of this bias because it can affect

everyday decisions that are made for the benefit of students. When educators operate and attempt to make unbiased decisions, implicit biases may be prevalent in the thought process, and they can challenge even the most well-rounded individuals, resulting in actions and outcomes that do not necessarily align with the implied intentions (Staats, 2016).

In 2011, Daniel Kahneman, author of *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, articulated a well-known framework for understanding human cognitive functioning by separating the mental processing of an individual into two parts: System 1 and System 2. System 1 is responsible for the cognition that occurs outside conscious awareness. System 2 is conscious processing. Individuals use System 2 for decisions and tasks that require deep concentration and well-thought-out decisions. System 2 is not part of the “knee-jerk” decision making process, but effortful deliberate concentration is necessary. (Staats, 2016). When individuals have implicit associations, they arise outside conscious awareness; many times, implicit biases do not always align with our intended beliefs and stated intentions. Individuals who strive to be professional and treat others fairly may unconsciously act in a manner that aligns with their implicit—rather than explicit biases. Even individuals who have great intentions may act in a manner which results in inequitable outcomes for various groups of students (Staats, 2016). Because implicit biases act as part of System 1, most individuals do not know certain implicit biases exist, yet they can have a tremendous impact on everyday decision making when it involves students and discipline. Identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, or age can activate implicit biases; these associations are critical of an individual’s System 1 processing, and everyone has implicit biases, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, and age (Staats, 2016).

Categorizing behavior as good or bad and then assigning a disciplinary consequence is not a one-size-fits-all matter. Several of the infractions for which students are disciplined are subjective. Therefore, the interpretation of the situation by the educator can play a major role in

how the situation is handled and whether disciplinary consequences are necessary. Infractions that are classified under the context of “disruptive behavior,” “disrespect,” or “excessive noise” are subjective, but they are often used as a main reason for disciplining students (Staats, 2016). There are no common methods used to assess infractions that are classified as disobedience or disruptive behavior; however, school leaders have attempted to establish basic characteristics of this behavior and outline the consequences of displaying those characteristics in the student code of conduct. When it comes to interpreting what is best for student discipline, many school leaders have different experiences; the experiences of the school leaders can shape their interpretation of an incident; and as a result, their experience and interpretation of a situation may contribute to disciplinary disparities based on the race and gender of the student (Staats, 2016). In 2015, a study conducted at Stanford University explored how racial disparities in discipline can happen even when black students and white students behave comparably the same. During the experiment, researchers provided a copy of disciplinary records of a student who had two minor infractions. The researchers asked the participating school leaders to imagine being the principal in charge of discipline at the school site. The researchers asked the participating school leaders a variety of questions to see how they would respond to the documented incidents. The names on the documents were changed; some leaders viewed documents with a stereotypical white name such as David or Chris, while other school leaders viewed documents with a stereotypical black name such as Donell or Jaquez. After viewing the documents, the school leaders seemed more likely to escalate disciplinary consequences from the first incident to the second incident when the student was perceived to be black based upon the name. In addition, a second part of the study suggested that infractions by a black student were more likely to be scrutinized as continuously disruptive behavior versus when two similar infractions were committed by a white student (Staats, 2016).

In education, implicit biases can cause a misrepresentation of the severity of the infraction, which can ultimately cause the student to lack understanding of what he or she actually did to warrant the implied disciplinary consequence. A school leader's unawareness of his or her implicit biases can result in one student receiving a warning for an infraction and another student being sent to school security or the discipline office for the same type of discipline infraction (Staats, 2016). Many school leaders may not automatically connect their reactions to disciplinary infractions to unfavorable perceptions of black males; however, trends in disproportionality of school discipline suggest that school leaders may implicitly react to stereotypical perceptions that black males require more control than white males and are not likely to positively respond to non-punitive measures (Staats, 2016).

Disparities in school discipline and academic achievement between black students and white students are well-known characteristics of public education in America. Educational leaders have placed effort into closing the academic achievement gap, but little effort has been placed on understanding how and why racism motivates imbalances within disciplinary consequences for minority males and how to resolve the situation of inequity with an ethical approach (Staats, 2016). In 2011, the Council for State Governments Justice Center and the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University publicly released a documented, detailed study that analyzed the relationship between school discipline, academic achievement, and the juvenile justice system among youths attending public school in Texas. Two key findings emerged: first, three percent of disciplinary decisions were due to mandates implemented by Texas state law. Many disciplinary incidents were managed after careful consideration of the incident by school leaders, and they reacted to incidents when they felt students had violated the school's code of conduct. And second, during the 2011-2012 school year, black males constituted approximately 12.8 percent of public school enrollment in Texas; however, 83

percent of black boys were cited as having at least one violation in the detailed document (Monroe, 2015). Two factors fuel the discipline gap: a teacher's disposition to write office referrals for black male students more often than white male students, and the tendency to bypass school psychologists and school social workers and shift the behavioral concern directly to the school administrators to handle instead of relying on skilled social and emotional practitioners (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Monroe, 2015).

Scholars have verbalized ways in which racial stereotypes, such as "acting white," trigger problematic perspectives about black males. It is important that educators elaborate on the topic of racial inequity. Researcher J. Aronson, author of "Stereotype threat: Contending and coping with unnerving expectations", states that "academic underperformance and inequity in discipline are informed by debilitating preconceived ideas about what people are like and how they are likely to behave" (Aronson, 2002; Monroe, 2015). A student's race and gender may determine whether his or her actions are considered silly or aggressive, a minor annoyance or a behavior in need of intervention. The bigger the gap between the background and the personality of the school leader and that of the student, the more likely the school leader will subconsciously view the student as representing a group, rather than as an individual. School leaders are often not aware of racial and gender differences in the students they view as causing trouble, but they subconsciously note those difference when making disciplinary decisions, which fuels inequity (Sparks, 2015).

Zero Tolerance Policy

The tough and swift "one-size-fits-all" zero-tolerance policy has resulted in an abundance of out-of-school suspensions in public schools. Zero-tolerance disciplinary practices disproportionately affect black male students (Dupper, 2010). These practices remove students from their educational environment and harm a significant number of students. There was time

when school leaders in charge of discipline listened, explored underlying issues, and decided on a disciplinary response that aligned with the nature of the offense and was in the best interest of the student. But in recent years, logical reasoning and professional judgment by school leaders have been replaced with disciplinary practices that criminalize student behavior with exclusion and create a school culture of fear and social control (Dupper, 2010).

According to The National Center for Education Statistics, 21.6 percent of all public secondary school students have been suspended at least once, and a total of 3.4 percent have been expelled (Vincent, Sprague, & Tobin, 2012). Exclusionary practices affect black male students more than any other race or gender. In 2007, black males accounted for 42.8% of the in-school and out-of-school suspensions, and white males accounted for only 15.6 % of in-school and out-of-school suspensions. Black male students are more likely to be suspended for subjective reasons such as non-compliance, disruptive behavior, and disrespect than students of other racial/ethnic backgrounds. Suspension and exclusion from school are often meant to act as a form of punishment for students in hopes of correcting the behavior that has been deemed inappropriate. School officials also use suspension to alert parents of inappropriate behavior and protect other students and school staff; however, unintended consequences may occur (Vincent, Sprague, & Tobin, 2012). According to the United States Department of Education, 44% of students who were excluded from school did not have the ability to access alternate educational opportunities. Referrals and exclusion from educational opportunities may deepen and intensify the academic achievement gap; and as a result, students lack trust in school personnel, and they may look for ways to occupy their time such as substance abuse and crime on the streets and in local neighborhoods (Vincent, Sprague, & Tobin, 2012). In 2005, researchers from the University of Oregon conducted a survey of 620 secondary school students, and the results indicated that disciplinary consequences that exclude students from school often produce

feelings of anger toward the educational leader, and that in-school or out-of-school suspension was unbeneficial in solving the problem that led to the suspension. Moreover, students who are removed from the educational environment are likely to drop out of school or become part of the juvenile justice system (Vincent, Sprague, & Tobin, 2012). There is no data that supports the claim that out-of-school suspensions and expulsions correct disruptive behavior or create a positive school climate. On the contrary, student removal from the educational setting has a negative effect on student social and emotional well-being and academic performance. There is a correlation between out-of-school suspension, low graduation rates, and high dropout rates, which lead to greater possible contact with the juvenile justice system. Often, school leaders use suspensions and expulsion as a method to remove students who are deemed troublemakers from the school environment—all in an effort to create a positive culture for those perceived as having a higher chance of social and academic success (Skiba, 2013).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, public schools began to use a stricter method for discipline (Insley, 2001). There was a public perception that violent behavior was increasing in public schools; and because of this perception, school districts adopted the zero-tolerance policy. The zero-tolerance policy usually calls for a disciplinary consequence—typically resulting in removal from the school environment—with little to no consideration surrounding the reason for the infractions or offense (Am. Psychol. Assessing Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Persuasive techniques used to introduce the effectiveness of the zero-tolerance policy generated public support for the use of the policy in public schools. U.S. citizens wanted a decrease in the amount of violent behavior that was assumed to often take place in public schools. In addition to the zero-tolerance policy, the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 was introduced in the U.S. Congress. The purpose of this law was to remove by expulsion for a minimum of one year any student who possessed a firearm (Gun Free Schools Act of 1994, 1994). As a result of this law, school

leaders broadened their use of the zero-tolerance policy in an effort to use the policy for particular behavioral infractions. The zero-tolerance policy was applied to students who participated in drug use or for those who were involved in physical altercations, caused disruptions, or verbally abused members of the school staff. For example, in Colorado, the zero-tolerance law states that a student may be suspended or expelled for blatant disobedience, defiance, or vandalism of school property (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2010).

When the zero-tolerance policy was implemented, school district officials noticed an increase of students who were suspended or expelled from school (Wald & Losen, 2003). As the number of suspensions and expulsions increased, controversy over the use of these disciplinary consequences began to rise. Students being suspended for frivolous reasons and the racial disparities in the suspension and expulsion data created contention between parents and school personnel (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). The United States has absorbed the doctrine of *in loco parentis*, which literally means “in place of parent,” from English common law. This law was established by the British, and it gives certain rights and responsibilities to children’s non-parental caregivers. Often, this law is cited as grounds for school leaders to have authority to discipline students; it is important for school leaders to have the authority to professionally exercise custodial rights by interceding in situations where students may be a danger to themselves or others (Underwood & Webb, 2005). However, civil rights leaders around the country have become concerned about the use of suspension and expulsion as a disciplinary consequence for black students—particularly males—as overuse of the zero-tolerance policy has created racial, gender, and ethnic disparities in school discipline (The Civil Rights Project, 2000; Solari & Balshaw, 2007).

Purpose of School Discipline

There are two main purposes of school discipline: to make sure the school is safe for all students and staff members and to create an environment where all students have equal opportunity to learn. In addition, school leaders may also use discipline as a method to reduce future student misbehavior and teach students the social skills so they may properly interact with others inside and outside of school (Gaustad, 1992). School leaders are obligated to create an environment where all students can learn and teachers can effectively deliver instruction. In order to create such an environment, school leaders must act with integrity when applying disciplinary consequences such as suspensions or expulsions. These consequences must be based solely on the infraction, the student's behavior, and whether the behavior jeopardized the safety and/or the learning environment of others in the school (Lane, 2004). However, there is inconsistency with the use of suspension and expulsion across public schools in the United States. School leaders are inconsistent with their definition of characteristics that properly define acceptable student behavior (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). When school leaders continually support disciplinary methods that exclude students from school, their disciplinary data may reflect an increase in suspensions and expulsions (The Civil Rights Project, 2000). There is a correlation between school suspensions and increased dropout rates at the secondary level; suspensions are associated with the *pushout* phenomenon (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986). Removing students who school leaders perceive to have negative effects on the climate and culture of the school does not always produce positive results. When disciplinary data show an increased number of suspensions or expulsions, the quality of instruction may suffer. The *pushout* phenomenon can result in low academic performance by students on local, state, and national standardized assessments (Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

Due Process Rights: *Goss v. Lopez*

In the 1975 U. S. Supreme Court case *Goss v. Lopez*, a principal suspended nine black male students due to their participation in an incident that was considered to be disruptive, which also defied acceptable school behavior as outlined by the code of conduct. After the incident, the principal decided to summon the students and their parents to a meeting to discuss the incident and the next steps to include discipline; however, no proper hearing was held. In Ohio, the law requires principals to notify parents within 24 hours of a disciplinary consequence that results in suspension. However, the law in Ohio does not allow parents to appeal the principal's decision of suspensions to the state Board of Education, and school officials failed to have document procedures readily available for student suspensions. The students decided to challenge the state law and file suit for violation of the Fourteenth Amendment, which states school officials must offer an official hearing before withholding the opportunity for a public education to students (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2010). After the district court decided the students' right to a hearing was violated, the United States Supreme Court agreed. Both courts concluded that the students' Fourteenth Amendment rights were violated. The U.S. Supreme Court stated that education is a property under state law, and students are entitled to that property. In addition, the property of individual education is protected by the Due Process Clause, and it cannot be withheld or taken away without school personnel adhering to procedures required by the clause. Procedural safeguards are also in place to protect students from wrongful disciplinary consequences. If school leaders do not follow the due process requirements, they become part of what is considered injustice and can cause harm to the student's education (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2010). After the *Goss v. Lopez* lawsuit, a standard of protocol was set for student suspensions. All students must be properly notified of the behavioral violation and consequences by verbal notification or notification in writing. However, if a student does not fully agree with the

depiction of the behavioral violation, principals must provide substantial evidence of the violation and allot the student the opportunity to provide rebuttal to the accusation (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2010).

Racial Disproportionality in School Discipline

A specific criticism and concern of the zero-tolerance policy is the disproportionate impact it has on black males. Individuals who do not support the policy provide two reasons for the lack of support:

1. The zero-tolerance policy does not provide a safe environment in conjunction with providing the best education for all students.
2. The zero-tolerance policy creates a school-to-prison pathway for black male students.

The zero-tolerance policy creates a path for black male students to funnel into the juvenile justice system (Insley, 2001). Research suggests that many students who are suspended or expelled from school have a low socioeconomic status and are minorities. Research also indicates that black male students are either suspended or expelled 250% more often than white male students. In recent research, 35 school districts were surveyed for a total population of 1,382,562 students. The survey referenced school suspensions; and out of 1,382,562 students, 46 percent were white, 44 percent were black, and 10 percent were classified as other. The percentage of black and white students was comparable, but 71.5 percent of students who received suspensions were black, with over 50 percent being black males. The study did not indicate the severity of the offenses or if there were multiple offenses; however, common offenses noted included engaging in physical altercations, using verbal abuse, using foreign objects as weapons, and being out of one's assigned area (Stone, 1993).

The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment protects students from discrimination based upon race, color, or national origin; and furthermore, this protection is

guaranteed by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Data analysis has identified rates of out-of-school suspensions to be significantly higher for black male students at the secondary level than for white male students at the secondary level (Raffaele-Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Overexposure to exclusionary practices places minority students at a higher risk for developing a gap in academic achievement and increases the chances students will drop out of school and become part of the juvenile justice system (Wald & Losen, 2003).

Race and socioeconomics are undoubtedly related in America. The racial disproportionality in school discipline may be a direct reflection of the disproportionality associated with socioeconomic status. Although socioeconomic status may be a risk factor for school suspension, black male students experience significantly higher suspension rates than white male students (Wald & Losen, 2003; Skiba, Homer, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011). Recent research studies revealed that black male students receive more severe disciplinary consequences for less serious infractions. Anne C. McFadden, primary author of “A Study of Race and Gender Bias in the Punishment of Handicapped School Children”, conducted research in a central Florida school district and reported that black males enrolled in the district often received out-of-school suspension as a punishment instead of a verbal warning or a detention, even if the infraction was not considered serious by school personnel. The results of this research are compatible with other research findings that conclude black students are referred for suspension for less serious behaviors than white students (McFadden, Marsh, Prince, & Hwang, 1992).

At times, the abundance of black students being suspended or excluded from the educational environment to create a high disparity rate in office referrals is initiated by the classroom teacher (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). A 2010 study that researched the disproportionality in school discipline surrounding black males found that white male students received office

referrals at a higher rate for objective offenses such as smoking, vandalism, inappropriate language, and skipping. However, black male students received discipline referrals for behaviors that were considered subjective, such as disobedience, disrespect, disruptive behavior, or excessive talking. Subjective behaviors require clearly defined expectations to be considered inappropriate. No concrete evidence exists that can support the notion that racial disparities in school discipline are a direct reflection of higher rates of disruptive behavior from black male students (Ferguson, 2000; Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2010).

Equal Protection Clause

One avenue for black male students who assert such claims of inequity in discipline and racial disproportionality is the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Equal Protection Clause protects equitable discipline for students because it affirms that no state in the United States can deny a residing student equal protection of the laws. This clause allows courts to investigate the motivation of school officials when assigning a disciplinary consequence by use of a rational basis test. This test assists courts in determining whether school personnel are motivated by honest educational considerations as a logical reason for assigning disciplinary consequences (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2010). The rational basis test generally acts in high regard to school administrators. Government officials operate under the notion that educators are experts in their field; and because of this, judicial systems are reluctant to get involved in the decisions made by school officials, as long as decisions are made with integrity. However, if school leaders use racial bias as a form of motivation, their decisions will be scrutinized by the courts; and in such cases, school leaders will need to provide ample documentation to justify applied disciplinary actions (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2010). If black male students are disciplined more than white male students and school officials make decisions based on the

infraction and not the student's race, then the racial disparity is not considered evidence of unconstitutional racial discrimination against black students (Pauken & Daniel, 2000).

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

When black male students declare inequity in disciplinary practices, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is an act that students may apply in school disciplinary cases involving racial discrimination. If any student is enrolled in a program that receives federal funding, Title VI protects them from racial and ethnic discrimination; therefore, students enrolled in public school are protected by Title VI. When students claim discrimination and file a Title VI, they must have evidence that shows schools leaders intentionally issued disciplinary consequences based on racial or ethnic bias which resulted in a discriminatory environment for minorities (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2010). Title VI and the Equal Protection Clause are similar laws that protect students from true, intentional discrimination. For both laws, students must provide documentation that supports their claim that any school leader intentionally acted in a discriminatory manner when issuing disciplinary consequences (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2010).

Educational Institutional Racism: *Hawkins v. Coleman*

In the case of *Hawkins v. Coleman* in a Texas federal district court, results of the case found that black students were suspended at a higher rate than white students in a Dallas, Texas, school district. The higher suspension rate for black students can be classified as institutional racism. In the *Hawkins v. Coleman* case, black students—particularly males—received more suspensions at a higher frequency when the school administrators were white. Due to the evidence presented in the *Hawkins v. Coleman* case, the school was required to create a program that highlighted the concern of disproportionality surrounding student discipline. The court agreed that the disciplinary practices used by school administration were discriminatory, but the judge did not want to interfere with the decisions of school personnel. Courts cannot change the

attitude and bias behavior of school leaders—as a professional, each individual educator has to decide to change on his or her own. In order for individuals to change, they must put forth real effort to portray a positive attitude to eliminate the negative, and ultimately, eliminate the effects of white institutional racism (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2010).

Equity in Disciplinary Practices amongst School Leaders

Educational leaders must emphasize varying degrees of enforcing school policy and procedure, and yet maintain consistency with each disciplinary situation (Tomal, 2001). Many school leaders have disciplinary practices that entail stages such as student conferences, parent conferences, and discipline referrals. Disruptive behaviors that are not immediately corrected can prohibit learning and spiral into a severe situation. Noncriminal behaviors such as talking back to teachers, shoving or pushing other students, or defying orders of school personnel can create a hostile environment. Disciplinary procedures must be in place that specifically address noncriminal types of behavior (Modzeleski, 1996). A zero-tolerance policy for noncriminal behaviors in some schools has given educational leaders the power to suspend students out of school for objective and subjective reasons. At a few schools, the widespread use of the school-based zero-tolerance policy, particularly for behaviors that do not physically endanger the students or the school, has serious implications for a student's short-term performance as well as his or her long-term social and economic well-being (Wallace, Goodkind, & Bachman, 2008).

While principals do have the authority to discipline students in an effort to maintain an orderly environment, it is imperative that rules of conduct be made clear to students, parents, and all stakeholders. There are five basic roles that school leaders can play when disciplining students:

1. Supporter: seeks harmony; helpful, indecisive, personal, unassertive
2. Negotiator: seeks resolution or win-win approach; objective, responsible, committed

3. Compromiser: inconsistent, wishy-washy, limits creativity; gives and takes
4. Abdicator: does nothing; avoid problems; ignores students; apathetic
5. Enforcer: self-righteous; intimidating, controlling, threatening, or dictatorial (Tomal, 2001)

Principals must implement practices that create equity in school discipline for everyone, keep students in school, and promote academic success. One practice principals may implement is procedural due process. Below are three major questions principals must ask to ensure disciplinary consequences fall in line with maintaining equity in disciplinary practices for all students:

1. Did the student receive written notification about the accused offense?
2. Were the parents of the student notified?
3. Has the student been in trouble prior to the current offense?

Failure to ask these important questions may cause the educational leader to conduct an inadequate evaluation of the situation; and an imprecise evaluation could lead to inequity in disciplinary practices, particularly for minority students (Manley-Casimir, 1978).

A second practice that secondary principals may implement to keep students in school and maintain equity in discipline for all ethnicities and genders is the establishment of a fairness committee. A fairness committee would allow students to consult with other students and/or teachers, if necessary. This committee would consist of a community stakeholder, a teacher, two students, and an administrator (Hantzopoulos, 2013). If a problem occurred, a grievance would be presented to the committee by a student or a teacher, and the committee would make a recommendation regarding student discipline. This process is important for maintaining a safe and orderly environment; failure to do so may cause low student morale school-wide (Hantzopoulos, 2013).

Principals may face challenges as they work to create equity in discipline for all students. Some of the challenges may include identifying suitable alternatives to suspension and pinpointing the exact needs of a behavior prevention and student self-awareness program. Principals must be convinced that they can make a positive and consequential impact. Setting and enforcing clear standards of behavior and academic performance and holding students accountable for their actions can promote safety, prevent disorder, and create equity in discipline that is advantageous for learning (Modzeleski, 1996).

School-To-Prison Pipeline

The school-to-prison pipeline is defined as a combination of corrective laws, policies, and practices that push young people—particularly black male students and students from a lower socioeconomic class—out of school to become part of the criminal justice system (Langberg & Fedders, 2013). Over the past three decades, crime rates involving youth have diminished; however, school districts around the United States continue to adopt ineffective and retaliatory approaches to correct student behavior. The zero-tolerance policy and associated disciplinary practices were established to prevent inappropriate behaviors and increase school safety. Despite the overall intention, the policy has actually increased the likelihood of students receiving suspensions and expulsions; therefore, it has not deterred behaviors that are deemed disruptive or inappropriate. Many times, school officials apply the zero-tolerance policy for minor misconduct such as disrespectful, defiant, or disruptive behavior—none of which are heinous acts that can be supported by the zero-tolerance policy. Although the zero-tolerance policy is considered race-neutral and unbiased, disciplinary practices surrounding the policy have disproportionately affected black male students more than any other race or gender (Thompson, J., 2016).

In secondary education, academic disengagement for black male students may result in truancy. Suspension often initiates a domino effect of further disciplinary consequences, which

can eventually lead to academic disengagement, academic failure, and dropping out. Research involving a group of ninth grade students in Florida showed that 73 percent of students who had been suspended from school failed an academic course, while only 36 percent of students who were not suspended failed an academic course. More than half of the students who were suspended and failed an academic course were minority males. As a result of the Florida study, minority male students are being pushed out of traditional schools and enrolling in alternative schools that are designed to educate students who were unsuccessful in traditional public school programs. In addition to research in Florida, an educational study in Missouri examined school discipline and the juvenile justice system for black and white students between the ages of ten and seventeen. The report indicated school suspensions that are racially biased are aligned with racial disparities in the number of juvenile court referrals received by school districts for the juvenile justice system (Thompson, J., 2016).

Restorative Justice and Positive Behavior Support

Restorative justice discipline is an alternative method of discipline, and it removes the automatic thought of using retribution or rehabilitation (Simson, 2014; Thompson, J., 2016). Retribution focuses on revenge or an eye-for-an-eye punitive reproach. Rehabilitation focuses solely on rehabilitating the offender (Garner, B.A., Black H.C, 2016; Thompson, J. 2016). Restorative justice focuses on finding a remedy for the one who is harmed as a result of the infraction and rehabilitating the offender. There are several areas of focus for restorative justice discipline:

1. Healing v. hurting;
2. Moral Learning;
3. Community participation and community caring;
4. Respectful dialogue;

5. Forgiveness;
6. Responsibility;
7. Apology;
8. And making amends.

Community service as a form of punishment is restorative justice. There is no negative outcome for community service, and it does not exclude students from rightful educational privileges or activities. By participating in community service, the student may develop self-confidence—which is contrary to the other disciplinary consequences. Restorative justice policies prevent excessive punishment; and as a result, a sense of community is restored (Thompson, J., 2016).

Positive behavior support is the application of behavior analysis to achieve socially important behavior change (Florida's Positive Behavior Support Project: A Multi-tiered Support System, 2005). Positive behavior support was created and is used as an intervention method for entire schools to help change student behavior. It is a behaviorally based intervention approach used to improve schools, families, and communities. The purpose of positive behavior support is to design an environment that supports research-validated practices and the educational environment that fosters teaching and learning. Positive behavior support has been proven to positively affect overall student behaviors for several reasons:

1. Interventions are based on the events of the infraction
2. Interventions address the cause of the behavioral problem
3. Interventions are justified by outcomes
4. The outcomes are usually positive for the offender and community

Positive behavior support is effective because administrators, faculty, and staff members work together as a team to make decisions. The team of individuals meets during a scheduled time to

discuss data as it relates to discipline and possible new interventions. This information is shared with the entire staff to get more buy-in to create a positive change within the climate and culture of the school (Sprague & Nelson, 2010; Thompson, J. 2016).

The positive behavior support system is an alternative to the zero-tolerance policy; this system challenges school leaders to use positive responses to misconduct just like restorative justice discipline. There is a three-tiered approach to Positive Behavior Support Systems: Tier-one consists of primary interventions that are established to address the needs of all students in school. Examples of tier-one interventions may include assigned seats, conferences with parents/guardians, and welcoming students to class as they enter the room. Tier two consists of secondary intervention, and this is where students receive targeted instruction. Examples of tier-two interventions may include building a positive teacher-student relationship that motivates positive behavior; establishing an attendance, behavioral, or grade contract; sending weekly progress reports; or rewarding exceptional student conduct. Tier three consists of tertiary prevention. Students who have severe behavioral issues will receive individualized support at tier three. Examples of tier-three interventions may include changing the student's schedule to meet his or her social and academic needs; allowing the student to participate in a peer/mentor program; providing cool-off time for the student; and allowing flexible seating for testing as a way to provide additional academic support. Rewards for positive behavior can be achieved through any tier of positive behavior support. Restorative justice and positive behavior support attempt to build relationships, create a positive environment with community support, and implement strategies to deescalate negative conflict when it arises (Sprague & Nelson, 2010; Thompson, J. 2016).

Florida's Disciplinary Policy Change

From January 2003 to December 2006, the Florida Legislature made it mandatory for school districts to implement the zero-tolerance policy for criminal behaviors like drug abuse and physical threats and crimes against students and school personnel. In an effort to eliminate an academic achievement gap, school districts had the option to transfer students to an alternative education setting (Florida Statute 1006.13, 2006). However, when the legislature implemented the statute, they did not specify how the zero-tolerance policy should be applied, and school administrators began to broadly apply the policy for minor infractions. As a result, school leaders disproportionately applied the zero-tolerance policy to black male students. In 2007, black male students accounted for 47 percent of referrals to the juvenile justice system. However, black males represent only 22 percent of students enrolled in public schools. In 2008, a study in 91% of Florida's counties by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice reported black males had more referrals to the juvenile justice system than any other race. Black males also received more severe consequences than white males who committed the same or similar offenses. In 2009, community organizations around Florida worked closely with Governor Charlie Crist and Florida's legislature to eliminate zero-tolerance policies for minor offenses. In 2009, the amendment added the following:

It is the intent of the Legislature to promote a safe and supportive learning environment in schools, to protect students and staff from conduct that poses a serious threat to school safety, and to encourage schools to use alternatives to expulsion or referral law enforcement agencies by addressing disruptive behavior through restitution, civil citation, teen court, neighborhood restorative justice, or similar programs. The Legislature finds that zero-tolerance policies are not intended to be rigorously applied to petty acts of misconduct and misdemeanors, including but not limited to minor fights or disturbances.

The Legislature finds that zero-tolerance policies must apply equally to all students regardless of their economic status, gender, race, or disability (Thompson, J. 2016). Due to school-related arrests being disproportionately applied to black male students, there is a higher chance of their being pushed into the criminal justice system than white students (Thompson, J. 2016).

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher identified and provided thorough researched documentation to support the claim that black male students are disciplined disproportionately in public schools. The researcher also supported the claim that some black males may have a stigma that negatively affects them in the community and in schools across America. The researcher used scholarly journals and documents from educational leaders and educational institutions to contribute to this body of work of qualitative research. In the next chapter, the researcher will present the methodology that will be used in the study to explore leadership and disciplinary practices used by secondary school leaders to support equity for black male students.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Severe school punishment, such as suspension, places students on a path toward social exclusion, educational failure, and potentially economic depression (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011). “Leaving school prematurely compromises a student’s ability to participate fully as a citizen . . . As a group, school dropouts not only cost society a loss in future productivity, but they are also disproportionately responsible for costs in crime and vandalism, and ultimately in social and economic dependency” (Taylor & Foster, 1986).

Research shows that black males are largely represented in disciplinary referrals; however, black males are referred for misbehavior that is less serious and more subjective than white males, but the rate of referrals for black males does not coincide with a high rate of misbehavior (Fowler, 2011). Suspension is viewed as a method to separate a student who displays violent and disruptive behaviors from the rest of the student body. This separation may be short term or long term—depending on how long it takes for the student to correct the behavior. Actions that are classified as disruptive behavior are more ambiguous (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). “Black males who are classified as special education students are 3.5 times more likely to be sent to in-school suspension; almost six times more likely to receive out-of-school suspension; four times more likely to be sent to disciplinary alternative school; and three times more likely to be expelled than white male students overall” (Fowler, 2011; Caton, 2012).

Suspensions, expulsions, detentions, demerits, and other disciplinary actions taken by the public school may eventually cause a student to drop out of school. Because suspension creates a loss of instructional time for students and because it forces those who have problems in school to leave school—rather than resolve their problems within the school environment---suspending students out of school can hinder their opportunities to develop socially and become productive

citizens. When suspensions are applied unevenly to a racial, ethnic, or gender specific group of students, that group's collective likelihood for success is threatened (Taylor & Foster, 1986). Suspension is not the best method of discipline for black male students, nor does it correct the behavior problem. Suspension eliminates educational opportunity for black males, and it provides them with the opportunity to become part of the worst place they could be—the streets. Any policy or practice that excludes black males from their education—even temporarily—is equivalent to a prison sentence. The vast majority of black males who are in prison—state or federal—have not earned a high school diploma. (Taylor & Foster, 1986).

Often, the school leader's solution to a problem is to remove the student from the educational environment. The practice of school suspensions may be part of the larger failure of the educational institution and the school's administrative team (Taylor & Foster, 1986).

Qualitative Research Theory

To gain a deeper understanding of leadership and disciplinary practices used by secondary school leaders that result in equity for black male students, the researcher will use an instrumental collective case study qualitative research method. This method is an approach in which the researcher explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving sources of information such as observations, interviews, audiovisual materials, and documents and reports (Creswell, 2013; de Souza, Hyde, & Kehoe, 2014). Drawing from critical social theory, the researcher will investigate how school leadership and the social and political aspects of a disciplinary incident shape the reality of all parties involved. Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and particular interactions (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research is an activity that engrosses the observer in the world of research; it allows the observer to use materials and practices that make the area of research clear and visible to others. Through

observation, the researcher views a world depicted through field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos—all in an effort to bring the observed world alive for the reader (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Creswell, 2013).

In qualitative research, researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry. Data is collected in a natural, real-life setting and undergoes inductive and deductive analysis; themes are established that represent the data; and a final written report is created that includes excerpts from participants in interviews. Finally, a complex description and interpretation of the problem and its contribution to the field of research is specified in the study, or it may include a call for change to be addressed in further research. Qualitative research is used because a problem or issue needs to be explored (Creswell, 2013). In this research design, the researcher will use qualitative research because he wants to empower individual school leaders to share their stories of leadership and disciplinary practices that support equity for black male students.

In a qualitative study, the researcher is in charge of data collection and analysis. The goal of qualitative research is to gain a deeper understanding of the subject; therefore, the researcher has the advantage of expanding his understanding of the subject through nonverbal and verbal communication, processing data, clarifying and summarizing material, checking with respondents for accuracy of interpretation, and exploring unusual or unanticipated responses (Merriam, 2002).

Qualitative research is richly descriptive. Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a case study. Through a case study, there will be descriptions of the context and setting, a description of the participants, and a description of the activities. In addition, the findings of the study will be supported with documents, field notes, participant interviews, electronic communication, or a combination of all. Quotes and excerpts contribute to the descriptive nature of qualitative research (Merriam, 2002). The case

study is an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community. By concentrating upon an entity (the case), this approach seeks to describe the phenomenon or unit in depth (Merriam, 2002). The case study approach is familiar to several fields of study, such as psychology, medicine, political science, law, and education (Creswell, 2013).

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose and significance of this study is to explore leadership and disciplinary practices used by secondary school leaders. This study is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the leadership role of the principal and disciplinary practices used at their school to support equity for black male students. “According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Civil Rights Data Collection, over 3.25 million students, approximately seven percent of all students enrolled in K-12, are estimated to have been suspended at least once” (Losen, 2013). On average, for each day public schools are in session in America, approximately 18,000 public school students are suspended (in-school or out-of-school) for a least one day. Based on the Office of Civil Rights data from every state, 28 percent of black males at the secondary level were suspended in recent years, compared to just ten percent of white males. When black male students believe school leaders have high expectations of them, their probability of out-of-school suspension is decreased by 26 percent, and their probability of in-school suspension is decreased by 28 percent (Hinojosa, 2008). The OCR reports that 95 percent of suspensions fall into two categories: disruptive behavior and “other” (Losen, Martinez, & University of California, 2013). According to Russell Skiba and Mark Rausch, authors of *Race Is Not Neutral: A National Investigation of African American and Latino Disproportionality in School Discipline*, Indiana University, three educator goals appear to account for the common use of suspension or expulsion for nonviolent or repeated school code violations of black males:

1. Improve the student's behavior and get the parents' attention so they can become actively involved in their child's education;
2. Deter other students from behaving inappropriately; and
3. Ensure that the school environment is safe and conducive to teaching and learning (Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Losen, 2013)

The word *disruption* as it is used in school policies about suspension assumes that there is fixed meaning for the term that is widely shared by school leaders. However, “disruptions appear to be highly contextualized social interactions whose interpretation depends on the socio-cultural context in which potentially disruptive events occur” (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Certainly suspending disruptive students might improve teaching conditions by relieving some of the burden and stress for school leaders that is associated with disruptive students, but understanding cultural, racial, and gender differences and increasing the engagement in and outside of the classroom may cause a decrease in disruptive behaviors of black male students (Losen, Martinez, & University of California, 2013). By learning more about how secondary school leaders apply disciplinary practices at their school, the researcher will gather more information to address the problem affecting black males in secondary education.

Research Design

The design of this qualitative study is an instrumental collective case study research design. A case study involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). A case study design in educational leadership is beneficial because the researcher has reviewed the related literature about the topic, and he can confidently say that a problem or issue exists that needs to be examined (Creswell, 2013). The researcher will conduct a collective instrumental case study in which the researcher focuses on an issue or concern, and then selects three cases to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). The

purpose of the instrumental collective case study is to learn more about the leadership and disciplinary practices that educational leaders use to support equity for black male students. This is information that only an instrumental case study can provide. The researcher will ask open-ended research questions and refrain from assuming the role of the expert researcher. The questions will change and become more refined during the process of the research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem (Creswell, 2013).

Table 2.

Characteristics of a Qualitative Research Case Study.

The table below describes the characteristics of qualitative research in the left column, and it provides a description of each characteristic in the right column.

Characteristics	Case Study Description
Focus	The researcher will develop a detailed description and analysis of a case study
Type of Problem Best Suited for Design	The researcher will articulate an in-depth understanding of a case study
Discipline Background	This research draws from psychology, law, political science, medicine, or education
Unit of Analysis	The researcher will study and observe a program or individual
Data Collection Forms	Multiple sources will be used: interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts
Data Analysis Strategies	The researcher will analyze the data and develop themes of the case as well as cross-case themes, if applicable
Written Report	This study will provide a detailed analysis of one or more cases with a conclusion and recommendations

Participant Selection

The researcher will conduct case studies at three high schools that were purposefully recommended by the Assistant Director of Educational Access, Opportunity, and Alternatives. Data from August to December of 2016 were disaggregated from all 27 high schools in the district, and Genesis High School, Malachi High School, and Titus High School are three high schools with disciplinary incidents affecting black males that are proportionate to the percentage of black males enrolled on campus. Genesis High School has a total population of 2,477

students. Eight percent of the student population are black males, totaling 222 black male students enrolled on campus. There are 419 recorded disciplinary incidents, with 9 percent representing black male students, totaling 41 incidents. Genesis High School best represented all other suburban schools with a low minority discipline rate and a low minority percentage of enrollment. Malachi High School, an urban high school, has a total population of 1,721 students. 15 percent of the student population are black males, totaling 254 black male students enrolled on campus. There are 437 recorded disciplinary incidents, with 11 percent representing black male students, totaling 46 incidents. After an examination of data across the district, Malachi High School was the top school with proportionate discipline compared to other schools with 15 to 20 percent of the student population consisting of black males. Titus High School, another urban school in the district, has a total population of 2,033 students. Twenty-five (25) percent of the student population are black males, totaling 505 black male students enrolled on campus. There are 1,031 recorded disciplinary incidents, with eight percent representing black male students, totaling 81 incidents. Titus High School was number one in the district for having a high enrollment of black male students and the lowest number of disciplinary incidents representing black male students.

There were other high schools in the district with a minority rate of 10 to 20 percent and 25 to 35 percent, but the data for those schools were not proportionate with the racial ethnicity of the school. After a careful review of data, it was determined that Genesis High School, Malachi High School, and Titus High School were the best schools for three case studies. The intent of all case studies is to examine various leadership and disciplinary practices that school leaders use to support equity for black male students on the school's campus.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following four research questions:

1. What factors, as perceived by school leaders, play a role in equitable school disciplinary practices for black male students?
2. What data sources do school leaders utilize that may influence disciplinary practices towards black male students?
3. What discretionary practices do school leaders use or take into consideration to support equity when handling a discipline incident that directly involves black male students?
4. How do school leaders develop and train staff to reflect shared values to support equity for black male students?

Interviews

Secondary school leaders will be interviewed twice for approximately one hour per interview. A semi-structured format will be used during the interview, and the researcher will ask clarifying and probing questions as needed. These are the research questions for each interview:

1. What factors, as perceived by school leaders, play a role in equitable school disciplinary practices for black male students?
 - A. What is the causal relationship between a student's socio-economic background and disciplinary behavior?
 - B. What are the early warning signs that you use as a school leader that are student indicators of increased disciplinary and emotional issues that decrease academic achievement?
 - C. What proactive positive behavior systems do you utilize to decrease disciplinary incidents and decrease the achievement gap?
2. What data sources do school leaders utilize that may influence disciplinary practices towards black male students?

- A. How do past academic performance data impact the success potential of black male students?
 - B. What is the correlation of parent involvement with student success for black males?
 - C. How do data of early warning signs such as attendance, discipline, and socio-economic background correlate with academic achievement for black males?
3. What discretionary practices do school leaders use or take into consideration to ensure equity when handling a disciplinary incident that directly involves black male students?
- A. What proactive systems do you, as a school leader, integrate procedurally to include restorative practices that are meeting the needs of black males?
 - B. What types of school-wide initiatives to improve teacher-student relationships with diverse students do you implement to increase the achievement of black male students?
 - C. What mentorship based programs do school leaders implement into the school culture to create a safe environment that encourages black male students to embrace a growth mindset and strive for excellence?
4. How do school leaders develop and train staff to reflect shared values to support equity for black male students?
- A. What activities can inspire teachers to develop and embrace a clear understanding of the academic barriers for students of diversity?
 - B. How can school leaders create opportunities to develop teacher leaders' capacity to improve student engagement and achievement of black male students?
 - C. How can school leaders integrate job embedded professional development that continuously provides teacher support that best meets the needs of black male students?

Each interview will be audiotaped and transcribed professionally by CastingWords online transcription company. The researcher will do his best to ensure confidentiality, and the interview protocol is not centered on sensitive information. Subjects may choose to reveal sensitive information or personal information during the interview. In addition, no inducements will be offered to participants. This study will not bring subjects any personal benefits; however, this study will allow participants to reflect on leadership and disciplinary practices and share their views and opinions.

This study is limited to secondary school leaders from one suburban high school and two urban high schools in central Florida concerning leadership and disciplinary practices used to support equity for black male students. Analysis of data obtained is concluded only by the participants in this study. This study is dependent on the school leader's awareness of leadership and disciplinary practices being implemented within the school setting on a consistent basis. The study is based upon answers given by secondary school leaders to open-ended questions through oral responses; it is assumed that the participants are thoughtful, forthright, and honest in providing accurate answers to questions they are asked during the study; this assumption will be checked with participant observations, direct interviews, documents, and physical artifacts collected during the study.

Data Analysis

The data collection of each case study will draw from multiple sources, such as documents, observations, direct interviews, participant observations, and physical artifacts. The researcher will provide a detailed description of the case such as the history of the case and the day-to-day rendering of the activities of the case (Creswell, 2012). During the interview process, each interview will be audiotaped. Once the audiotaped interviews are completed, the researcher will organize the files from each case study and convert the recordings to text with the use of a

computer generated word document program. After the data from each case have been organized, the researcher will read the transcripts to understand details of each case study—which may consist of note taking and memos on each case study transcription or artifact collected; these notes will be short phrases, ideas, or key concepts that occur to the researcher (Creswell, 2012). The researcher will code the data from each case study into several categories. The researcher will conduct a within-case analysis and identify themes for the purpose of interpreting each case study from a holistic approach and understanding the complexity of each case. The researcher will conduct a cross-case analysis cycle (See Figure 1), which will holistically identify themes that extend across all three case studies. At the conclusion of the case studies, the researcher will use all holistic themes identified to formulate one interpretation of all three case studies (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2012).

Beginning with Data Collection, this figure illustrates the qualitative research cycle that the researcher will follow during each instrumental case study.

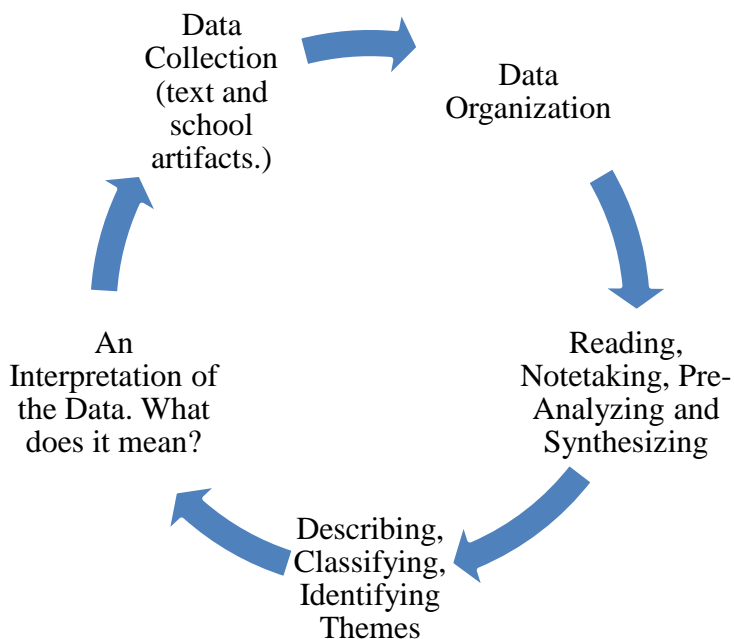


Figure1.

Data Analysis Cycle.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher described the qualitative research theory, the purpose of the study, the research design, the participant selection, the research questions, the initial interview format, and the steps for data analysis. This study is intended to contribute to the body of research pertaining to the leadership and disciplinary practices as they relate to equity for black male students. In the next chapter, the researcher will present the data from three data sets: interviews, researcher reflective journal, and relevant documents and artifacts of each case study.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Case Study Data

Introduction

The purpose and significance of this study is to explore leadership and disciplinary practices used by secondary school principals. This study is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of school leadership practices and to explore disciplinary practices used to support equity for black male students. During this study, the researcher examined the leadership and the disciplinary practices used at three central Florida high schools. Through interviews and observations, the researcher analyzed leadership and disciplinary practices that principals implemented to support equity for black male students. Specifically, this study did the following:

1. Explored the factors that play a role in equitable disciplinary practices for black male students;
2. Explored the discretionary practices used to support equity when handling disciplinary incidents that involve black male students;
3. Explored the data sources used by school leaders that may influence disciplinary practices for black male students; and,
4. Explored the professional development and training for school staff in learning how to support equity for black male students.

For this study, the researcher used a qualitative research instrumental collective case study design. A case study involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). A case study design in educational leadership is beneficial because the researcher reviewed the related literature about the topic and can confidently claim that a controversial topic exists that needs to be explored (Creswell, 2013). Three comprehensive case studies were conducted for a thorough look into the leadership and disciplinary practices that principals used to support equity for black male students; this was

information that only an instrumental case study could provide. The researcher asked open-ended research questions and refrained from assuming the role of the expert researcher.

In order to collect data, the researcher contacted the principal at three chosen school sites to obtain permission to conduct interviews and observations. Once the researcher explained the purpose of the project, each principal was emailed a copy of the research protocol, participant consent form, and an approval letter from the respected school district. As the researcher began to interview school principals, they recommended assistant principals at their school site who had experience with discipline and could add value to the study. Principals and school sites were selected based upon school disciplinary data results that showed discipline that was proportionate with the percentage of black male students enrolled at the school. Specific data that were used to select school sites and principals included these categories:

1. The total student population
2. The total population of black students
3. The total population of black male students
4. The total number of disciplinary incidents, and
5. The total number of incidents that affected black males

In this chapter, the researcher presented related findings and themes that emerged from three case studies of high schools in central Florida. Interviews took place on two different occasions with principals, as well as observations and question-and-answer sessions with an assistant principal at each school.

Case Study A: Genesis High School

Genesis High School, comprised of students in grades 9-12, is located in the suburb of Genesis, Florida. The population of Genesis, Florida is 71,020 individuals. Genesis High School opened in August of 1998, and the current student population is 2,477. There are 141 instructional staff members at Genesis High School.

In the state of Florida, every high school earns a grade based on the academic performance of the student population. The current school grade for Genesis High School is a B. Student proficiency is based upon all students performing at a level 3 or higher, out of a 5 point numerical scale, on state standardized assessments. At Genesis High School, 46 percent of the student population is proficient in mathematics, 71 percent is proficient in science, 81 percent is proficient in social studies, and 45 percent is proficient in reading.

The demographic breakdown of Genesis High School is as follows: 41 percent of the student population is White; 30 percent of the student population is Hispanic; 19 percent of the student population is Black; 4 percent of the student population is Multiracial, and 1 percent of the student population is Asian. The gender breakdown of Genesis High School is 51 percent male and 49 percent female. Currently, there are 222 black male students enrolled at Genesis High School, which is eight percent of the entire student population. There are 419 recorded disciplinary incidents, with nine percent representing black male students, totaling 41 incidents.

Participants

Ms. Naomi, the principal of Genesis High School has been a principal at the school for three years. Prior to becoming a high school principal, she was a middle school principal and high school assistant principal. Mr. Peter is the assistant principal at Genesis High School, and he has been an assistant principal for two years. Before being appointed as the assistant at Genesis High School, he was a language arts teacher for eight years.

Factors and Discretionary Practices that Play a Role in Equitable School Discipline

The principal and assistant principal explained the factors and discretionary practices that play a role in equitable school discipline for students at Genesis High School. The researcher listened attentively to understand which factors and discretionary practices school leaders used to support equity not only for black male students but for all students, too. Socioeconomics, student support systems, relationships, and parental involvement are vital to the successful implementation of equitable disciplinary practices at Genesis High School.

Socioeconomics

Based upon the free and reduced price lunch data, half of the students at Genesis High School come from families who would be considered “working poor.” By definition from the principal, “working poor” may be defined as parents who have a job and a student in school who qualifies for free or reduced price lunch, and they struggle to meet all the needs of their children. The majority of the working poor at Genesis High School are black families and Hispanic families. Through the principal’s experience of dealing with school-wide discipline, it is believed that the socioeconomic background of the family may measure the importance of education for the student. The principal referenced the following to support that claim: “If a family is in a lower socioeconomic category, school may not always be a priority for the student” (Naomi, personal communication, January 2017).

If a student comes from a family with a strong socioeconomic background, the frustration level of the student may be lower. With the assistant principal, the researcher reviewed state standardized testing artifacts that relate to the proficiency level of students in reading and math. Out of 411 students who scored a level 1 or 2 on a 5 point scale in reading, 208 were classified as eligible for free or reduced price lunch. The standardized test data supported the claim that students who struggle financially may need additional academic and social support. Principal

Naomi compared the frustration level of affluent students with those who are classified as low-socioeconomic students:

I think sometimes students who need additional support become easily frustrated, which in turn causes inappropriate behaviors and discipline problems. Many times, affluent students have more support—whether it is tutoring at home or parents who are highly educated; and because of the level of support at home, affluent students have less frustration and less behavior problems at school (Naomi, personal communication, January 2017).

The principal uses discretionary measures, such as whether or not the student is homeless or living with a family member, as a factor when applying discipline. The overall desire for the principal is to promote education, to eliminate frustration, and to support students academically and socially.

Student Support Systems

Positive Behavior Support Systems are implemented through the Response to Intervention process that categorizes student behavior into three tiers—with tier one being school-wide support to tier three being individualized support. Genesis High School has two organizations that directly impact the behavior of students: The Freshmen Success Team and The Gentlemen's Club. The Freshmen Success Team is a mentoring program that involves freshmen and some upperclassmen. Upperclassmen have the opportunity to visit low-level freshmen classes and have deep discussions about making good choices academically and behaviorally in school. While the researcher was visiting a ninth grade biology class, two upperclassmen students were mentoring a freshman class about calculating grade point averages, joining clubs and organizations on campus, and having a positive friendships with other students on campus.

Assistant Principal Peter gave a brief overview of how upperclassmen were chosen to partake in the role of mentorship:

Some of the upperclassmen are the kids that wish they had done well in ninth grade, and some are strong students. The upperclassmen use PowerPoint presentations to provide information to freshmen students. I do not choose upperclassmen who are only taking advanced placement courses, because not every student can relate. I chose from a variety of students on campus on various levels. I also choose students of different ethnicities and gender. When students talk to other students, they listen—far better than me as an adult talking to them (Peter, personal communication, January/February 2017).

The principal and assistant principal have created a system for all students to be involved in mentorship, which supports the development and growth of a school-wide positive behavior support system. When students mentor each other, it creates buy-in from the mentor and the mentee. The mentor has the responsibility of holding the mentee accountable; in addition, the mentee has an upperclassman with whom to discuss problems that may arise during the school day and create a solution that maintains a track record of positive behavior.

When the researcher asked if there were any specific organizations that targeted minority male students, the principal informed the researcher about the purpose of The Gentlemen's Club. This club is a support system established by the assistant principal that teaches males—specifically black males—how to dress, communicate, and behave as gentlemen on campus. With 222 black males on campus, the assistant principal wanted to establish a club that culturally represented black males. Black male students are represented by participating in Black History Month presentations and step-shows during pep rallies and lunch. One major function of the club is to give male students an opportunity to mentor middle school black male students. The

Principal Naomi believes in the purpose and benefit of the club for black male students, and she supports it by stating:

Last year, we had a high failure rate in core classes for ninth graders, and we had behavior issues. It was too high, and it made me uncomfortable. I hired an assistant principal from a middle school to be the ninth grade administrator at my school, and he immediately set up this program to mentor and help incoming ninth graders (Naomi, personal communication, January 2017).

Although Genesis High School did not have many black male students, several of the black male freshmen were being sent out of class for making poor decisions, and they were constantly having conflicts with other students.

Relationships

The relationships that black males have with teachers and administrators is paramount to the student's success and the overall success of Genesis High School. Last school year, the principal noticed an increase in the number of referrals that black males received during the school day. Principal Naomi did not have to review the data for this information because at the end of each day, the administrative staff informed her about the number of disciplinary incidents and which students were involved in the incidents. When teachers build relationships with students, they have the opportunity to remove themselves from the situation and look at the situation through the lens of the student. The principal is extra cautious as she tries to look through the lens of her black male students, and she states:

I have to be aware that black males are perceived differently and realize the lens I am looking through is not the same lens as a black male student. I have to realize black males have had a different life experience than I have had and always be aware that my lens is

different, especially being a white female (Naomi, personal communication, January 2017).

As the researcher roamed campus and observed teacher-student relationships with black males, it was evident that the principal and assistant principal had an expectation for teachers to build positive relationships with students. During class changes, the researcher stood in the courtyard and observed the teachers' interactions with students as they entered class. As the researcher walked closer to the entrance of an Intensive Reading class, he witnessed the teacher stating greeting students in various ways: "Welcome to class, [black male student]. Hey, [black male student]. How is your day going so far? [Black male student], get ready to read aloud in class today...we have to get ready for the Florida Standards Assessment." There was a genuine concern by the teacher for the well-being of the students. It was evident by the students' reaction to their teacher's greeting that this was an everyday occurrence.

Based upon how the teachers interacted with the students, it was apparent to the researcher that the teachers were aware of the perception of black male students and that they attempted to counteract that perception by holding personal conversations with students. Because more than half the school year was over and the principal realized many relationships had been established, she constantly encouraged her staff to maintain a high level of momentum for academics and diffuse inappropriate behavior that may occur in the classroom. The principal always supports new and improved ideas to capture the attention of students and foster positive relationships. During a brief meeting with a few faculty members, the principal began the meeting by stating: "Hey, listen! You've already established your relationship with your kids. You can think outside of the box; it might crash and burn some days, but that is okay."

Trying new strategies in the classroom and being supportive of student learning and their social and emotional needs is what makes cultivating positive relationships with students a necessary mechanism for equitable discipline.

Parental Involvement

Principal Naomi's motto is "A partnership with parents will increase the likelihood of success for black male students." With 9.2 percent of the student population at Genesis High School being black males, it is not difficult for the principal to identify which black males come from a traditional family structure and the level of involvement of the parents.

According to her, "Many of our black male students have a non-traditional family—being raised by grandparents or a single parent" (Naomi, personal communication, January 2017).

Trying to get grandparents or a single parent involved in the student's education can be a challenge for the administrative team at Genesis High School. Assistant Principal Peter informed the researcher why parent involvement is such a challenge: "I try to build relationships with single parents and grandparents because I find that they are tired. As a school, we want to guide the students while they are here seven hours of the day" (Peter, personal communication, January/February 2017).

Because there is a lack of parental involvement for black male students, teachers and administrators communicate with black males in a nurturing and supportive manner.

"I want my momma rights when I am here," exclaimed an administrator as she spoke to a grandmother about a student's lack of enthusiasm when going to class. Sometimes when there is a lack of parent involvement, administrators act as parents for the well-being of the student.

Data Sources that May Influence Disciplinary Practices

From classroom observations and district discipline data to individual school and student data, Genesis High School has many data sources they may use to make decisions that are

equitable and in the best interest of the student. As the researcher interviewed school administrators and analyzed data, it was determined that student observations and student academic performance and history were necessary data sources that influenced disciplinary practices for school leaders.

Student Observations

Principal Naomi spends much time in the hallways observing the interactions of her students and teachers, and it is easy for her to see if students respond inappropriately to teachers on campus. The general observation of a student provides Principal Naomi with data that she can use when determining how to proceed with a disciplinary consequence in any situation. Documenting minor incidents allows the principal and assistant principal the flexibility of keeping track of student behavior and taking corrective action by having an animated conversation and without writing a referral. The principal supports the method of collecting student behavioral information by general observations, and she states, “If I see students behaving inappropriately, I immediately reprimand and have stern conversations with the offenders” (Naomi, personal communication, January 2017).

While the principal may make a mental note of student misbehavior, the assistant principal uses pen and paper to capture minor incidents, and this has worked out successfully for the administrative team. Assistant Principal Peter explained how he documents and addresses inappropriate behavior: “If I notice a student involved in mischief, I document his poor actions and speak with the student when the time is convenient; many times, I speak to students at lunch” (Peter, personal communication, January/February 2017).

The administrative staff demonstrated how general observations play an active role in solving situations and how it is a useful method for documenting incidents for future reference, if necessary.

Student Academic Performance and History

The academic success of all students is the priority for the staff at Genesis High School. As the researcher observed the assistant principal engage in conversations with a student, it was apparent that student performance was a considerable factor in student disciplinary consequences. Assistant Principal Peter explained: “I review the same data for all students, to be honest with you; and I always look at grades” (Peter, personal communication, January/February 2017). The academic performance, the enrollment history, and the class schedule are points of discussion and review when students are disciplined. How many times a student has moved and the number of schools a student has attended may also determine how a student behaves in school. This is necessary data for the principal and assistant principal to understand. The principal wants a global scope of who the student is and what type of work habit the student has in and outside of the classroom.

According to Principal Naomi, an overview of the class schedule and the behavior of the student can shed light to why incidents occur with a student in a particular class. “Looking at the class schedule and teachers will give me an indication about management style from the teacher that the student is dealing with on a daily basis” (Naomi, personal communication, January 2017).

The principal and the assistant principal understand the management styles of their teachers. Some students perform and behave better with teachers who are perceived as having a relaxed, care-free classroom management style, while other students perform better with teachers who are more strict. As the assistant principal reviews each student’s background, a lengthy discipline history will alert school administration of a potential problem. Assistant Principal Peter supported this claim: “The past behavior of a student will tell me if he has had any issues in

a particular class or with a particular teacher” (Peter, personal communication, January/February 2017).

The principal reviews discipline ethnicity data at administrative staff meetings each week. She is not alerted by the number of disciplinary incidents with any particular gender or race because the assistant principals use various sources of information to determine the type of consequence a student needs. Principal Naomi states, “Our discipline is usually aligned and proportionate with our ethnicity percentage” (Naomi, personal communication, January 2017). The principal sustains a level of trust with teachers and students by reviewing overall data and having data driven conversations.

Professional Development and Training for School Staff on Equity Support

Professional development is paramount to successfully implementing equitable practices in the classroom. Teachers must understand how equity is represented from the lens of black male students. It is the responsibility of the school leaders to provide professional development opportunities for equity. Genesis High School provided professional development informally. Direct training on how to properly engage students in the lesson is the most important professional development provided by school leaders. School leaders also provide teachers with immediate informal feedback on how to deescalate situations and monitor student behavior in the classroom to support equitable disciplinary practices.

Student Engagement

Professional development and training for school staff is a key piece for equity support. According to the professional development schedule at Genesis High School, much of the professional development for struggling students—behaviorally or academically—is centered on keeping students engaged in the learning process. According to the principal, “If students are

intellectually engaged, they will enjoy what they are doing in the classroom, and they are going to behave” (Naomi, personal communication, January 2017).

There is no record of specific training that is done on culture or how to properly diffuse inappropriate behavior. But during many of the school-wide training sessions, the principal focuses on classroom strategies that can be implemented to increase the rigor of student learning and how to relate content area subject matter to student interest. The assistant principal shied away from conducting formal training; instead, he sent weekly emails about creative ways to manage the classroom. The emails are called *Tips and Reminders for Teachers*, and they include preventative interventions and tips about how to talk to students and redirect them. Assistant Principal Peter stated his goal:

I want to provide teachers with information about what to do if a student is not listening in class and not listening when they are asked to do something, like put a cell phone away. I want teachers to deescalate situations and prevent them from happening again (Peter, personal communication, January/February 2017).

Teacher Feedback

Mini feedback sessions provide the principal with the opportunity to coach and train teachers how to implement strategies for behavior improvement. On a consistent basis, the principal models how to handle students who behave inappropriately, and this is mainly through student-principal conversations. As the principal of the school, Principal Naomi has an impact about how teachers feel regarding their job. The principal is responsible for a level of ownership for the action of her teachers.

I think happy people are kinder to others. My philosophy this year is throw kindness like confetti. I model positive interactions with students, even when they misbehave. And if I

see or hear about a teacher being culturally insensitive, I have a conversation (Naomi, personal communication, January 2017).

The principal and assistant principal acknowledge that professional development and feedback can be most effective in an informal situation. Communication is how teachers grow. Genesis High School has a culture of effective communication and taking professional corrective actions for teacher growth. The principal has established a culture of treating students and colleagues fairly, and she expects everyone to continue with a growth mindset for the success of the students.

Case Study B: Malachi High School

Malachi High School is located in central Florida, and it serves students in grades 9-12. Malachi High School opened in August of 1973, and the current student population is 1,721. There are 105 instructional staff members at Malachi High School. All elementary, middle, and high schools earn a school grade in the state of Florida. The school grade is based upon the performance of the student population. Malachi High School earned a C grade during the most recent assessment report.

Student proficiency is based upon all students performing at a level 3 or higher on a 5-point numerical scale on state standardized assessments. At Malachi High School, 30 percent of the student population is proficient in mathematics, 56 percent is proficient in science, 66 percent is proficient in social studies, and 47 percent is proficient in reading. In 2001, Malachi High School began to offer courses for four different magnet programs: Business and Global Finance; Culinary Arts; Law and Criminal Justice; and the Fire Academy. Every spring, students from all around the county may apply to attend one of Malachi High School's magnet programs.

The demographic breakdown of Malachi High School is as follows: 56 percent of the student population is Hispanic; 30 percent of the student population is Black; 10 percent of the

student population is White; 3 percent of the student population is Multiracial, and 1 percent of the student population is Asian. The gender breakdown for Malachi High School is 50 percent male and 50 percent female. Fifteen (15) percent of the student population are black males, totaling 254 black males enrolled on campus. There are 437 recorded disciplinary incidents, with 11 percent representing black male students, totaling 46 incidents.

Participants

Mr. Matthew, the principal at Malachi High School, has been a principal at the school for two years. Prior to becoming a high school principal, he was a high school Assistant Principal for Curriculum/Instruction and an Assistant Principal for Discipline. Mr. Isaiah has been an assistant principal at Malachi High School for over 10 years. Prior to becoming a high school assistant principal, he taught varying exceptionalities within the Exceptional Student Education department at Malachi High School.

Factors and Discretionary Practices that Play a Role in Equitable School Discipline

Acknowledging the past and implementing practices that support and prepare students for future endeavors are indicators of a school that values equity for all students. Malachi High School is an urban school in central Florida that strives to support equity for black male students. Through qualitative research, the researcher was able to identify culture, student engagement, relationships, and the due process for the students as factors and discretionary practices that play a role in equitable school disciplinary practices for black male students.

Culture

One word that describes the culture of Malachi High School and the culture within the community is *unity*. The administration and faculty at Malachi High School take pride in demonstrating the positive culture that has been built over several years. Even with the large population of students attending the school from across the county, a culture of excellence and

community is maintained. Because of the number of students attending Malachi High School from across the district, no particular set of students sees the school as their turf or area; it belongs to everyone who attends. The culture of the school excites the principal, and he has set expectations for administrators, teachers, and staff members to treat all students the same.

However, he does not take ownership of creating the culture:

Our culture at Malachi has been very positive from the day I got here. It was not something I created; it was something that was already here. We do have problems like every other high school in the county, but for the most part, our students get along. They want to be at Malachi High School, so they value the school and they value being here. Everyone is coming from a distance, and you cannot tell on any given day who is part of the magnet program and who is part of the traditional high school program. There is a very strong positive student and teacher culture (Matthew, personal communication, January 2017).

Malachi High School was one of the first high schools in the county, so many members of the community are familiar with the ins and outs of the school and how it functions on a daily basis. The Principal Matthew values the community, so when decisions are made—even dealing with discipline—he takes the outside community and the reputation of the school into consideration:

I do not know how the culture was established at Malachi High School; it is something that has been valued for a long time. Malachi High School has been around for many years and it has alumni for support. Many of our students have parents who are Malachi alumni, and they see it as a legacy that their child attends Malachi High School. The teachers respect the tradition of the school, as many of them are also part of Malachi's alumni (Matthew, personal communication, January 2017).

The alumni, history, and support from the community of Malachi High School are important factors that the principal considers when handling major disciplinary incidents. Through conversation, it is clear that he desires to treat all students with equity and maintain the positive student-teacher culture that was created many years before he was appointed as the principal.

Student Engagement

When students are fully engaged in learning, the principal and faculty may experience a decrease in the number of students behaving inappropriately. Supporting the district's initiative, Principal Matthew correlates rigorous student engagement with closing the achievement gap between white male students and black male students. The principal decided to encourage black male students to enroll in advanced placement courses, but he was careful to not overload students to the point where they would not be successful. As he stated,

When the curriculum is taught at a basic level and students are not engaged, teachers will begin to see poor grades, poor student attendance, and tardy problems—all of these warning signs trigger behavior problems. To increase engagement and counteract behavior problems for black male students, I encouraged my guidance counselors to utilize the district's advanced placement potential list and register students who are on the 'cusp' for advanced placement courses. I wanted them to particularly look at black males (Matthew, personal communication, January 2017).

The principal has seen success by registering black males into advanced placement courses; however, too many black male students have four or five advanced placement classes and some of them are struggling. This is happening because some of Malachi's black male students have never been exposed to advanced placement curriculum and highly rigorous engagement in the classroom.

The number of black male students who are enrolled in advanced placement courses has increased, and there has been an overall decrease in inappropriate behavior of black male students. It is clear that the principal wanted to push black males to a higher level of academic achievement, and he was certain that enrolling black males in advanced placement classes would curb inappropriate behavior. Mr. Matthew explains his support for this initiative:

My counselors have done a great job at using the district's advance placement potential list. They conference with our black male students during registration and encourage them to take advance placement courses. Our black males who take advanced placement classes have become more academically focused because they are engaged in the content from the start of the period to the end of the period. Full student engagement eliminates any additional time for students to misbehave (Matthew, personal communication, January 2017).

Enrolling black males who demonstrate the potential to be successful in advanced placement courses is a discretionary practice to support disciplinary equity for black male students. While the principal understands the importance of a rigorous high school education, he does not want to auto-assign students into advanced placement classes without proper advising from counselors. The desire to close the achievement gap and prepare black male students for higher learning is evident in his passion to promote advanced placement classes for black males. Having the majority of black males in regular and honors classes will not narrow the achievement gap, but it may lead to fewer discipline issues for black male students who might otherwise be frustrated with the lack of rigor and become disengaged from the content.

Relationships

A positive, productive student-friendly relationship is an important factor to the success of Malachi High School. Without positive relationships, students may feel a lack of ownership in

the school and care from their teachers. Building strong relationships and understanding the history and background of each student is a necessity for equity. To support equity for black males, a relationship must be established. Relationships are built with consistent communication by all members of the faculty and staff at Malachi High School. The principal cannot build relationships alone, nor can classroom teachers. Regardless of their walk of life, the principal understands the importance of building relationships with black male students; building relationships increases the success rate of black male students and the school. His explanation of building positive relations is supported by the following statements:

I hire the right teachers! I have a teaching staff that is experienced. In the past few years, there has been turnover due to retirements, but I have hired young teachers who buy-in to the importance of building relationships with students. I have a core group of teachers who are great with building relationships with students. I use those teachers to set up trainings on relationship building during pre-planning and during professional learning community time. My teacher leaders teach useful strategies and demonstrate ways to communicate with students in the classroom to build positive relationships (Matthew, personal communication, January 2017).

Because the assistant principal handles most of the discipline, relationships are extremely important. Some students will not respect or listen to a teacher or another administrator if there is no relationship built or if the student feels disrespected in any manner. Assistant Principal Isaiah explained his method to building effective relationships with students: “I build relationships with students during their freshmen year. From the beginning, it is important that I ask my students, ‘Hey! Are you ok?’ Or ‘What is going on?’ Or ‘How was your weekend?’” (Isaiah, personal communication, January/February 2017).

As the researcher continued to observe the interactions between the assistant principal and the students, it was evident that Mr. Isaiah's desire was to build non-confrontational relationships with black male students—even those who displayed anger or frustration when he approached them:

If a student has a 'chip' on his shoulder, I do not want to meet that chip with a bigger chip. Being able to have a conversation and find out what the student is thinking and how he feels is critical to a strong relationship (Isaiah, personal communication).

The researcher observed the interactions between Mr. Isaiah and a few black male students:

“Hey, students, let's get to class on time...let's go!! [Black male student], take your hat off...pull your pants up!”

“[Black male student], you're always talking to your girlfriend and you're late for class.”

Mr. Isaiah shakes his head in disbelief and frustration.

“[Black female student], do you want a boyfriend like [black male student] who is always late for [teacher's name] class?”

Mr. Isaiah and the students begin to chuckle, and the students proceed to class.

Building cohesive relationships is important to support equity in discipline. The assistant principal demonstrates care and concern for the students during class changes. Because the assistant principal 'called out' the black male student who was continuously late to class and identified the poor behavior of the student, a relationship was built with both the black male and black female student. A positive relationship with students will enable administrators to hand out consequences to students without disrespect or 'push back' from the student who is accused of behaving inappropriately. For black male students, positive relationships support disciplinary equity and help to deter misbehavior in school.

Due Process for the Student

Mr. Matthew values each student and the diversity of the students at Malachi High School. As the principal, he strives to treat students with equity, but that does not always mean each student is given the same consequence for similar disciplinary offenses. Mr. Matthew considers the social, emotional, and academic factors of each student when administering discipline:

I might have two students—same incident—speaking only on discipline—but one of those students may have never had a problem, and the other student may have had several discipline problems and live in a group home. I have to look at each incident on a case-by-case basis (Matthew, personal communication, January 2017).

When incidents are reviewed in isolation, the principal has the opportunity to support equity for black male students. Malachi High School has maintained equitable disciplinary practices for black male students, and Mr. Matthew provided the researcher with a brief explanation on how equity is supported for black male students when suspension and in-school-suspension may be a disciplinary consequence:

There are incidents that involve black male students, and the incident may call for a suspension. I always have to ask the question, does the incident really reach a level where I have to issue a suspension (in-school or out-of-school) as a consequence? (Matthew, personal communication, January 2017).

In addition to the principal, the assistant principal looks at each incident for what it is worth, and he will determine the appropriate consequence—one that best meets the needs of black male students. Step-by-step investigations are important factors in supporting equity for black male students. Mr. Isaiah is the assistant principal at Malachi High School, and he illustrated an example of how black male students are disciplined with equity:

If a twelfth grade black male student is in a fight and he has a 0.8 grade point average, applying a suspension as a consequence would not be the appropriate discipline—especially if he is a chronic offender. My job is to investigate the incident and get to the root cause of the behavior (Isaiah, personal communication, January/February 2017).

The principal has trained the assistant principal to investigate each situation and listen to the students. During an investigation of an incident, the principals and the assistant principal ask the same type of investigative questions. And ultimately, the student will receive the consequence he deserves that is equitable to the situation—not what is outlined in the student code of conduct. Reviewing each incident in isolation is a key factor that supports equitable disciplinary practices for black male students.

Data Sources that May Influence Disciplinary Practices

With the amount of data that schools generate on a daily basis, school leaders at Malachi High School must determine which data sources add value to their job and what they are trying to achieve with each student at the school. On a quarterly basis, the principal and the assistant principal receive Malachi High School's discipline and academic performance data from the school district. After extensive interviews with the principal and the assistant principal, it was determined that student discipline history and student academic performance are data sources that may influence disciplinary practices for black male students.

Student Discipline History

Reviewing school-wide disciplinary history is a significant task for Mr. Matthew. Part of his day on Monday is spent reviewing the disciplinary history of “frequent flyers” of the discipline office. The discipline history gives Mr. Matthew a perspective of what inappropriate behaviors are trending and the consequences the assistant principal is issuing.

I review the discipline list from the previous week and look at the student's history using an online program that houses student information. I also look at the current year-to-date history, which includes the number of discipline referrals and the category each referral was coded (Matthew, personal communication, January 2017).

The following are five examples of how discipline referrals are coded in the online system that is frequently used by the assistant principal:

1. Inappropriate behavior
2. Insubordination
3. Disruptive
4. Major Disruptive
5. Fighting/battery

When the data were reviewed by the researcher, many of the incidents that involved black male students were listed under inappropriate behavior, insubordination, and fighting/battery.

According to the school district's code of conduct, students who are charged with fighting/battery are expected to be suspended from school. Mr. Matthew explained how data driven decisions are used within the discipline office—specifically for black male students:

I do not have conversations where I ask my assistant principal to look at the number of black male students that are suspended on a daily basis. I expect all students to be treated with respect and equity. When fights break out during the school day that involve black male students, I will look intensely at the data—especially if there is a stream of fights over a short period of time (Matthew, personal communication, January 2017).

Mr. Isaiah, the assistant principal at Malachi High School, views disciplinary history as a very important factor when dealing with misbehaving students. Additionally, whether or not a student

is classified as an exceptional student with an Individual Educational Plan will be a factor in how the student is disciplined:

When it comes to consequences, I look at the student's discipline history first. I look to see how often the student is getting into trouble and if he is committing the same offense.

Race has nothing to do with disciplinary practices. Kids are kids, and I do not see color (Isaiah, personal communication, January/February 2017).

One method the principal uses to review and keep track of student data is through a weekly data spreadsheet of key performance indicators that include behavior and attendance offenses; this document is sent directly to the principal by district officials. Gender and racial data are also reviewed; and when that data indicate discipline is beginning to increase, the principal will use proactive measures such as class assemblies or conferences with groups of students to offset the behavior that can negatively impact the school.

Student Academic Progress

Past academic performance can predict future performance. Mr. Matthew and Mr. Isaiah concur that reviewing academic performance for the purpose of identifying how much progress a student has made towards graduation is critical—especially for black male students. Sometimes Mr. Matthew will look at a student's *On Track for Graduation Report* and wonder how the student has even made it to the high school level: "Often times I look at reports and see it as, 'Wow, the student has gotten through all these times with very little success'" (Matthew, personal communication, January 2017).

Based on the discussion with Mr. Matthew, the researcher may conclude that a few students have been "passed through" the system for appropriate conduct and not stellar academic performance:

As a principal, I try to express to my students that even though they may think they cannot work at a level of high performance (due to low performance in the past and not being on track for graduation), they actually can. I am a confidence builder (Matthew, personal communication, January 2017).

Assistant Principal Isaiah looks at the ethnicity and gender report for black male students. Mr. Isaiah has a concern about the number of black males who are not graduating from high school. He has a desire to increase the number of black male graduates. When he identifies a black male who is not on track for graduation and one who continues to have discipline issues at school, he uses discretion for the purpose of graduation—not discipline.

As an educator, I am on a mission to get more black males to graduate from high school. When I have black males in my office, I look at his credits earned, current grades, and test scores. I use the *On Track for Graduation Report* to my discretion when giving discipline consequences to a student—especially a black male student who needs to get across the stage (Isaiah, personal communication, January/February 2017).

With the appropriate use of data, the principal makes decisions based upon what is best for the students. Mr. Matthew and Mr. Isaiah understand that each student is different—with a different history—behaviorally and academically. Data is only a small part of how decisions are made for students. Student history and on-track graduation information are two key indicators of how detrimental an inequitable consequence may be for a student.

Professional Development and Training for School Staff on Equity Support

The principal and assistant principal at Malachi High School require teachers to participate in year-round professional development to improve the quality of teaching in the classroom and their ability to engage students in learning to achieve the overall mission and vision of student success at Malachi High School. By use of interviews and observations, it was

determined that A Clear Vision and Demonstration Classrooms are used as topics for professional development and training for school staff in an effort to understand how to support equity for black male students.

A Clear Vision

Mr. Matthew has a vision that every student will graduate and leave Malachi High School with a skill that can be used in postsecondary education or in the workforce. There is an expectation that all faculty members will have the same vision for every student they teach. The first step in having a shared vision that supports behavioral and academic equity for black male students is having a vision that is clearly articulated. All stakeholders (students, parents, and teachers) must understand and partake in the vision with fidelity. Mr. Matthew expressed his thoughts on creating a vision that can be adopted by everyone involved at Malachi High School:

As a principal, I have to set a vision that supports equity. The school and the community must buy into the vision and understand what it looks like and how it works. I have to promote the vision and make sure every decision I make is based on the vision of the school—especially if it is a generic vision such as making sure all students at Malachi High School graduate (Matthew, personal communication, January 2017).

Demonstration Classrooms

Teachers at Malachi High School thrive on the opportunity to demonstrate strategies and skills that are conducive to student equity and behavioral support in the classroom. Teacher leaders take the initiative to mentor inexperienced and experienced teachers. Learning walks occur when a teacher leader invites colleagues in the classroom to see students who are perceived to be behaviorally-challenged and students of diverse backgrounds perform in class. As Principal Matthew says,

My teachers invite other teachers to their classroom to see what is going on and observe how some of our most challenging black male students perform academically and behaviorally. Many times, teachers will visit a classroom and see students who might behave inappropriately in math class; but in welding or science class, they are having fun and completing the assignments. They are getting everything done, getting an industry certification, and being a leader in the classroom (Matthew, personal communication, January 2017).

Diversity training is not a major topic of discussion at faculty meetings, but Mr. Matthew wants teachers to understand the importance of patience and how understanding the background of their students is essential to equity in the classroom. At Malachi, teachers have the opportunity to demonstrate diversity skills to colleagues:

I want teachers to see black male students in action. If one of our challenging black male students is behaving appropriately in five out of seven classes, but is he misbehaving in two other classes, I want the teachers to see how their colleagues handle students of diversity—particularly black males—and engage them in learning (Matthew, personal communication, January 2017).

Acknowledging differences, building relationships, and understanding diversity can be demonstrated through a teacher's tone, actions, and diction in the classroom. For teachers to fully understand how to relate and engage minority students to support equity, the principal and assistant principal are aware that diversity training on a higher level is necessary. And while a demonstration classroom may be an initial step in providing surface level diversity training, teachers will need to read and discuss scholarly journals and educational books and articles about teaching diverse populations and understanding diversity through the lens of the student.

Case Study C: Titus High School

Titus High School, comprising students in grades 9-12, is located in a rural area on the far-east side of the county. The school opened in 1969, and the current student population is 2,033. There are 96 instructional staff members at Titus High School. All elementary, middle, and high schools earn a school grade in the state of Florida. The school grade is based on the performance of the student population. Titus High School earned a B school grade in the most recent assessment report.

Proficiency is based upon all students performing at a level 3 or higher on a 5-point numerical scale on state standardized assessments. At Titus High School, 46 percent of the student population is proficient in mathematics, 71 percent of the student population is proficient in science, 81 percent of the student population is proficient in social studies, and 45 percent of the student population is proficient in reading. Students who attend Titus High School must apply for 1 of 13 programs. The following areas of concentration are available for students who attend Titus High School: Auto Body & Automotive Repair, Business Administration, Computer Systems Technology, Culinary Arts, Early Childhood Education, Journalism, Welding, Industrial Electricity, and Health Administration.

The demographic breakdown for Titus High School is as follows: 52 percent of the student population is Black; 26 percent of the student population is Hispanic; 13 percent of the student population is White; 6 percent of the student population is Asian; and 3 percent of the student population is Multiracial. The gender breakdown for Titus High School is 57 percent male and 43 percent female. Twenty-five (25) percent of the students are black males, totaling 505 black males enrolled on campus. There are 1,031 recorded disciplinary incidents, with eight percent representing black male students, totaling 81 incidents.

Participants

Mr. Luke, the principal at Titus High School, has been the principal at Titus High School for five years. Prior to being a high school principal, he was a high school assistant principal and a high school biology teacher. Mr. James, the assistant principal at Titus High School, has been a high school assistant principal for four years. Prior to becoming an assistant principal, he was a high school business education teacher.

Factors and Discretionary Practices that Play a Role in Equitable School Discipline

With a minority rate higher than 50 percent, school leaders at Titus High School must examine every situation that occurs and make decisions that are conducive to student learning and overall achievement. It is important for the principal and assistant principal to act with equity and integrity when handling student disciplinary incidents. Several factors and discretionary practices are considered to support equity for black male students. Qualitative research determined that socioeconomics and the value of education, relationships, mentorship programs, social and news media, and equity in treatment are factors and discretionary practices that play a role in equitable school discipline for black male students at Titus High School.

Socioeconomics and the Value of Education

Within Titus High School, 76 percent of the students have a free or reduced lunch rate. According to the principal, some educators have a perception that students who have a low socioeconomic status are going to behave inappropriately. The student's socioeconomic position does not indicate inappropriate behavior. The engagement of the student in the classroom dictates inappropriate behavior. Mr. Luke does not see students by an economic status:

What I perceive and what I see at Titus High School is that all students are the same.

Whether or not they have money or no money, it is how individuals interact with each

other that make the difference regarding behavior (Luke, personal communication, January 2017).

The assistant principal at Titus High School handles discipline the majority of the day. In that role, Mr. James has the opportunity to see how socioeconomics influence student behavior.

While he does not agree that students who are poor often behave inappropriately, he does feel that the home life of a student has a great influence on how the student values the education he is receiving at school:

Home life has a huge factor on kids. Even when a child is little, he is being raised a certain way. He is being exposed to many different things; so, there are several variables that go into how much he values education. When parents consistently repeat phrases such as, ‘you need a good education,’ or ‘you need to get good grades and there are no ifs, ands, or buts,’ that is exactly what the student is going to do (James, personal communication, January/February 2017).

Students will respect whatever is valuable to them. The value of education will drive the decisions a student makes. Most high school students understand the difference between a good decision and a bad decision, and that is why the principal and assistant principal do not see a correlation between poverty and poor behavior choices. Poor behavior choices coincide with poor decision making skills and the negative influences a student has at home—not the financial resources the student is accustomed to having or not having.

Relationships

Creating relationships to increase student achievement and reduce disciplinary incidents involving black male students is necessary at Titus High School. This school is unique because it has a high percentage of black male students and many of those students reside in different areas of the county. Every teacher may not possess the same level of care for their students, as care is

shown in various ways. However, through observations, it was evident that each faculty member has a caring mindset, and Principal Luke was adamant about his teachers not having a dictator mindset. Dictatorship does not build positive relationships: “The students think the school in its entirety cares about them—not just their English teacher and the other six or seven teachers they have on their schedule. Every teacher on this campus cares” (Luke, personal communication, January 2017).

Building relationships with black male students is something the principal and the assistant principal have continuously worked to achieve. During class change, the researcher observed a few black male students walking past the principal, assistant principal, and teachers without acknowledging their presence or saying hello. Additionally, black males appeared to be zoned out and focused on the music that was playing in their headphones. Subsequently, this caused them not to focus on building positive relationships with staff members. With the number of black male students on campus, Mr. James said that he and Mr. Luke made a special effort to have sidebar conversations and build relationships in small steps:

It is easier for some individuals to build a rapport with our black male students. A student may find a black male teacher he can relate to as an individual. As a white man, I do not think a relationship is something I could not build with a student, but I have to be conscious of the situation (James, personal communication, January/February 2017).

Mr. Luke addressed his goal with building relationships with black males on campus:

As a leader, I have to make sure my black male students feel like they can come to me. I must show that I am a caring and understanding individual. Sometimes for a white male teacher or administrator it is harder to build relationships, because the student is coming with a perceived inappropriate perception. I have to overcome that perception by showing care and compassion (Luke, personal communication, January 2017).

Mr. Luke and Mr. James value the time they spend with students and the creative ways they choose to build relationships. Many relationships are built through conversations with students. Because Mr. James is the assistant principal over discipline, he puts in more effort to building relationships with black male students on campus. With the high population of black males, it is important that students understand he is one who can be trusted—even in unfavorable situations. Each time a black male student entered Mr. James's office, it was primarily for a discipline or an attendance issue. The researcher observed Mr. James taking the time to listen in an effort to understand where the student was "coming from" socially and mentally. He expressed his desire to "dig beneath the surface:"

I want to know more about my students and what issues they are dealing with on a daily basis—far above what I can see on the surface. I ask several questions about their life because I want to make a connection with each black male student on a more personal level (James, personal communication, January/February 2017).

At Titus High School, one of the main goals in building relationships with students is allowing them to understand that the principal and the assistant principal have an open-door policy. Based upon the observations of black male students who entered the discipline office, they understood Mr. James cared for them and wanted them to make positive decisions; and that level of understanding allowed Mr. James to build trust with the students. And in return, the students showed him a high level of respect. James spoke about the process involved in building student trust: "It takes a while to build appropriate relationships because everyone is different. Sometimes it takes a week, a month, or even a year...it depends on what the student has experienced in the past" (James, personal communication, January/February 2017).

The principal uses relationships as a way to support equity in discipline. When a student has a positive relationship with an adult on campus, he may reconsider acting inappropriately

and seek guidance from an adult he trusts. The principal and assistant principal at Titus High School value and support positive relationships.

Mentorship Programs

Aside from a positive relationship with students, the principal approved a program that would give black males a “safe haven” with the supervision of a veteran teacher on staff. The principal wanted black male students to measure success by changing the perception of what makes a black male successful within their community. He explained that many times students will get sidetracked by thinking a professional athlete or television star measures the highest level of success. In addition, black males acknowledged doctors and lawyers as successful professionals, but they never considered the other professions outside of athletics, television, medical, and law as highly successful.

Principal Luke bemoans this skewed vision of success:

Success is achieved by many other professions besides a basketball player or a music rapper. Sadly, nobody says success is a teacher or administrator. Every one of my teachers is a success. Could they be a better teacher? Absolutely! Many of them could be better, but they are successful in what their role is as a member of society. That is what I must get black male students to understand. There are students who will graduate from high school and become welders and make more money than teachers and school administrators. That is success. Black male students need to see overall success—not what the media has portrayed as success for them to perceive (Luke, personal communication, January 2017).

The Men of Vision program was established by a black male teacher on campus. Again, Mr. Luke approved the program because he wanted to make sure black male students on campus felt like they were getting guidance from a well-known relatable source. Luke said,

The purpose of Men of Vision is to expose black male students to things in the world. When I say things in the world, I do not mean Europe, but I want to expose them to the world around them. I want my black male students to see successful men in their surrounding area. Success means an individual enjoys what you he is doing. He is making a living and supporting a family. My students need to see this type of behavior in action (Luke, personal communication, January 2017).

Social and News Media

The principal at Titus High School has experienced how social media can impact black male students in school. Many times when the principal or assistant principal has dealt with a fight or dispute, it begins and escalates on social media. In general, all media has caused the principal to use discretion when dealing with an incident that can potentially turn into chaos and disrupt the entire campus. Principal Luke recalled a serious student disturbance that he helped to defuse:

A year ago when a black male was killed by a neighborhood security guard, I was informed that my black male students were planning to do a walkout. During lunch I just knew something was wrong because tension was in the air. Suddenly in the middle of lunch, several black male students left the cafeteria and took a walk through the school's hallways. I walked behind them, because I could have escalated the situation if I attempted to stop it. As a principal, I have to allow them to let out their frustration (Luke, personal communication, January 2017).

Mr. Luke is cognizant that black male students may come to school with frustration based upon what they have seen on television. He admits that many times when an incident has occurred around the country or in the community, he is slightly fearful of what may happen the next day at school. When a major event occurs and he realizes it can cause havoc on campus, he

immediately reflects on the situation and initiates a plan of action to offset any disturbances. In the event that an unexpected situation breaks out on campus, he uses his instinctive leadership skills:

As a leader, sometimes I am scared and nervous—that is without a doubt. And sometimes I think, ‘Oh, I am getting fired’ (when there is a potential for chaos), but I do what I feel is instinctive to work with the student population that I have. Fortunately, it works (Luke, personal communication, January 2017).

Equity in Treatment with No Discrimination

Equity is an important factor when disciplinary consequences are administered at Titus High School. Mr. Luke believes if any principal or assistant principal is going to administer disciplinary consequences based exclusively on what the student handbook says, he is not needed as an administrator. Having prior knowledge of a student’s background and understanding why inappropriate behavior may have occurred is vital to discipline. As the principal, Mr. Luke knows the background of his black male students, and sometimes he knows why discipline incidents occur; this knowledge enables him to work with the student and understand the behavior:

According to the student handbook, sometimes a black male student needs to be suspended from school; his behavior warrants a suspension. But, I have to think of every situation, including his home life, and make the best disciplinary decision for the student’s life. I assign consequences based upon what the student needs and what will correct the behavior—not what the handbook says (Luke, personal communication, January 2017).

As an Assistant Principal of Discipline, Mr. James has a very important job of supporting equity in disciplinary practices. Every student is enrolled at Titus High School to receive an

education, and his goal is to make sure students graduate on time. Mr. James treats students with respect at all times—even during disciplinary situations that may be perceived as difficult:

The biggest thing I do is treat every student fairly. My mission is to make sure students understand that I have goals and aspirations for them. Making decisions based up my vision of success for all students drives equitable disciplinary practices (James, personal communication, January/February 2017).

Based on observations, the researcher can support the claim that all students are treated the same. Disciplinary data supports that the principal has implemented a protocol to make sure all students are treated fairly. For example, if a student gets one tardy, there is a universal consequence; the same method applies for the second and third tardy. Mr. James did express that there are situations where he must decide to not follow protocol, and the result of not following protocol is always in the best interest of the student. The assistant principal works with every student to support fairness and equity.

Data Sources that May Influence Disciplinary Practices

School leaders at Titus High School make data-driven decisions that support student growth and learning. The principal and assistant principal do not make decisions based on feelings or the student code of conduct. They are trained in how to correctly read data, and they utilize their data analysis skills to ultimately drive student success. Through the use of observations, interviews, and school-wide data artifacts, it was determined that student discipline and academic history data and parental involvement data are data sources that may influence disciplinary practices for black male students.

Student Discipline and Academic History

As students lined up to speak with Mr. James, he silently reviewed the prior discipline history of each student who entered his office. Student data is stored on a school-based computer

hard drive that stores grades, attendance, and disciplinary consequences for each student. This history is important to Mr. James, because he looks for trends in inappropriate behavior:

I look at prior discipline history, and I look to see if there is something that has happened repeatedly. I read notes that are inputted by another assistant principal, the principal, the guidance counselor, or the social worker. When I look at data, I look at all information to assess each incident—not just the race and gender of the student (James, personal communication, January/February 2017).

There are no specific school-based data sources that are used in disciplinary decisions for a particular race or gender of student. All interactions between students are the same. Assistant Principal James primarily focuses on how administrators deal with the problem and not the race or gender of student who needs a consequence:

Sometimes you can go down a road that you do not intend to go down when you only look at race or gender as a factor in making a decision. I look at the same data for everything student; that makes my practice as a disciplinarian authentic (James, personal communication, January/February 2017).

When disciplinary incidents for black males increase, the principal spends time reviewing overall discipline and academic data to determine what strategies have worked and have not worked. Mr. Luke looks for strategies and techniques to have worked—whether the strategy was used a week ago or a month ago. Mr. Luke believes that it is important to use what has worked in the past to get students to understand what is necessary to be successful in the future:

With my school being more than 50 percent black, it is important for me to review data of discipline and academic performance. I know I have a high number of minority male students, so it is more important for me to look at gender and not necessarily race (Luke, personal communication, January 2017).

Parental Involvement Data

With the number of black males enrolled on the campus, Mr. Luke expected an influx of fathers who supported their sons in extracurricular activities such as football, basketball, and other sporting events and those who regularly attended conference night; but he quickly noticed that the level of parental involvement did not meet his expectations. Once every quarter, Titus High Schools hosts a parent-teacher conference night. During conference night, parents and teachers have the opportunity to discuss the status of each student's academic and social progress. At the end of each conference night, Mr. Luke collects attendance data from each teacher that identifies the number of conferences held during the evening:

We do not have very much parent involvement. The amount of parents—especially fathers—that show up for conference night are far and few between. Particularly, I would love to see more fathers of my black male students at conference night, but I know many parents work two jobs and life situations may make it impossible for parents to attend. However, I do not judge a student's success rate by the lack of parent involvement (Luke, personal communication, January 2017).

While the assistant principal disciplines a student, he views the parent-conference attendance information and takes into account the number of times a parent has actually been to the school to meet with a teacher or administrator. Often, Mr. James views himself as a father figure to the students. For some of the black males who live in the community, parents may not always play an active role in the success of the student or the student's discipline infractions. Mr. James prides himself on disciplining each student as if the student were his own child:

My goal is to prepare students for life after high school; so, if I am not giving true consequences, society will. When students do not have consequences for making poor decisions at home, I have to make sure they have consequences for making poor

decisions at school. Sometimes I am the only parent figure the student has (James, personal communication, January/February 2017).

When the principal and assistant principal meet parents, they try to establish an open-line of communication. The principal acknowledged that many of the parents from the community feel intimidated by school officials because several of them feel like they lack adequate skills to effectively communicate with school personnel. Mr. Luke strives to promote parental involvement and have an open line of communication with parents through emails, newsletters, text messages, and phone calls home. When a black male student lacks parental involvement and there is data to support that lack of involvement, the principal looks at each student and the incident from a global perspective before making a disciplinary decision.

Professional Development and Training for School Staff on Equity Support

According to the principal at Titus High School, professional development must be ongoing and implemented within the role of the teacher. Mr. Luke strives to provide equity training for his teachers as it relates to handling difficult situations in the classroom in order to maintain equity for black male students. Qualitative research determined that job embedded coaching is important professional development and training for school staff to support equity for black male students in and outside of the classroom.

Job Embedded Coaching

Indirect coaching is how teachers are properly trained to handle situations that may result in an altercation with students of diverse backgrounds. If there is an issue with a student or if the assistant principal gets an email from a teacher, he always communicates with the teacher about strategies and the consequences he is going to implement with the student. The purpose of this communication is indirect training. When the assistant principal and the teacher converse with each other, the teacher learns about strategies that may be used to support equity in the classroom

for students with a diverse background. Assistant Principal James emphasized his belief in communicating with his teachers:

I must make sure my teachers understand the consequences and how they are applied to certain incidents. This requires having conversations and taking time to teach them how consequences are implemented. When I am speaking with a student, I always invite the teacher to partake in the conversation. As a teacher watches me handle situations with minority students, it provides them with the opportunity to take notes, and it helps me to get buy-in from the teacher (James, personal communication, January/February 2017).

During pre-planning, Mr. James conducts training sessions on discipline; and as a faculty, they discuss situations that may occur in the classroom and effective ways to resolve unwanted conflicts.

According to the faculty meeting agenda, Mr. Luke makes it a priority to provide teachers with professional development on effective strategies that are used to deescalate situations with minority students. Professional development material may include: an article from *Educational Weekly* with whole group discussion or a classroom management video from district's the office of professional development. Overall, Mr. Luke wants teachers to understand their reason for being at work—and that reason is for the students:

The only way any job embedded professional development will work is for the teacher to know exactly what he or she is doing in the classroom and realize that every decision must be in the best interest of the student. If the teacher is using classroom management strategies that do not result in a positive outcome for the student, it is wrong and it is not going to work (Luke, personal communication, January 2017).

Strategies to understand and communicate with black male students are discussed at many of the faculty meetings throughout the year. The topic of disciplining and communicating with black

males is a necessary component of faculty meetings because Titus High School has a large black male student population. Principal Luke clearly believes in the value of training his faculty:

At the beginning of the year, I will do a brief training and refer back to key concepts of the training at faculty meetings. I cannot do a single training session in one day or three days; training and professional development about the role of the teacher in reference to teaching and communicating with minority male students is an ongoing conversation. At Titus High School, it is a lifestyle (Luke, personal communication, January 2017).

Summary

In Chapter 4, the researcher analyzed, synthesized, and presented qualitative data that was collected during three case studies that provided real-life events, leadership skills, and disciplinary practices used by secondary school principals that support equity for black male students. The researcher interviewed three secondary principals and three secondary assistant principals to understand how they effectively handle incidents that support equitable practices and what factors contribute to equity.

This study was conducted with the intention to contribute to the body of research pertaining to the leadership and disciplinary practices that may be implemented when handling incidents that involve black male students and other students of diversity. In the next chapter, the researcher will answer four research questions. The answers will be based upon data collected and practices observed during the interviews.

Chapter 5: Analysis, Results, and Conclusion of the Study

Introduction

An instrumental collective case study research method approach was used to explore a real-life, contemporary, bounded system over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving sources of information such as observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports (Creswell, 2013). Quotes and excerpts contributed to the descriptive nature of the qualitative research (Merriam, 2002). Each case study is an intensive description and analysis of an educational institution. By concentrating upon an entity (the case), this approach described the phenomenon in depth (Merriam, 2002).

Principals and assistant principals must create an environment that fosters appropriate behavior. A school environment that is free from stereotypical injustices and inequity of discipline cannot exist if principals, assistant principals, teachers, and stakeholders have a different value system or believe only in their own self-interests. Principals and assistant principals must focus on the mission and vision of the school as a guide for making professional decisions, and school policies and procedures that are structured and orderly are essential to successful student learning. Appropriate disciplinary practices that are equitable may require principals to think “out of the box.” Creative disciplinary practices will deter inappropriate behavior in the classroom; in return, principals and assistant principals will have the opportunity to focus on their teachers’ instructional practices and the success of their students.

The objective of this study was to identify leadership and disciplinary practices that support equity for black male students at the secondary level. Specifically, this study explored and analyzed views from principals and assistant principals at the high school level regarding four components:

1. Factors that play a role in equitable school disciplinary practices for black male students;
2. Data sources used that may influence disciplinary practices for black male students;
3. Discretionary practices taken into consideration to ensure equity when handling discipline incidents that involve black male students; and
4. The professional development and training of staff members on shared values that support equity for black male students.

The researcher interviewed, observed, and collected artifacts from three principals and three assistant principals. In addition to exploring leadership and disciplinary practices that support equity for black male students, the researcher desired to determine if the responses from the principals and assistant principals aligned with published literature that claims black male students are disproportionately disciplined in schools across the country.

Revision to Research Questions

In Chapter 1, the researcher presented four research questions that would drive the study of exploring disciplinary and leadership practices that support equity for black male students.

The four research questions are listed below:

1. What factors, as perceived by school leaders, play a role in equitable school disciplinary practices for black male students?
2. What data sources do school leaders utilize that may influence disciplinary practices towards black male students?
3. What discretionary practices do school leaders use or take into consideration to support equity when handling a disciplinary incident that directly involves black male students?
4. How do school leaders develop and train staff to reflect shared values to support equity for black male students?

During the analysis of data, the researcher observed that question number 1 and question number 3 had comparable answers throughout the interviews, data collection, and observations of all three case studies. Due to this discovery, the researcher combined research question 1 and research question 3 during the analysis of data that is presented in this chapter. In addition, the researcher did a cross-case analysis of the three revised research questions (See Appendix D).

Research Question 1

What factors, as perceived by school leaders, play a role in equitable school disciplinary practices; and, what discretionary practices do principals and assistant principals use to support equity when handling an incident involving black male students?

Socioeconomics and Home Life

Principals and assistant principals discussed their leadership experience surrounding the socioeconomic status of a student and the home life of a student and how both factors play an equitable role in school disciplinary practices for black males. Principals and assistant principals indicated that students who struggle financially may need more support academically or socially. Two principals had experience with low socioeconomics as a factor in how black male students behaved, but one principal did not experience socioeconomics as a factor in how black male students behaved. For the particular principal who did not experience socioeconomics as a factor in how black male students behaved, it was unmistakable that the interaction between the principal and the student was the largest factor for equitable discipline.

One out of three assistant principals believed the home life was one of the largest factors in supporting equity for black male students. Each assistant principal believed the situations many black male students face at home have some influence in how they behave, and these situations should affect the way disciplinary consequences are assigned. Principals and assistant

principals formulated ideas that teachers may use within the classroom to offset the financial stress of students. Two ideas can be immediately implemented:

1. Requesting that teachers have supplies readily available for all students in class
2. Encouraging teachers to minimize the number of required materials for students to bring to class every day.

Principals and assistant principals confirmed that a disruptive home life and financial constraints are taken into consideration for black male students when disciplinary incidents happen during the school day.

Relationships

Building strong relationships will increase the opportunity for success for black male students. Principals and assistant principals desire to have strong relationships with students and families. There is awareness that black males are perceived differently than other students around the school, so principals and assistant principals must focus on looking through the lens of black males in an effort to view the world as they view the world. Sidebar conversations are strategies that assistant principals use during the school day. These conversations build relationships with black male students and diminish negative feelings of discipline when principals and assistant principals have to assign consequences for inappropriate behavior.

Building positive relationships is even more important when a black male student resides in a single-parent home. Many times, black males are considered the head-of-household in single-parent, female-dominated homes. Therefore, it is common for black males to have the same mindset at school and have little respect for school personnel. All three principals and assistant principals agree that hiring the right teachers—who care about building relationships with students—is crucial to motivating students to make positive decisions and building relationships that are effective and lasting. Relationship building must start immediately, and

each principal had a different method for initiating relationship building with black male students. One principal started building relationships with black males as soon as they entered the school during their freshman year. All other principals and assistant principals desired to build individual relationships with students—almost one student at a time. It was very important for them to really understand who their students are, where they come from, and what their plans are after high school. Cohesive relationships support equity in discipline. When relationships are built with students, principals and assistant principals have the necessary information to make decisions based upon factual information about the student they may have learned over an extended period of time.

Mentorship and Feeling Connected to the School

The desire to feel connected to the school and have a mentor on campus is a major factor in equity support for black male students. Two out of three principals and assistant principals created an organization where black male students can have a specific teacher as a positive role model and mentor. According to all three principals, black male students were not connected to the school after the fall term. Many black male students were involved in athletics—particularly football and basketball—and a connection to the school outside of athletics was necessary to support equity and lead to the path of social and academic success. Principals and assistant principals wanted black male students to connect with other students. Student-to-student mentorship may be utilized for students to talk to peers about frustrations they may deal with at school or at home and also provide support to each other academically and socially.

The principal and assistant principal at Titus High School wanted black male students to connect to their surrounding community. A Men of Vision program was established as a way to expose black male students to their surrounding community in order for them to see individuals—particularly black men—successful at their careers and within their community.

Sometimes mentoring black male students meant that principals and assistant principals were forced to have honest, direct conversations with students. Each principal and assistant principal noted that mentorship can be a challenge, but when a black male student has a mentor on campus, it is key factor in equity when discipline is involved.

Research Question 2

What data sources do school leaders utilize that may influence disciplinary practices towards black male students?

Student Discipline Data

Prior discipline data is a source that school leaders utilize that may influence disciplinary practices and determine consequences for black male students. Black male students who have a lengthy discipline history may experience a harsher consequence than a black male student who does not have a lengthy history or no history at all. One assistant principal stated, “Past behavior of a student will tell me if there is a particular issue with a certain type of teacher or certain class” (Personal communication, January/February 2017).

Each principal views disciplinary/ethnicity data with assistant principals on campus. This data enable them to make decisions about how to proceed with discipline when there is trend of black male students who are getting into trouble and being suspended from school. One principal utilizes the district’s online discipline reporting system, which stores discipline information over a year-long period of time. In all three schools, discipline incident data can be broken down into several types of categories. Disciplinary categories for black male students often include inappropriate behavior, insubordination, and fighting/battery. Inappropriate behavior and insubordination are very vague categories in which to classify discipline. Each principal and assistant principal agreed that inappropriate behavior and insubordination are dependent upon the perception of the teacher and the administrator. When those categories are used to classify

discipline for black male students, administrators investigate and get to the root cause of the incident before applying a consequence. When there is a trend of fights that break out among black male students, principals do not use specific data to make disciplinary decisions; they see the fights, investigate the incident, and apply consequences when necessary. Each principal views discipline data as a necessary component to review while maintaining equitable disciplinary practices for black male students.

Student Academic Data

Past academic performance and the student's current class schedule may factor into disciplinary consequences. The number of times a black male student has moved from one to school to another may affect his academic data. Principals and assistant principals look for school enrollment transfers when students enter the office. Principals and assistant principals desire an increase in black males who graduate from high school, and they have ongoing conversations with black male students about graduation requirements and post-secondary educational opportunities. Each school utilizes a graduation on-track report that comes from the district. When students have altercations with peers or teachers, the information on this report is taken into consideration before disciplinary consequences are given. Black male students with poor academic performance or those who are not on track for graduation may receive a different disciplinary consequence than what the student code of conduct dictates or even another student who is on track for graduation may receive. These data play a vital role in supporting equity for black male students. Principals and assistant principals assign consequences with equity to correct behavior—not general consequences that the student handbook may outline for various levels of offenses and consequences.

Parental Involvement Data

Some parents are highly involved in their child's education, and some are not. Principals and assistant principals at all three high schools strive to build relationships with parents as soon as the student is enrolled at the school. One assistant principal told a guardian she wanted "momma rights" while the child was on campus. The amount of parental involvement for black male students differs from school to school; however, all principals and assistant principals noticed a lack of parental involvement and these data are used when disciplining black male students.

At one high school with a large black male population, the principal expected a large number of fathers to be active members in their son's education; however, this did not happen—even when black males played on various high school athletic teams. At two other high schools, one had a low black male population and many of the black male students live in female-dominated, single-parent homes. The other high school has heavy community support, so the parents lived in the community, as some of them were alumni.

When black male students are disciplined, the principal and assistant principal measure the amount of parental involvement the student has in his life. When there is a lack of parental involvement, each administrator has to make a disciplinary decision that corrects the behavior and a decision that is in the best interest of the child.

Student Observation Data

Observing student interactions in the hall with teachers and other administrators is a factor that may be used to support equity when disciplining students. All three assistant principals document student interactions and record their observations in an online database so that they may refer back to the notes at a later time. By observing students and collecting mental data, principals and assistant principals have the opportunity to immediately correct student misbehavior. When principals and assistant principals observe how students interact with each

other or with their teachers, they have the opportunity to detect possible developing issues with black male students. According to all three principals, body language, tone, and attitude can be identified through observations. Principals collect data through observations to assist them in determining equitable disciplinary practices.

Research Question 3

How do school leaders develop and train staff to reflect shared values to support equity for black male students?

Positive Communication with Black Male Students

Positive communication can deescalate any negative situation. Sometimes when individuals have a perception of how black males act in school, they home in on it, and it takes experience for that perception to change. All three principals and assistant principals want the faculty and staff at their school to practice positive communication techniques with black male students. When teachers and administrators speak positively to students, the opportunity for success increases; and by positively communicating with black male students, the teacher or administrator demonstrates their willingness to give the student a fair shot. Positive communication supports equity and builds healthy relationships with students. If everyone on staff values positive, effective communication, difficult conversations are easier to have when disciplinary consequences are justified for black male students. One principal expressed that effective training on communication with black male students cannot be accomplished in one day, but it takes reiterating key points of training and appropriate communication on a consistent basis—like at every faculty meeting.

Coaching and Immediate Feedback

Each principal coaches and trains staff members in different ways. When principals and assistant principals observe situations that may escalate in a conflict between a teacher and black

male students, the administrator uses this opportunity to coach the teacher and provide immediate feedback on how to effectively handle the conversation. One assistant principal regularly communicates with teachers about strategies that he or she may use in the classroom to defuse situations. One assistant principal has conversations with students and teachers together; this practice allows the teacher to observe how the assistant principal has handled the situation with a black male student. “Coaching and providing immediate feedback to a teacher is a skill,” expressed one principal (Personal communication, January 2017). It is important for principals and assistant principals to effectively train and coach teachers. Immediate feedback works; it solves the problem and it allows the teacher time to reflect on decisions they make in class that may escalate a situation involving a black male student, which in return can cause a disciplinary incident and result in a consequence. All three assistant principals confirmed that they have intense conversations with teachers to offer ideas to support the teacher. Realistic, meaningful conversations are important to building techniques to use during feedback sessions on how to support equity for black male students.

Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds

Professional development that reflects shared values and supports equity for black male students includes training on how to engage students in the learning process, training on how to teach students from diverse backgrounds, and training on how to implement strategies for low performing and behaviorally challenged students. Principals and assistant principals are consistent when addressing and handling disciplinary situations with black male students. That behavior is modeled so faculty and staff may acknowledge the positive behavior from their administrators and reflect on how they can implement the consistency they need in order for their students to be successful in the classroom. Modeling is a method principals use in setting a vision and demonstrating to faculty and staff what equity in practice looks like. At all three

schools, assistant principals provide year-round training for teachers and staff members, and most conversations with teachers emphasize tips and strategies for dealing with diverse students, being culturally sensitive, and building relationships. According to one principal, when a black male student makes a poor choice, teachers should not reflexively ask for the student to be removed or kick the student out of class; this type of behavior from the teacher exemplifies poor classroom management and gives a perception that the teacher may lack understanding and patience for diverse students. It is vital to the success of black male students that principals and assistant principals provide professional development and training for staff members and set a clear vision for supporting equity for black male students academically and socially.

Data Analysis in Comparison to Researched Literature

According to Leithwood, there are eight dimensions that conceptualize transformational leadership, and each leader the researcher interviewed and observed actively engaged in four of the eight dimensions:

1. Building a school vision
2. Providing intellectual stimulation
3. Offering individualized support
4. Creating a productive school culture

Transformational leadership supports change for all individuals (Leithwood, 1994).

Transformational leaders seek justice and democracy; they want equity for all students.

Transformative leaders critique inequitable practices and offer the promise not only of greater individual achievement, but of a better life lived in common with others (Shields, 2010). Each principal understands factors that play a role in equitable and inequitable practices for black male students. In addition, each principal conveyed his or her desire to achieve what is best for the

students. Providing a safe environment that supports equity—socially and academically—is what school leaders in all three case studies desired.

Black male students are referred for discipline due to school staff perceptions of their excessive verbal and physical aggression (Reed, 1988). However, there are certain environmental factors such as living in a single-parent family home and impoverished neighborhoods that are linked to aggressive attitudes and behaviors. In addition to race, living in a deprived educational, social, and economic system may contribute to interpersonal violence that results in disciplinary consequences for black male students (Reed, 1988). The principals and assistant principals in this study demonstrated social justice leadership. Through interviews, principals and assistant principals examined their own beliefs and practices, which allowed them to critique the world from their perspective and the lens of black male students (Furman & Shields, 2005). The data for Genesis, Malachi, and Titus High Schools show that the zero-tolerance policy is not applied to many disciplinary incidents. Research shows that black males are most affected by exclusionary discipline practices. According to Vincent, Sprague & Tobin, a 2007 national study of suspensions showed that 42.8 percent of in-school and out-of-school suspensions were of black male students. In addition, it was discovered that black male students were more likely to be suspended than students of other racial backgrounds. The data presented from the three high schools of this study are transparent, and the school leaders have implemented strategies and practices that support equity for black male students.

According to Daniel R. Tomal, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at Concordia University, River Forest, Illinois, there are five basic roles that school leaders can assume when disciplining students:

1. Supporter: seeks harmony; helpful, indecisive, personal, unassertive
2. Negotiator: seeks resolution or win-win approach; objective, responsible, committed

3. Compromiser: inconsistent, wishy-washy, limits creativity; gives and takes
4. Abdicator: does nothing; avoids problems; ignores students; apathetic
5. Enforcer: self-righteous; intimidating, controlling, threatening, or dictatorial

Through observations and interviews, the researcher identified the characteristics of a supporter and a negotiator in each principal and assistant principal. Principals and assistant principals wanted to build personal relationships with students and create a vision of harmony among all faculty, staff, and students. To support equity and prior to applying consequences to a disciplinary incident, principals and assistant principals examined disciplinary incidents from a global perspective—looking at grades, home life, attendance, and discipline history—to negotiate how a black male student would be disciplined in order to correct the behavior.

Through research and data analysis, school leaders articulated agreement with Critical Race Theory and the Race Relations Amendment of 1976 and 2000. This Act placed a new duty on all public schools and the Department of Education to have a written policy on race equity and equality and also to assess the impact of their policies on ethnic minorities and monitor the levels of attainment of minority pupils in all schools. This act focused on establishing practices and policies that supported equity for minority students (Gillborn, 2005). The goal of Critical Race Theory is to operate as a call to work in addressing the predicament of children of color in education; it is a means by which to identify the function of racism as an institutional and systemic phenomenon (Stovall, 2005).

Principals and assistant principals strive to create policies and procedures and implement practices that reinforce equity for black male students. School leaders understand communication, relationship building, awareness of culture, and sensitivity to a student's socioeconomic status are necessary to establish support equity and ensure that it happens with every disciplinary incident. Each administrator agreed that they have seen and experienced forms

of inequity for black male students. There is not one solution to solving discriminatory practices of discipline when it comes to black males, but there were four key points identified through this study that will assist with the abolishment of inequitable disciplinary practices for black male students:

1. Students, parents, and teachers must have a clear understanding of school policy and disciplinary procedures.
2. School leaders must operate with fairness and equity when handling situations involving disciplinary practices with not only black male students, but with all students.
3. School leaders, guidance counselors, Response to Intervention Specialists, and teachers must communicate and build positive relationships with students and parents to be proactive in preventing inappropriate behaviors.
4. School leaders must understand that the socioeconomic situation of students indicates the amount of support they may receive at home. Not all students who suffer financially will have discipline issues; but administrators must understand that financial constraints increase the frustration level of students, which may trigger patterns of inappropriate behavior.

Research conducted with all three case studies aligns with the social justice leadership because social justice leaders aspire to create caring communities where relationships matter (Marshall & Olivia, 2009). Leaders who practice social justice genuinely seek equity in schools and seek to engage in activities that resist historical inequities and marginalizations (Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). To contribute to the theory, the researcher concluded that building a positive relationship with students and understanding how low socioeconomics may contribute to a student's ability to perform academically and comprehend social norms that are perceived acceptable to society enables school leaders to focus on correcting inappropriate behavior and

supporting the student rather than disciplining black male students for subjective behaviors that are often categorized as disrespect or insubordination. This contribution correlates with research conducted by Demaray & Malecki that supports positive relationships with teachers and students to create a culture where black male students feel supported by teachers and administrators.

In addition to building productive relationships with students, school leaders support due process for students. The court case of *Goss v. Lopez* established a framework for school leaders to follow when applying disciplinary consequences to student incidents. School leaders who participated in this case study identified procedures used to support due process and parent notification of inappropriate behavior. Little information was provided to support how teachers can handle difficult situations to deescalate conflict that may arise in the classroom. Teacher professional development which includes ongoing feedback from school leadership is a contributing factor in supporting equity for black male students. Socioeconomic and cultural professional development will provide teachers with tools they need to successfully implement positive behavior support interventions in the classroom. It is the responsibility of the school leader to create a culture and climate that is safe for student learning and growth. Eliminating biases and viewing incidents from the lens of the student may force school leaders to be proactive and not reactive to disciplinary incidents involving black male students.

Emerged Limitations of this Study

Throughout this study of leadership and disciplinary practices that school leaders used to support equity for black male students, three limitations that emerged: the informal handling of disciplinary incidents, the lack of detailed information provided from school leaders, and the time allotted for interviews and questions. School leaders from all three high schools informally handled a variety of incidents that were perceived as minor infractions. While the researcher was on campus observing interactions between school leaders and the students, it was noticed that

some incidents were handled with a verbal reprimand. Incidents that are resolved by use of a verbal reprimand are undocumented. When an incident is undocumented, a discipline referral is not generated by the teacher or administrator, and the overall discipline data may be skewed due to the lack of documentation.

Two out of three high school principals provided adequate information on leadership and disciplinary practices that are implemented within their school to support equity for black male students. One principal, however, had limited information. Due to his day-to-day disconnect from the discipline office, his knowledge about practices and strategies that were implemented for student discipline was limited. The researcher had to ask the principal several additional probing questions to acquire a thorough response for each research question.

For each interview with the principals and assistant principals, the researcher scheduled a two-hour block of time. After the initial interview with the principal at each school site, the data were analyzed and an interview with the assistant principal at each school site was scheduled. The allotted time for the interviews with the principals and the assistant principals provided the researcher ample time to discover and create a snapshot of each school, but the limited visits scheduled with the principals and assistant principals did not provide adequate time to meticulously observe an entire school day with school leaders. Thus it is possible that information and school artifacts may not have been documented and accounted for during this research.

Policy Implications

Throughout this chapter, the researcher addressed possible factors and discretionary practices that support equity for black male students, data sources that may influence disciplinary practices towards black male students, and professional development and training for staff members that support equity for black male students. Each of the components contribute to the

overall success of black males as they graduate from high school and avoid the school push-out and prison-to-pipeline direction that often plagues them in society. The qualitative research presented in Chapter 4 and the answers to research questions presented in Chapter 5 support the policy changes that secondary schools may implement to better support equity for black male students.

Initially, the zero-tolerance policy was implemented as a behavioral management tool for major disciplinary offenses at the secondary level. However, some school leaders have used the protocol to categorize behaviors that are perceived as unbecoming of acceptable social conduct under the zero-tolerance policy. The zero-tolerance policy needs to be amended with specific outlined offenses that directly relate to zero tolerance. This policy must precisely state each inappropriate action and the direct zero-tolerance consequence that school leaders should apply to the action.

In-school and out-of-school suspension contribute to the push-out of black males in high school. Black male students who are suspended from school have a difficult time remaining on track academically and socially. Black males feel racially inferior due to the social construction of race from the period of time when slavery was legal (Simson, 2014). The social construction of race in school discipline supports the claim of black males feeling inferior to males of other ethnicities. Misunderstood representation of dress, culture, and demeanor often stereotypes black males. They may be labeled as defiant, disrespectful, dangerous, and not belonging in mainstream society, which in turn results in suspension from school and confirms black males as demographic group in society (Simson, 2014). The policy surrounding in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension for students at the secondary level must be changed. Due process must be given for all incidents, and school leaders must implement disciplinary practices that change student behavior (not punish the behavior) and support students in making positive decisions.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited to three high school principals and three high school assistant principals at one suburban and two urban high schools in central Florida. Through interviews and the collection of major artifacts, a direct answer has not been determined on how to ensure or support equity for black male students 100 percent of the time. However, from the research conducted in this study, the researcher suggests an examination of how the correlation between socioeconomics and the lack of a father figure in the household impact behavior for black male students. Qualitative research determined two out of three schools concluded parent involvement to be a factor or source of data when implementing disciplinary consequences for black male students. An investigation to identify triggers that may influence misbehavior for black male students is suggested because school leaders from all three schools agreed that a positive relationship is a critical component to establishing successful academic and social progress for black male students. Building a positive relationship allows the school leader to understand the student and what possible dynamic of the home life or school day may trigger inappropriate behavior.

An outline of clear and concise policies and procedures is beneficial for implementing best disciplinary practices at secondary schools. An analysis of how policies and procedures are initially implemented at the district level and how those policies and procedures set parameters for school administrators is a critical component to equitable school discipline. The in-school and out-of-school suspension policies and practices at all three schools vary. Although there are similarities among all three schools, two of the schools listed out-of-school suspension for “disrespect” and one high school listed in-school-suspension for “disrespect.” Depending on which school the student is attending, there could be a more or less severe consequence for

subjective behaviors such as disrespect and insubordination. Business partners and community leaders can support secondary school leaders with individual and group mentorship programs.

In addition, consulting outside agencies such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to establish a partnership with schools to support black male students can have a positive impact on relationship building and positive decision-making skills. Each school acknowledged an outside factor such as home life and societal life may play a role in discipline and the push-out of black males in school. If the National Association for the Advancement of Color People created a partnership with local schools, school leaders may gain insight on strengthening relationships with black male students and supporting them through mentorship programs that may help them transition from secondary to post-secondary educational institutions.

Finally, more in-depth and frequent visits for observations over a longer period of time are needed to discuss strategies implemented to support equity for black male students. By disaggregating qualitative research data, the researcher identified themes that are used to support disciplinary equity for black male students. School leaders must have the opportunity to review the data, modify resources, and amend any policies and practices that are a factor in inequitable disciplinary practices for black male students. Collaborating with feeder-pattern elementary and middle school leaders to identify early childhood warning signs that may lead to misbehavior in high school is beneficial for school leaders and black male students. School leaders at the elementary and middle school level may contribute to the awareness of particular needs students may have prior to enrolling at the secondary level. When the social and emotional necessities of a student are identified before high school, school leaders have the option to decipher what school-based social and emotional services they may offer to the student.

In summary, equity that supports black male students is not something that can be achieved in one year. Supporting equity can be done, but there is no way to ensure that equity is used in every situation that involves a black male student and discipline in school. Diversity training is essential to generate equity, but relationships are the most important component for establishing equitable school disciplinary practices for black male students.

Conclusion of this Study

Through qualitative research on the topic of how leadership and disciplinary practices that school leaders implement to support equity for black male students, it is clear that principals and assistant principals are responsible for creating an atmosphere that is conducive to learning and the safety of students. Principals design practices that align with the culture of the school. Through interviews conducted by the researcher, it was evident that different leaders have different managing styles when it comes to equity and school discipline. Some leaders implement a zero-tolerance policy regarding disciplinary practices and ethnicity; some leaders foster and promote teacher leadership as a mechanism for supporting equity; and some leaders believe in mentorship as a way to get all students involved with a program on campus so that every student has an adult role model. While all strategies for supporting equity for black males are not the same, all school leaders identified relationship building and open communication as the most important aspects for supporting equity for black male students. As administrators communicate and get to know black males on campus, relationships can be built that will reduce minor behavior issues on campus.

It is important for school leaders to have prior knowledge to factors that may contribute to inappropriate behavior by black male students, such as culture, relationships, and the socioeconomic status of students. Each school leader identified early warning signs such as poor grade, attendance, and lack of parental support as a way to indicate which students need more

support, and most administrators have an action plan that immediately addresses those early warning signs. Guidance counselors, intervention specialists, and other administrators are a part of that action plan. Taking the necessary steps in building relationships with identified school personnel may reduce the amount of disciplinary consequences and eliminate the perception of inequity in the discipline of black male students. It is essential that disciplinary practices reflect the shared values of the school, and the consequences applied by school leaders must align with the perceived problem identified by the school administrator. Sensitivity and culture training for school staff can help reduce the amount of inequity in schools. Training will allow staff members to understand various cultures and work to build lasting relationships with students. Positive behavior support systems are also necessary to maintain disciplinary practices that support equity. Students must be acknowledged for appropriate behaviors, and school leaders can plan assemblies or programs and also acknowledge and praise students throughout afternoon announcements or the school newspaper to establish a positive culture and continue to build healthy relationships.

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Appendix A

Major Themes that Emerged in Case Study A: Genesis High School Case Study

Major Theme	Illustration
Socioeconomics	“I think sometimes students who need additional support become easily frustrated, which in turn causes inappropriate behaviors and discipline problems.”--Principal Naomi
Student Support Systems	“Last year, we had a high failure rate in core classes for ninth graders, and we had behavior issues. It was too high, and it made me uncomfortable. I hired an assistant principal from a middle school to be the ninth grade administrator at my school, and he immediately set up this program to mentor and help incoming ninth graders.”—Principal Naomi
Relationships	“I have to be aware that black males are perceived differently and realize the lens I am looking through is not the same lens as a black male student. I have to realize black males have had a different life experience than I have had and always be aware that my lens is different, especially being a white female.”—Principal Naomi
Parental Involvement	“I try to build relationships with single parents and grandparents because I find that they are tired. As a school, we want to guide the students while they are here seven hours of the day.”—Assistant Principal Peter
Student Observations	“If I notice a student involved in mischief, I document his poor actions and speak with the student when the time is convenient; many times, I speak to students at lunch.” —Assistant Principal Peter
Student Performance and History	“Looking at the class schedule and teachers will give me an indication about management style from the teacher that the student is dealing with on a daily basis.”—Assistant Principal Peter
Student Engagement	“If students are intellectually engaged, they will enjoy what they are doing in the classroom, and they are going to behave.”—Principal Naomi
Teacher Feedback	“I think happy people are kinder to others. My Philosophy this year is throw kindness like confetti. I model positive interactions with students, even when they misbehave. And if I see or hear about a teacher being culturally insensitive, I have a conversation.”—Principal Naomi

Appendix B

Major Themes that Emerged in Case Study B: Malachi High School

Major Theme	Illustration
Culture	“Our culture at Malachi has been very positive from the day I got here. It was not something I created; it was something that was already here. We do have problems like every other high school in the county, but for the most part, our students get along. They want to be at Malachi High School, so they value the school and they value being here. Everyone is coming from a distance, and you cannot tell on any given day who is part of the magnet program and who is part of the traditional high school program. There is a very strong positive student and teacher culture.” –Principal Matthew
Student Engagement	“My counselors have done a great job at using the district’s advance placement potential list. They conference with our black male students during registration and encourage them to take advance placement courses. Our black males who take advance placement classes have become more academically focused because they are engaged in the content from the start of the period to the end of the period. Full student engagement eliminates any additional time for students to misbehave.” –Principal Matthew
Relationships	“If a student has a ‘chip’ on his shoulder, I do not want to meet that chip with a bigger chip. Being able to have a conversation and find out what the student is thinking and how he feels is critical to a strong relationship.”—Assistant Principal Isaiah
Due Process for the Student	“If a twelfth grade black male student is in a fight and he has a 0.8 grade point average, applying a suspension as a consequence would not be the appropriate discipline—especially if he is a chronic offender. My job is to investigate the incident and get to the root cause of the behavior.”—Assistant Principal Isaiah
Student Discipline History	“When it comes to consequences, I look at the student’s discipline history first. I look to see how often the student is getting into trouble and if he is committing the same offense. Race has nothing to do with disciplinary practices. Kids are kids, and I do not see color.” —Assistant Principal Isaiah
Student Academic Progress	“As an educator, I am on a mission to get more black males to graduate from high school. When I have black males in my office, I look at his credits earned, current grades, and test scores. I use the <i>On Track for Graduation Report</i> to my discretion when giving discipline consequences to a student—especially a black male student who needs to get across the stage.” –Assistant Principal Isaiah
A Clear Vision	“As a principal, I have to set a vision that supports equity. The school and the community must buy into the vision and understand what it looks like and how it works. I have to promote the vision and make sure every decision I make is based on the vision of the school—

	especially if it is a generic vision such as making sure all students at Malachi High School graduate.” –Principal Matthew
Demonstration Classrooms	“I want teachers to see black male students in action. If one of our challenging black male students is behaving appropriately in five out of seven classes, but is he misbehaving in two other classes, I want the teachers to see how their colleagues handle students of diversity—particularly black males—and engage them in learning.” –Principal Matthew

Appendix C

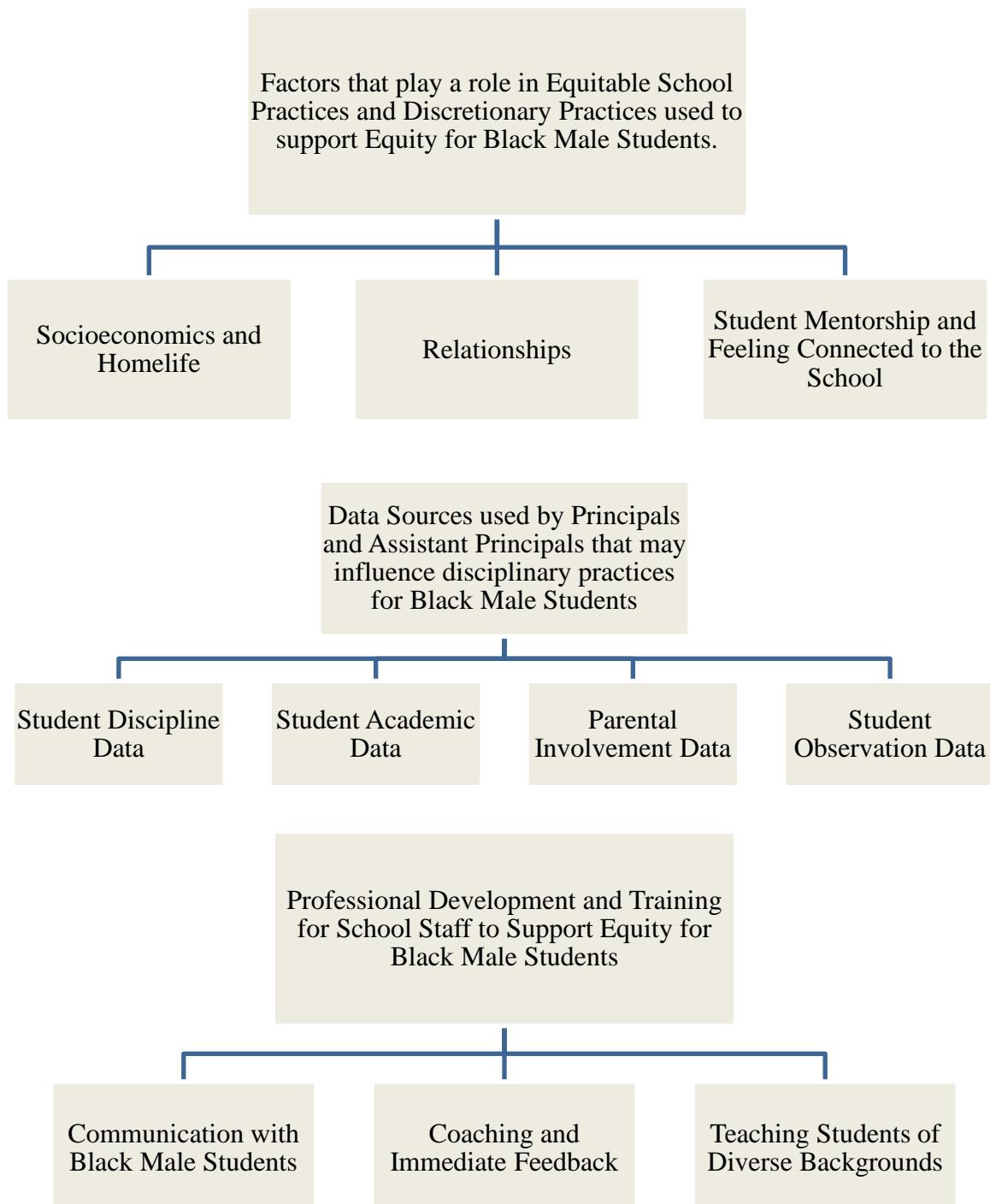
Major Themes that Emerged in Case Study C: Titus High School

Major Theme	Illustration
Socioeconomics and the Value of Education	“What I perceive and what I see at Titus High School is that all students are the same. Whether or not they have money or no money, it is how individuals interact with each other that make the difference regarding behavior.” –Principal Luke
Relationships	“As a leader, I have to make sure my black male students feel like they can come to me. I must show that I am a caring and understanding individual. Sometimes for a white male teacher or administrator it is harder to build relationships, because the student is coming with a perceived inappropriate perception. I have to overcome that perception by showing care and compassion.”—Principal Luke
Mentorship Programs	“The purpose of Men of Vision is to expose black male students to things in the world. When I say things in the world, I do not mean Europe, but I want to expose them to the world around them. I want my black male students to see successful men in their surrounding area. Success means an individual enjoys what you he is doing. He is making a living and supporting a family. My students need to see this type of behavior in action.”—Principal Luke
Social and News Media	“A year ago when a black male was killed by a neighborhood security guard, I was informed that my black male students were planning to do a walkout. During lunch I just knew something was wrong because tension was in the air. Suddenly in the middle of lunch, several black male students left the cafeteria and took a walk through the school’s hallways. I walked behind them, because I could have escalated the situation if I attempted to stop it. As a principal, I have to allow them to let out their frustration.”—Principal Luke
Equity in Treatment with No Discrimination	“According to the student handbook, sometimes a black male student needs to be suspended from school; his behavior warrants a suspension. But, I have to think of every situation, including his home life, and make the best disciplinary decision for the student’s life. I assign consequences based upon what the student needs and what will correct the behavior—not what the handbook says.”—Principal Luke
Student Discipline History and Academic History	“With my school being more than 50 percent black, it is important for me to review data of discipline and academic performance. I know I have a high number of minority male students, so it is more important for me to look at gender and not necessarily race.”—Principal Luke
Parental Involvement Data	“We do not have very much parent involvement. The amount of parents—especially fathers—that show up for conference night are far and few between. Particularly, I would love to see more fathers of my black male students at conference night, but I know many parents work two jobs and life situations may make it impossible for parents

	to attend. However, I do not judge a student's success rate by the lack of parent involvement." –Principal Luke
Job Embedded Coaching	"The only way any job embedded professional development will work is for the teacher to know exactly what he or she is doing in the classroom and realize that every decision must be in the best interest of the student. If the teacher is using classroom management strategies that do not result in a positive outcome for the student, it is wrong and it is not going to work."—Principal Luke

Appendix D

Cross Case Analysis of the Data. The chief block of each pyramid displays the components of each research question. Common major themes that are identified from all three case studies combined are represented in the subsequent blocks.



Appendix E

Florida Southern College Doctorate in Educational Leadership Interview Protocol Questions

Project Title: A Case Study of Leadership and Disciplinary Practices Used by Secondary School Leaders to Support Equity for Black Male Students

Principal Investigator: Jazrick Haggins

Phone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx

E-mail: jhaggins@xxxx.xxx.xxx

Faculty Sponsor: Kathryn Blackburn, Ed.D

Department: Educational Leadership

1. What factors, as perceived by school leaders, play a role in equitable school disciplinary practices?

- A. What is the casual relationship between a student's socio-economic background and disciplinary behavior?
- B. What are the research-based early warning signs that are student indicators of increased disciplinary and emotional issues that decrease academic achievement?
- C. What proactive positive behavior systems do you utilize to decrease disciplinary incidents and narrow the achievement gap?

2. What data sources do school leaders utilize that may influence disciplinary practices towards black male students?

- A. How does past academic performance data impact the success potential of black male students?
- B. What does research say about the correlation of parent involvement on student success for black males?

C. How does data of early warning signs such as attendance, discipline, and socio-economic background impact academic achievement for black males?

3. What discretionary practices do school leaders use or take into consideration to ensure equity when handling a discipline incident that directly involve black male students?

A. What proactive systems can school leaders integrate procedurally to include restorative practices that are meeting the needs of black males?

B. What types of school-wide initiatives to improve teacher-student relationships with diverse students can be implemented to increase the achievement of black male students?

C. What mentorship based programs can school leaders implement unto the school culture to create a safe environment that encourages black male students to embrace a growth mindset and strive for excellence?

4. How do school leaders develop and train staff to reflect shared values to ensure equity?

A. What activities can inspire teachers to develop and embrace a clear understanding of the academic barriers of students of diversity?

B. How can school leaders create opportunities to develop teacher leaders' capacity to improve student engagement and achievement of black male students?

C. How can school leaders integrate job embedded professional development that continuously provides teacher support that best meets the needs of black male students?

Appendix F

Florida Southern College Consent to Participate in Research

Project Title: A Case Study of Leadership and Disciplinary Practices Used by Secondary School Leaders to Support Equity for Black Male Students

Principal Investigator: Jazrick Haggins

Phone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx

E-mail: jhaggins@xxxx.xxx.xxx

Faculty Sponsor: Kathryn Blackburn, Ed.D

Department: Educational Leadership

My name is Jazrick Haggins, and I am a graduate student at Florida Southern College. You are being invited to participate in a research study because you exhibit leadership skills and implement disciplinary practices that support equity for black male students. You were selected based upon specific data from your school that was generated by the district's Response to Intervention and Multi-Tiered System of Support supervisor.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify specific leadership skills and examine disciplinary practices that successful school leaders use to support equity. As part of this study, you will be asked to provide specific answers to four research questions and specific answers to a series of sub-research questions. You will be asked to provide as much detail as possible so the researcher can gain a clear understanding of leadership skills and disciplinary practices that you implement within your school to support equity for black male students. It will take you approximately two hours (during two separate sessions) of interview time to complete the study.

Potential Benefits

You will not be paid for taking part in this study. This study will not bring subjects any personal benefits; however, this study will allow participants to reflect on leadership skills and share their views and opinions on disciplinary practices that may lend an opportunity to help future secondary school leaders.

Potential Risks

There are no anticipated risks to you. This project is not intended to provoke any physical or emotional discomfort or stress. Subjects may be inclined to share sensitive and confidential information during the interview. All efforts will be made to ensure confidentiality.

Confidentiality

All data will be stored in a secured file in the researcher/investigator's office. Your privacy and research records will be kept confidential to the extent of the law. Authorized research personnel, employees of the Department of Health and Human Services, and the FSC Institutional Review Board may inspect the records from this research project.

Research Protocol

During the interview process, each interview will be audio-taped. Once the audio-taped interviews are completed, the researcher will organize the files from the case study and convert the recordings to text with the use of a computer generated word document program. After the data from the case has been organized, the researcher will read the transcripts to understand details of the case study—which may consist of note taking and memos on the case study transcription or artifact collected. The researcher will code the data from the case study into several categories. The researcher will conduct a within-case analysis and identify themes for the purpose of interpreting the case study from a holistic approach and understanding the complexity of the case.

After all case study interviews are complete, the researcher will conduct a cross-case analysis, which will holistically identify themes that transcend across all three case studies. At the conclusion of all three case studies, the researcher will use all holistic themes identified to formulate one interpretation of all three case studies. The published results will not include your name or any other information that would personally identify you in any way. You will not be given individual results obtained during this study.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your decision to take part in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions about this study, contact the Primary Investigator at the phone number or e-mail at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as an individual taking part in a research study, you may contact the FSC Vice President for Academic Affairs (863-680-4124).

I have read the Informed Consent Form and agree to participate in this study. I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. I understand that I *will not* receive payment for my participation. Additionally, I understand that this form will be renewed annually for research projects lasting longer than one year.

Name of Participant (please print)_____

Signature of Participant _____ Date_____

Signature of Investigator or Witness _____ Date_____

Appendix G

Application for Review of Human Subjects Research

For office use only.

IRB Number

Submitted to the
Dean of Florida Southern College

Title of Project: A Case Study of Leadership and Disciplinary Practices Used by Secondary School Leaders to Support Equity for Black Male Students.

Is the Project federally funded? ☐ Yes ☒ No If yes, complete the following:

Name of Federal Agency

Grant Number

FSC Routing Number

Type of Review Requested: ☐ Exempt ☒ Expedited ☐ Expedited Special Population ☐ Full Board

Principal Investigator(s): I acknowledge that this represents an accurate and complete description of my research.

Jazrick Haggins July 28, 2016 jhaggins@mail.usf.edu
Name of Primary PI (typed) Signature of PI Date E-Mail

Education Educational Leadership
Department Division

xxxx Lakeland, FL 33812 (xxx) xxx-xxxx jhaggins@mail.usf.edu
PI's Address Phone E-Mail

Name of PI (typed) Signature of PI Date E-Mail

Department College

PI's Address Phone E-Mail

Adviser (complete if PI is a student): I agree to provide the proper surveillance of this project to ensure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are properly protected.

Kathryn Blackburn Kathryn Blackburn July 28, 2016 kathryn.blackburn@polk-fl.net
Adviser's Name Signature of Adviser Date E-Mail

Education/Educational Leadership
Department

2215 Sleepy Hill Rd. Lakeland, FL 33810

Adviser's Address

(xxx) xxx-xxxx

Phone

kathryn.blackburn@polk-fl.net

E-Mail

Research Proposal Review

1. Describe purpose(s) of research:

The purpose of this study is to explore disciplinary practices used by secondary school principals. This study is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the role of the principal and disciplinary practices used at their school to support equity towards black male students.

2. Describe the subjects of this study, including: 1) sampling procedures, 2) sampling population, 3) number of subjects expected to participate, 4) how long the subjects will be involved, 5) any follow up procedures planned, and 6) any anticipated risks. Include a copy of the script or other mechanisms to be used to solicit subjects.

The subjects in this study are secondary school leaders (principals and assistant principals). The leaders and schools have been purposefully selected based on specific data from each school's disciplinary profile that was generated by the district's Response to Intervention and Multi-Tiered System of Support supervisor. Secondary school leaders will be informed that getting consent, conducting observations, asking probing questions about artifacts, and collecting data may involve more of their time, in addition to time given for interviews. I hope the subjects will be articulate and reflective. The expectation is that the subjects will be involved sporadically over a four week period of time.

3. Describe each proposed condition, intervention, or manipulation of human subjects or their environments. Include a copy of any questionnaires, tests, or other written instruments, instructions, scripts, etc. to be used.

Secondary school leaders will be interviewed for approximately one to two hours interview. A semi-structured interview format will be used and interview protocols are attached. During the interview, I will ask clarifying and probing questions as needed. Each interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. I will do my best to ensure confidentiality.

4. Will the subjects encounter the possibility of stress or psychological, social, physical, or legal risks that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests?

This project is not intended to provoke any physical or emotional discomfort or stress. Subjects may be inclined to share sensitive and confidential information during the interview. All efforts will be made to ensure confidentiality.

5. Will medical clearance be necessary for subjects to participate because of tissue or blood sampling, administration of substances such as food or drugs, or physical exercise conditioning?

No

6. Will subjects be deceived or misled in any way?

No

7. Will information be requested that subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive?

The interview protocol is not centered on sensitive subject matter. Subjects may choose to reveal sensitive or personal information during the interview; every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality.

8. Will the subjects be presented with materials that might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading?

No

9. Will any inducements be offered to the subjects for their participation?

No inducements will be offered to participants. This study will not bring subjects any personal benefits. This study will allow participants to reflect on leadership and disciplinary practices and share their views and opinions.

10. Will a written consent form (and assent form for minor) be used?

Yes. A written consent will be used.

11. Will the data be part of a record that can be identified with the subject?

No

12. Describe the steps you are taking to protect the confidentiality of the subjects.

Confidentiality will be ensured by the use of pseudonyms when transcribing interviews. Interview tapes and pseudonym keys will be kept in a secure location for two years; and after two years, they will be destroyed.

13. Will the subject's participation in a specific experiment or study be made a part of any record available to his or her supervisor, teacher, or employer?

No

14. Describe the benefits that might accrue to either the subjects or society. Note that 45 CFR 46, Section 46.111(a)(2) requires that the risks to subjects be reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits. The investigator should specifically state the importance of knowledge that reasonably may be expected to result from this research.

This study will not bring any specific benefits to subjects outside of an opportunity share view, opinions, and leadership and disciplinary practices. Their participation will benefit the field of educational leadership. It will provide educational leaders with knowledge of how equity in disciplinary practices is established and supported at the secondary level of public school.

Concurrence by:				
Department Head (print)	Signature	Date	Department	
Dean or Research Director (print)	Signature	Date	School	

Checklist for application submission:

- ☐ Research Plan or grant proposal
☒ Informed consent/assent forms
☒ Outline or script to be provided prior to subjects agreement to participate
☒ Instrument(s) – questionnaire, survey, testing
☒ Curriculum Vitae
☐ Investigator/Department/School signatures

Proposal Reviewed by: _____

Approved: _____ Date: _____

About the Author

Jazrick Haggins is a native of Lakeland, Florida. In 2005, he earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a concentration in Literature and Professional and Technical Writing; and in 2008, he earned his Master of Education degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from the University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida.

From 2005 to 2011, Jazrick taught high school English and served on several leadership committees before transition to secondary school administration. Since 2011, Jazrick spent four years as an Assistant Principal for Student Affairs, four years as an Assistant Principal for Curriculum and Instruction and he is currently a high school principal in central Florida. In addition to researching leadership and disciplinary practices, policies, and procedures, Jazrick acquired knowledge on the topic of how high academic expectations correlate with student behavior. He plans to contribute to the body of educational leadership through active qualitative research on successful student academic performance for minority students of all genders.